

Trust in Mature and Post-communist Democracies

Teodora Gaidytė

VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Abstract This article aims at analysing and theoretically displaying the peculiarities of *trust* in mature and post-communist democracies. To begin with, the paper conceptualises the notion of trust as interpreted by the culturalist and the rationalist approaches, and systemises it into a more coherent theoretical framework. Second, social and political trust is discussed and the relationship between these categories is analysed. Third, the dialectics of political trust and liberalism is tackled. Finally, trust in the communist regime and aftermath is examined. The main argument is that, at the societal level, social trust in post-communist societies is limited to particularised trust; it is more family-centred as compared to the wider *radius* of generalised trust in mature democracies. Meanwhile political trust in post-communist societies is less self-reflexive and is less rationally-based, since, unlike in old democratic societies, it has evolved as the opposite to fear, rather than to risk.

Key words generalised trust; particularised trust; political trust; institutionalised distrust; institutionalised trust; risk; fear; post-communism.

Introduction

As a concept of political sociology, trust finds its primary expression in the social capital literature. On the other hand, contemporary political research more often refers to the category of trust in the wider context of democratic convergence at the European Union level, in particular, analysing transformation, consolidation, and the quality of democracy in post-communist societies. In fact, the focus on the notion of trust marks the turning point from institutional level explanations to individual-level analysis. This is very important and innovative, keeping in mind that twenty years after the fall of communism it is getting increasingly difficult to add to the theoretical debate about this region. Carothers (2002: 5–21) points out that most post-communist research is elite- and institutions-based and lacks insight into socio-cultural dimensions that are the preconditions of the paths of democratisation in the region. Taking this into consideration, the present article aims at analysing specifically the bottom-up dimension of democracy, that is., political and social trust, applying the different conceptualizations of the category as well as the comparative approach of trust in mature and post-communist democracies.

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

Especially the early stage of the post-communist transformation (until the countries were invited to negotiate upon the EU membership in 1997-1998) was the most chaotic, turbulent and institutionally instable. I argue that the destructive influence on trust during post-communism and the early transformation period is inert and long-lasting. The argument is based on the current studies, showing that former communist countries tend to be characterised by the low levels of generalised and political trust (Sztompka, 1999; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Howard, 2003; Bădescu & Uslaner, 2003; Kornai et al., 2004; Žiliukaitė et al., 2006; Mierina, 2011). The World Value Survey data (2005 – 2007), for instance, indicates that in the recent period in most post-communist societies between 18 to 24 percent of respondents agreed that most people could be trusted. These levels are depressingly low, if we compare them with some of the Western countries (for instance, in the Netherlands generalized trust is indicated at the level of 56 percent). More importantly, as Mierina (2011: 138) observes in her doctoral research, the dynamics of the levels of generalised trust is very inert and do not reflect the rapid changes of political transformation. Even more shocking is the fact that in some countries, like Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the level of generalised trust is even decreasing over time, comparing with the aftermath of Communism. The studies also prove that the low levels of social trust are matched with political distrust, alienation, inefficacy, scepticism, passivity.

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

Below, I will first conceptualise trust as a sociological category in political science, distinguishing the main elements of and approaches to trust. Secondly, I will define the different forms of trust, in particular, social and political trust, its origin and relationship with democracy and causality. Thirdly, I will briefly discuss the dialectics of trust and liberal democracy, displaying the nature of trust in mature, or older, democracies. Finally, I will focus on trust in regard to the communist legacy and regime transformation in post-communist societies. My argument is that the traditions of liberal democracy and politically institutionalised mechanisms of *distrust* (which is a controversial basis of liberal system) stimulated generalised (and moralistic) type of trust which sustains good-willing approach and cooperation at societal level. Meanwhile, communist legacies and post-communist transformation endowed society with particularised trust, which is a prerequisite and a consequence of inefficacy, corruption and inequality, thus limiting and perverting democracy in post-communist societies.

Conceptualisation of the category of trust

The notion of trust

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

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

In other words, trust helps us to leap from ignorance to certain knowledge (Luhmann 1979; Möllering 2001).

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

Following the rational choice approach, we are inclined to take risks and place trust only if the person we are dealing with is perceived as *trustworthy*. Kollock (1994, 318–319) maintains that to be trustworthy means to become committed to particular exchange partners, and this commitment can be treated as a response to the possible risk of trust. Thus placing trust as making a bet is grounded in the anticipation of mutual utility. It implies a certain level of predictability of social actions: when we trust someone, we organize our actions according to the most probable utility-based behaviour of other actors. This idea is reminiscent of the Pareto-optimum situation of the Prisoners' dilemma in game theory: the actor is led to trust the other actor presuming that in the future, the latter would be interested in further cooperation (reciprocity). Therefore the mechanism of trust enables confidence in mutual utility in situations where mutual utility cannot be immediately or simultaneously realised. Putnam (1993) describes this situation as a “short-term altruism” based on “long-term self-interest”. One may argue that in this sense, trust itself is not something very rational, even if we can define it in rational terms, but it is essential for rational decision-making to function.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why is generalized trust important for democracies? Authors (Putnam, 1993; Rose, 1998; Newton, 1999; Sztompka 1999; Mishler & Rose, 2005; Uslaner, 2003, 2008;) maintain that in democracy, generalised trust encourages tolerance for pluralism and a variety of lifestyles, which is inevitable for the implementation of fundamental human rights and freedoms in democratic regimes. Moreover, generalised trust allows for peaceful conflict resolution, compromise and consensus, because when people trust each other, they are committed to the same democratic values and principles (Misztal, 1996; Žiliukaitė, 2005: 87). With persistence of generalised trust it becomes more likely that citizens obey laws and rules and do not abuse the rights of other people. Finally, it is also more likely that a society with higher levels of trust will reject any undemocratic alternatives (Rose et al., 1998). In fact, this insight is very important when talking about the consolidation of democracy. Mishler and Rose (2005: 1053) suggest that from a cultural perspective, distrust in society and democratic institutions not only undermines their legitimacy, but “also threatens to increase support for undemocratic regimes”.

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

When we talk about trust as a moral value, we cannot avoid discussion about the relationship between social (generalized) and political trust. Many authors believe that social trust and political trust are mutually reinforcing (Burt, 1992; Putnam, 1993, Sztompka 1999). Some authors (Sztompka 1999, Warren, 1999) even think that political trust indeed gives an impulse for social trust to emerge. It is argued that trust in a certain system as a set of values empowers us to trust citizens of this system as we all belong to the same setting of normative rules and general morality. Newton (1999: 169–170) assumes that trust in political institutions, as the background for good governance, may create a capacity for trust (with some institutional precautions included) and positively contributes to generalised trust. Farrell and Knight (2003) suggest that institutions create rules and sanctions for people to behave in a

trustworthy manner, thereby fostering trust. Similarly, Levi (1996: 51) argues, “governments provide more than the backdrop for facilitating trust among citizens; governments also influence civic behaviour to the extent they elicit trust or distrust towards themselves”. We can also talk about the positive effect of social trust on political trust. As Putnam (2000) observes, if people are willing to trust strangers, they will also trust politicians and political institutions.

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

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

The dialectics of trust and liberal democracy

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

Historically, the institutionalisation of distrust in the political system is tightly related to economic liberalism and, of course, the ideas of A. Smith. The Constitution of the United States (1787) has institutionalised distrust primarily in the realm of economics: it inscribes protective mechanisms on behalf of economic liberties against the intervention of the state in economic relations. These mechanisms have been transferred to the more abstract sphere of

politics, first of all, by means of the concept of the “division of powers”, which means that institutions competing with each other for power will restrain each other’s possibilities for systemic usurpation. Moreover, distrust is also institutionalised through additional “safeguards”: a multi-party system, election rules, the right to competition, monitoring, and formalities that regulate the time span and periodicity of office terms (Benn and Peters, 1959: 281). In other words, democracy is enshrined here as *enlightened suspicion* that replaces *blind trust* (Harisson and Innes, 2003: 180).

However, the constitutional rules and formal safeguard mechanisms alone are not sufficient in order to avoid the abuse of power by institutions. Permanent distrust in the political system put up by the society becomes one of the fundamental substantial institutions for democracy to truly work. This ensures safeguarding precaution and results in the legitimacy of the institutional system. Hardin (2006: 152) acknowledges that distrust is one of the most principal conditions for modern democracy: power inequality between state institutions and society is too immoderate, yet we have no alternatives to these institutions; consequently, we are dependent on them. Institutionalised distrust creates the background for implicating many “agencies of accountability” in the system that may enforce trustworthiness. These agencies (courts, police, controllers, examination boards, etc.) put pressure on persons, institutions, or systems that are our targets of trust (Sztompka, 1999: 47). Their main function is to keep the regime accountable. But enforcement agencies must be trustworthy themselves. If citizens do not trust these agencies, they will not trust their officials to fulfil their duties (Dasgupta, 1988: 50).

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

Exposing substantial institutional distrust does not mean that we need to feel formal political distrust at the same time: on the contrary, social trust may strengthen trust in political institutions/politicians, while social trust functions as a safeguard, a precaution against the possible usurpation of power by institutions.

In what way is institutionalized distrust related with generalised trust? Warren (2001) thinks that liberal tradition and permanent accountability of government is one of the main prerequisites of generalised trust. The differentiated ways of expressing vigilance against political institutions and systems endows with self-confidence in peoples' actions, responsibility and common optimism. Efficiency in controlling institutions and existing safeguards motivates us to behave honestly as we would expect honesty from others. Talking about honest reciprocity, Uslaner (2001: 6) refers to the Golden Rule, saying that "you do unto others as you would have them do unto you". This rule becomes a foundation of moralistic or generalised trust.

Trust and post-communism

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

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

The pre-communist phase

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

Although after the World War I, the newly established nation states began to develop their (pseudo)democratic systems (with reservations – general and equal elections, electoral competition, and peaceful change of governing parties), this process did not reach the consolidation phase and did not become the “only game in town”. Societies remained mostly traditional; most people continued to live in rural areas, on semi-subsistence farms (in agricultural economies). As Kochanowicz (2004) admits, in such traditional agrarian societies, the number of social contacts was limited; trust was bounded only within the circle of people with whom one was familiar, while foreigners and strangers were distrusted. Moreover, since farmers lived in semi-subsistence economies, trust in market institutions was of limited importance as well. Finally, common people did not perceive political trust, or trust in the government as a relevant issue, since the pre-modern government was far from individuals. The state mostly relied on coercion, but not on confidence (Kochanowicz 2004: 69–70). To make a comparison, in Western societies, partial trust was gradually transformed into more generalised trust along with the process of modernisation (technological and science progress, urbanisation, and globalisation of market systems). But, as will be explained below, this kind of modernisation has never really taken place in post-communist societies.

Communist rule

The establishment of communist regimes in some countries in 1940 and then again after World War II was associated with modernisation, both politically and economically, but only limited modernisation was actually achieved. Kochanowicz (2004) argues that communist societies retained strong elements of the traditional social organisation and cultural legacies of the rural society. Roughly speaking, communist modernisation just transferred peasant traditions to the cities. Even a large part of urban workers were kept commuting from villages, hence the traditional family structure still prevailed. Moreover, the pre-war urban culture (the axis of individualism-based modernisation) was also destroyed by the regime (Kochanowicz, 2004: 74). The peasant cultural-type cities meant that generalised trust was not evolving, as it was supposed to evolve in industrial individualist societies where, due to many social contacts, partial morality (particularised trust) was replaced with more generalised morality

(generalised trust). With this peasant culture, the real trust-based contacts remained limited while other social contacts with less familiar people and strangers included more distrust, as was the case in traditional societies. This restriction of trust created the background to the formation of the so-called familialism: trust in the communist society was not generalised, but atomised within small family circles and did not pass beyond these circles. Some authors note that the traditional organisation of the family was tightly related to very egoistic attitudes towards the outside of the family circle; this behaviour, lacking the perception of the common good, is described as “amoral familialism” (Tarkowska and Tarkowski, 1991). As Kochanowicz puts it,

The economics of shortage and the lack of a notion of the common good during Communism legitimised a particular understanding of honesty which enabled shirking, cheating, and petty stealing from the workplace as long as it led to supplying the family with things necessarily for survival and functioning in society. (Kochanowicz, 2004: 75)

Amoral familialism erased any trust at a wider societal level and prevented the emergence of civil society as a trust penetrator, with a perception of social responsibility, the common good and common action.

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

Despite the formally required political trust, the communist state insisted that citizens be suspicious in terms of social trust. An atmosphere of fear of politically disloyal citizens was created. The state aimed at maintaining permanent distrust in social relations and at shattering wider networks of trust within society, since these networks might initiate opposition to the communist regime. There was no real trust in vertical relations (trust in employees, higher party members, professors at universities, etc.), but at the same time, there

was dependence on them based on fear. Obviously, communist social engineering was psychologically grounded. Referring to historical colonial uprisings and revolutions, it was seen that successful were those revolutions which were capable of mobilising not only masses (at the horizontal level), but also the middle classes and elites (at the vertical level). Therefore, the communist regime did everything it could to destroy real trust at the vertical level thereby preventing social vertical partnerships, which might function as an opposition to the formal regime. Based on fear and dependence, these vertical social ties instead functioned as the backbone of the regime and guaranteed its stability (Sztompka, 1999: 152–153).

To sum up, the communist regime generated very peculiar specifics in regard to trust. Communism contributed to a more pragmatic, calculated substance of *particularized* trust, but not the real, good-will based *generalized* trust. According to Fukuyama, the trust radius was limited only to the family circle and did not spill over to generalised trust. We might say that at societal level trust turned out to be pragmatic and selfish in the sense that it was related to some expectations for the self; this trust also involved a higher perception of risk of social action, as it was connected with fear and low trustworthiness of not-familiar people. In contrast, in democratic systems, generalised trust originates from the spill-over of real trust in family circles and is consequently related more to the perceived notion and benefits of the common good, which is at the core of social capital. As regards *political trust*, during the communist regime, it was largely characterised by declarative nature as it was imposed from above and referred to the opposition of fear. Eventually, in the political realm, the category of trust did not translate into a notion or feeling of any sort. There was no conscious trustworthiness of the subject; therefore, the capacities of building trust towards political institutions could not evolve among the citizens.

The transformation phase

Despite the short period of existence of the so-called partial solidarity immediately preceding and following the proclaimed political independence and free elections in post-communist societies, the antinomy of trust and fear remained and was even sharpened due to traumatic processes of early transformation. The expectations of citizens were not rewarded by quick results and desired political outcomes, the short successes of private business actions were often replaced by economic set-backs, corruption, and bribery, since styles of behaviour in the old regime still remained omnipresent during the transformation process. Although political

and economic reforms rapidly took place, cultural patterns, identities, values, and attitudes did not undergo any sudden changes and remained reserved, based on suspicion and passivity.

In the time of early transformation, trust among society members became much more risky because of unstable institutional, economic, and social conditions. Economically speaking, the projection of trust anticipated much too high a cost because of specific cultural legacies as well as the lack of legal mechanisms that could compensate associated risks. In the first decades of the transition, the system was heavily corrupted; consequently, legal enforcement of laws and justice was weak. Courts were not functioning properly, political institutions seemed to be nominal and subordinated to certain clans and cliques. Communist political capital and politics-based social relations were actually transformed into economic capital during the early years of transition; this was made possible by the unfair mechanisms of privatisation, which benefited the old *nomenklatura* (Howard, 2003). As a result, some of the old Communist party members became businessmen or managers of state-owned companies, some of them remained in politics, and these communist legacy-based relationships created the background for the establishment of influential oligarchic clans in most of post-communist societies. Alongside the decadent reputation of political, economic and social structures, these new informal political and economic clans also decreased the reputation of the political system and promoted distrust (Kochanowicz, 2004: 79).

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

As mentioned before, the mainstream of cultural theories underlines the modern substance of trust, creating the antinomy between trust and risk. Risk, in fact, is a self-reflexive notion, since one decides on the trustworthiness of another subject: whether it is expedient to take risks and what gains or losses trust might produce (Coleman, 1990). In the communist regime and later on in post-communist societies, this antinomy of trust and risk hardly makes sense. The communist regime and the so-called trustworthiness of the communist regime were grounded in the mechanisms of coercion, terror, and fear. The unstable post-communist institutional arrangements also deeply contributed to fear. The unpredictable situation did not allow for any reasonable-based evaluation of trustworthiness, which is why it did not include any “making a bet” mechanism. Therefore, while trust in democracy is opposite to *risk* as a self-reflexive notion (which also includes responsibility for one’s decisions), under post-communist conditions, trust comes in opposition to *fear*, which we cannot control. In this sense, trust is no longer a rational response. Trust becomes not a free choice, but more of voluntary or forced compliance. The dimension of fear utterly erases real trust, as well as prohibits any common social interaction. Together with the loss of human dignity, it brings about passivity, non-involvement, and non-communication (Markova, 2004: 8). Consequently, trust in post-communist societies barely associates with social commitment or a good-willing attitude. In comparison, in old democracies, political participation is largely based on community networks and a common sense of responsibility for social/political actions (though these networks, according to Putnam and Norris, are also waning). Meanwhile in post-communist democracies, the lack of generalised trust or even distrust, intolerance, apathy, or suspicion towards society makes political participation apathetic and lacking vibrancy, since common political action is not supported at the societal level.

Empirical evidence

To support the theoretical points above, I refer to the few empirical studies on trust in post-communist societies. As it was mentioned in the beginning, the most comprehensive research on trust in post-communist societies was done by Mierina (2011). She uses the WVS data (2005 – 2007), which shows that only one quarter of respondents in post-communist societies tend to trust people in general: 22,2 % in Bulgaria, 19 % in Poland, 20,3 % in Romania and 18,1 % in Slovenia. It is worth noting that during the democratization period, in some countries generalised trust went down: in Bulgaria from 30,4 (1993) to 22,2 % (2007), in

Czech Republic from 30,2 % (1993) to 23,9% (2001), in Estonia from 27,6 % (1993) to 23,9 % (2001), in Lithuania from 30,8 % (1993) to 24,9 % (2001).

In another study *Undiscovered Power: Map of the civil Society in Lithuania* the authors Žiliukaitė and Ramonaitė (2006: 234) claim to have found a significant difference between generalised trust and particularised trust in Lithuania. Referring to the results of the fieldwork (*Lithuanian Values 2005*), the study indicates that out of 1010 respondents only 7,2 % express trust in strangers (people whom the respondents have not met before). In comparison, about 75 % of respondents trust people they actually know, 59 % place trust in neighbours, 84 % trust in relatives and almost 98 % trust in their family. The numbers illustrate that most people are attached to particularised trust and rely on the close-knit ties with family and friends, which existed in communist societies. Similar findings were also discussed by Bădescu (2003) and Vasilache (2010) in Romania.

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

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

To sum up, in his comprehensive studies on post-communist countries, Uslaner (2003; 2008) has gathered empirical evidence that general climate of political distrust and atomised (in-group) societal trust in former communist countries are tightly related to corruption, inequality and expectations for the future. His longitudinal findings show that almost in all

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

Future research

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

Another obvious gap in the current research of trust is the lack of longitudinal research comprising communist and post-communist years. Admittedly, although in many countries the data on trust under the communist regime is very limited or not available at all, some rare records of several countries are collected. Comprehensive longitudinal analysis of the post-communist countries would provide a better insight in trust transformation and the perverse effects of communism as the contextual factor on generalised and particularised trust.

The value of studies of trust in the post-communist societies would be undoubtedly generated by qualitative data, showing how trust in particular was and is related to fear and risk in different situations at the individual level. The qualitative research might help to find out what the perceptions of trust among different age groups are and whether the impact of

communism on trust is stronger for older citizens than for the young who were socialized after the democratic transition.

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

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

Conclusions

The present article aimed at analysing the notion of trust from different theoretical perspectives and at examining the trajectories of trust transformation in mature and post-communist societies. The theoretical conceptualisation of the category of trust displayed competing approaches towards trust, emphasising a rational, or cultural, moral side of trust. The variety of suggested insights into trust might be useful in defining different forms of trust: generalised and particularised trust at the societal level and political (institutional) trust.

The article argues that generalised trust lays on the moralistic foundation, although also includes some rational elements. Particularised trust, contrarily, holds less of moralistic approach and scatters society into atomised, egocentric circles. The generalised type of social trust is tightly related with political trust, which emerges in contemporary society as a result of the liberal institutionalised distrust.

To sum up the theoretical considerations on trust in post-communist societies, several remarks should be made. First, scholars analysing communist regimes and their aftermath suggest that social trust in post-communist democracies lacks attitudes based on good will and mostly relies on particularised trust. Due to the communist experience, social trust became limited to the “strategically egoistic” attitude in order to fulfil one’s needs, even if using illegal methods. This perception is gradually transformed into sub-consciousness; the notion of social trust becomes pervasive, and robustly attached to rational calculations. Trust in strangers is deeply set apart from trust in family. On the contrary, although social trust in western-type modernised societies is also related to the rational choice, civil society, with its perception of the common good and common action, also requires a non-rational dimension of trust, more specifically, moralistic and generalised type of trust.

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

Annotated further reading

Sztompka P (1999) *Trust. A Sociological Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The monograph presents a comprehensive theoretical study of trust as a fundamental component of human actions. The study provides conceptual and typological clarifications of the notions of trust, its foundations and functions. The special focus is placed on the transformation of trust in the aftermath of communism.

Bădescu G and Uslaner E M (eds) (2003) *Social Capital and the Transition to Democracy*. London: Routledge.

The edited collection presents the research on how post-communist countries are adopting the Western models of society. The concepts of social capital and trust have been used to explain civic engagement, support for democracy and the democratization processes in general. The theoretical analysis is supported by detailed case-studies.

Kornai J, Rothstein B and Rose-Ackerman S (2004) *Creating Social Trust: Problems of Post-Socialist Transition*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

The study focuses on the process of development of trust in post-communist countries. The scholars examine barriers of trust, analysing the interactions of individuals and their social, political, and economic environments. Taking in the consideration the historical circumstances, the interpretations of the causality of illegal organizations (like mafia) and trust are presented.

Markova I (ed.) (2004) *Trust and Democratic Transition in Post-Communist Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University press.

The book is concerned with theoretical and empirical analyses of trust and distrust in post-communist Europe. The notion of trust is conceptualised and reconstructed in accordance to the communist legacies and post-communist transformation. I find historical interpretation of trust formation in the different political regimes and economic systems very valuable.

Hardin R (2006) *Trust*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

This key book conceptualises trust in contemporary society and politics. Trust is examined from various perspectives, taking into account wide-range aspects of public life. The author also focuses on the phenomena of distrust in government, as the essential feature of liberal system.

Rosanvallon P (2008) *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The popular monograph deals with the phenomena of protest politics in liberal democracies and concentrates on the reason of steady erosion of confidence in government. The paradox of trust and liberalism is widely discussed from historical and philosophical perspectives.

Warren M E (1999) *Democracy & Trust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The edited collection of articles analyses relationship between democracy and trust. Different theories of social and political trust are presented and connected, as well as “healthy distrust” in democratic institutions is discussed.

Fukuyama F (1995) *The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. London: Penguin

The seminal work provides the key insights on trust as a cultural feature. Taking into account cultural and civilisational patterns of the societies, trust is assessed as an underlying principle that fosters or restrains social and economic prosperity.

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Nota bene. This article is the updated version of the author’s article “Trust: the Notion and its Transformation in Mature and Post-Communist Democracies”, published in *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* 2012 (27): 35 – 60.

Teodora Gaidytė is currently a PhD candidate at the Sociology Department of the VU University Amsterdam. In her PhD project (2009 – 14) she examines the relationship between trust, perceived political efficacy and political participation in mature and post-communist societies. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in political science and Master’s degree in comparative politics. Her primary research interests lay in the field of political sociology, first of all, political attitudes in post-communist societies, political participation and the role of trust in social interactions. [email: t.gaidyte@vu.nl]

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

remise en question et moins basée rationnellement depuis que, contrairement aux anciennes sociétés démocratiques, elle a évolué en opposition à la crainte plutôt qu'en opposition au risque.

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

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

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