# PART III

Widening

Chapter 6

# THE SECOND RENAISSANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN EAST AND CENTRAL EUROPE – AND IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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It has become quite common to talk about a revival of the concept of civil society from the 1980s onwards and to identify East Central Europe as one major site of that revival. This chapter provides a critical review of these occurrences, but, beyond taking stock of the civil society debate in East Central Europe, it aims at elaborating a broader Euro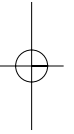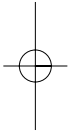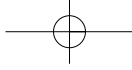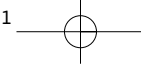pean perspective. Our analysis emphasizes the historically specific forms of interaction between East Central European countries and the West during the post-Second World War years that witnessed a series of major political and economic transformations and the gradual dismantling of the welfare state in the respective parts of the European continent. It is argued that, although genuine dialogue between the two parts of Europe was impeded before 1989, these transformations shaped significantly the nature of the emerging NGOs and, as a consequence, had a large impact on the developing forms of democracy and civil society in Europe. New practices have arguably become available to individual and collective actors of civil society since 1989 and the concurrent creation of a radically new language on the issue suggests a renaissance of the civil society debate and the opening up of new avenues for the conceptualisation of the polity and for political *praxis* both in Europe and globally. Furthermore, though, it is argued that we are witnessing a passage from traditional modes of dialogical negotiations between governmental organisations and civil society actors to the processes of *co-*

*optation* of civil society. By using the term co-optation, we attempt to conceptually grasp – and critically discuss – the potential dissolution of sharp antagonisms and contradictions in the globally emerging contexts of interaction between states and new forms of civil society. The rebirth of the concept and the formulation of a new vocabulary and language can be traced to such important social movements as *Solidarnosc* in East Central Europe.

## The Message of *Solidarnosc* and the Language of Civil Society before 1989

Entrapped in the ambiguities of the Yalta system's *Realpolitik*, East Central European societies proceeded on a long path of learning in order to find the right language and modes of self-organization and articulation required to defend their values and identities vis-à-vis dictatorship and authoritarian rule. Revolts and revolutions of workers and intellectuals during the 1950s, and the more peaceful but radical reforms 'from above' that culminated in the Prague Spring in 1968, were heroic, but ineffective experiments.[1] At the same time, these bitter lessons contributed a great deal to the emergence of a new political philosophy and 'strategy' and to the social practice of civil society. The emancipatory powers of East Central Europe needed new ways and forms for self-expression. Adam Michnik's reconceptualization of civil society heralded a new language which arose from strong needs that could not find proper channels for expression.

> The essence of spontaneously growing Independent and Self-governing Labour Union solidarity lay in the restoration of social ties, self-organization aimed at guaranteeing the defense of labor, civil, and national rights. For the first time in the history of communist Poland 'civil society' was being restored, and it was reaching a compromise with the state. (Michnik 1985: 124)

This development would not have been possible without a gradual but nonetheless fundamental change in political thinking and strategy expressed in the renaissance of civil society that was necessarily coupled with the birth of a new language. Curiously enough, at another periphery, Latin America, discussions around the same kinds of ideas were taking place simultaneously. According to Fernando Cardoso, 'In Brazilian political language, everything which was an organized fragment was being designated civil society. Not rigorously, but effectively, the whole opposition … was being described as if it were the movement of Civil Society' (cited in Kaldor 2003: 75; see chapter 7 for a broader discussion).

Although no direct link can be found between intellectuals in the two peripheries, Mary Kaldor admits the term reflected an emerging reality in

Latin America that echoed the way it was used in Central Europe. She quotes the Brazilian Francisco Weffort whose words parallel those of Jacek Kuron, arguing the need for the rebirth of civil society:

> The discovery that there was something more to politics than the state began with the simplest facts of life of the persecuted. In the most difficult moments, they had to make use of what they found around them. There were no parties to go to, no courts in which they could have confidence. At a difficult time, the primary resource was the family, friends and in some cases a fellow worker. What are we talking about if not civil society, though still at the molecular level of interpersonal relations? In a situation of enormous ideological complexity, the discovery of civil society was much less a question of theory than of necessity. (Kaldor 2003:75)

Driven by a curious missionary spirit, the Communist parties in East Central Europe considered it their duty to either cut the horizontal fibres of civil society, or to hinder their development. Society, they believed, kneaded into an atomized mass, would indeed deliver reliable and obedient subjects. The state, intertwined with the Communist party, helped to demobilize society in many different ways: by the dismantling of democratic and social actors, and by monopolizing interest intermediation through the 'etatization' of trade unions, and so on. By far the most effective means of demobilization was the atomization of society through the destruction of social networks and the undermining of social identities and value systems (see chapter 5 above for an analysis of the case of the G.D.R.).

Fortunately, the complete liquidation of civil society failed. Undercurrents of civil existence were never totally eradicated from the collective consciousness. Social networks survived in semi-latent and semi-legitimate forms, and in the mid-1960s their slow regeneration began. After the trauma of the 1956 Revolution, the nature of the dictatorship started to change throughout Soviet bloc countries. A 'paternalism' or 'enlightened socialist absolutism' emerged in Poland and Hungary that was in harmony with the precariousness and transitory character of East Central European history. The early attempts at liberation taught independent-minded East Europeans to look for alternative methods to democratize their regimes and increase autonomy and political, social and cultural freedom within the seemingly stable framework of the bipolar world order.

In Hungary, the first alternative was the introduction of economic reforms and a cautious, state-controlled opening towards the world economy without political change in the 1960s. The internal contradictions of this reform experiment reached a climax in the early 1980s and led to the end of the unwritten compromise between the State and society. The artificially maintained image of the country as an

economic success story became untenable. This was the historic turning point for Hungarian society that then started to rid itself of political paralysis and social muteness. Self-mobilization from below, in different grassroots activities, gradually emerged. With the evolving political and economic crises, the culture of silence was gradually replaced with more open dialogue among formerly isolated circles of independent-minded citizens. Cautiously, the media became involved in the new critical discourse and the long list of taboo themes began to shrink. In other words, a new public arena emerged to openly and critically discuss social, environmental, cultural and, in a restricted way, political issues. In the 1980s, a modern critical discourse promoting dialogue was born in Hungary.

In Poland, *Solidarnosc*, quickly became a nationwide, self-supporting political, cultural, social and economic network and a metaphor for an emerging civil society. The political philosophers behind the movement deliberately built their strategy on non-violence, involving the party-state and local authorities in a dialogue with representatives of the officially unrecognized movement. The enforcement of dialogue, in the form of radical demands and systematic negotiations, was tempered with the readiness to compromise. Non-violence and strong solidarity characterized this unique East Central European social movement. As part of the new logic and discourse, the adjective 'civil' was reborn and began to spread since it proved to be the single common denominator for different social and political actors searching for alternatives. A common denominator, or a 'probing concept' was much needed at a time of high uncertainty, fragmentation and also broadening horizons. 'Civil' in everyday parlance, meant autonomous, independent, non-military, non-violent and non-official. The very existence and pervasive success of *Solidarnosc* proved throughout the region of the Eastern bloc that there was a chance to peacefully challenge from below the authoritarian and dictatorial Soviet-type regimes and their apparatus.

The organization of civil movements differed from country to country according to historical traditions, the nature of the dictatorship, political culture and social structure. A wide variety of civil initiatives, movements and associations emerged at the beginning of the 1980s in Hungary in the absence of a large and strong independent moral authority like the Polish Catholic Church which functioned as an umbrella. At an early stage, there was a strong tendency for cooperation and solidarity among these civil groups called 'alternative social movements' or 'civil initiatives'. There was a unifying and consciously shared concept of civil society that had its origin in the political thought of István Bibó, a prominent and independent political writer and historian.[2] Bibó introduced the metaphor of 'small circles of freedom', which was subsequently used and developed further by the emerging

student movement, environmental and peace groups, and other initiatives during the 1980s. The common vision of the alternative movements and new civil organizations was a natural outgrowth of these 'small circles of freedom' that developed into interdependent networks and alliances. Their gradual emergence created a mutually reinforcing network during the second half of the 1980s.[3] Rivalry among these groups remained secondary to the unifying force of challenging the authorities of the party-state until the democratic elections after the fall of communism in 1990. Significantly, when they surfaced, all these actors employed the new vocabulary of a wholly new language.

There is widespread agreement in the literature on the East Central European Velvet Revolutions that civil society was pivotal to the overthrow of communist regimes in 1989 (Bernhard 1996).[4] More recent evaluations of the 'alternative movements' and their civil society discourse during the 1980s provide different interpretations. In his recent book, John K. Glenn talks about the 'monocausal logic and conceptual imprecision' of many of these interpretations.[5] Glenn's conclusion is that we need to reconceptualize civil society 'as a master frame with which civic movements across Eastern Europe sought to mobilize public support in light of changing political opportunities' (Glenn 2001: 26–27).

The literature on civil society first concentrated on the democratic opposition movements during the Cold War, usually taking *Solidarnosc* as an outstanding model of social self-reliance and political resistance. But soon the concept was used for the analysis of fundamentally different societies from the United States via the former Soviet Union to Africa and the Far East. Civil society became the agent of cross-border, transnational cooperation and organization and has been gaining in global dimensions ever since (see Budiman 1990; Arato and Cohen 1992; Bozóki and Sükösd 1993; Elander and Gustafsson 1995; Dragovich, Liebich, and Warner 1995; Tismaneanu 1995; Yamamoto 1995; Hall 1995; Rueschemeyer et al. 1998).

Parallel to its increasingly widespread usage, the complexity and comprehensiveness of the concept of civil society can be discovered in the most recent literature. Michael Muetzelfeldt and Gary Smith's analysis reveals the one-sidedness of most of the earlier, biased civil society approaches that either over-emphasize the importance of the State or of civil society. They consequently suggest a more balanced view and emphasize that what they call the 'mutually emergent approach' offers a more complex understanding of the relationship between the State and civil society:

> In contrast to those who give primacy to either civil society or institutions of governance, we emphasize their mutually emergent features, and recognize the importance of the two-way interaction between civil society and

governance. This mutually emergent approach emphasizes the reciprocal constitution of a strong facilitating state and a strong civil society … (Muetzelfeldt and Smith 2002: 58) [6]

More importantly, as the following paragraph indicates, this perspective has the advantage of acknowledging the intricate relationship between State and civil society and the difficulties inherent in any attempt to arrive at a systematic theorisation of the modes of their relation.

> States are not homogenous, and have contradictory features because of their contradictory position in relationship to capital and civil society …This approach provides an analytical framework that allows for reciprocal socio-political reproduction between state and civil society. This in turn opens the possibility for developing models for action that build civil society and good governance through virtuous cycles of effective active citizenship. (Muetzelfeldt and Smith 2002: 59)

This more sophisticated, complex and balanced approach was elaborated in the civil society literature by Martin Krygier.

> Poland has a special and far-reaching significance for many themes. For it was there, more than anywhere else, remarkably resilient, and was ultimately successful beyond anyone's imaginings … Much can be learned about civil society from the manifestos, struggles, ambitions, and fate of *Solidarnosc,* from what it understood civil society to be, and from what it failed or was uninterested to understand about the concept… (Krygier 1997: 59)

Krygier detects the important difference between civil society *in statu nascendi* and a well-established and functioning civil society.

> Civil societies depend upon distinctive configurations of economic life, civility among acquaintances and strangers, and tolerant pluralism. These in turn depend upon particular configurations of state and law, and gain support from particular sorts of politics. In each of these domains, civil society has … elements that *Solidarnosc* did not have … Moreover, the elements interrelate. A truly civil society has a strong – though not despotically strong – political and legal infrastructure and liberal democratic politics. (ibid.: 64)

The problem is that a 'truly' civil society does not exist. Real civil societies, however, might have and should have ideals and therefore the foundation of an ideal type can be useful (Alexander 1998). Real civil societies may even be measured against such an ideal type. Jadwiga Staniszkis pulls us back to the soil of Central and Eastern European realities:

> The creation of a civil society is a much more complex process than mere political liberalization: it demands both property rights reform and deep

cultural change. It is painful, just as is the creation of new politics occurring now in the Eastern bloc. Not only the old, facade institutions are activated (thus is usually the first step, before new institutions are created and oppositions recognized) but both the old and the new elites have to resist the temptations of unlimited power. The evolution from the situation when only society (not the ruling elite) is bound by rules to the legal structure limiting all actors is not completed yet in the Eastern bloc; oppositional reformers as well as 'revolutionaries from above' of the old establishment demonstrate temptation to use techniques (and philosophy) of the prerogative state in the name of reform. (Staniszkis 1991: 26)[7]

These temptations are real and have not been successfully resisted by either the old or new power elites. Real civil societies in the new member states, future accession and non-accession countries are weak and dependent on weak states which often try to over-compensate for their incapacity by over-regulation, bureaucratic authoritarianism and fake social dialogue. The 'mutually emergent approach' can be applied to post-communist societies, but the circles connecting power, institutions and civil society are far from being virtuous.

For some Western authors, the main characteristic of 1989 was its complete lack of innovation. Mary Kaldor agrees that the Velvet Revolutions of that year did not produce new policies or strategies for governments, but she argues that the period of the 1980s, preceding the revolutions, was fomenting with ideas. Precisely thanks to the emerging movements, 'small circles of freedom', a new understanding of citizenship and civil society accompanied with cross-border networking, 'transnationalism' was born. Kaldor claims that 'the notion of European or global civil society, which could be said to have emerged during this period, in some sense encompassed or encapsulated this strand of thinking' (Kaldor 2003: 50).

From the outbreak of the 1956 Revolution onwards, there was tension between the non-acceptance of Soviet domination and the logic of the bipolar world system throughout the region. Original and effective ways were found to democratize and support the building of a new relationship with the political ruling class. After the failures of 1956 and 1968, *Solidarnosc* proved efficient and victorious. It revitalized and reformulated the concept of civil society. East Central European dissidents and independent intellectuals and activists digested the lessons of 1956 and drew new conclusions by the late 1970s and early 1980s. The new way of thinking and articulation of the basic values of civil society represented by Michnik, Kuron, Konrad, and Havel, among others, regarding the relationship between an oppressive authoritarian state on the one hand, and society on the other, contributed greatly to political and theoretical conceptualization. The change in thinking and acting in civil society was supported by powerful 'external' international trends as

well. The 1975 Helsinki Accord's third basket on Human Rights helped Charta '77 in Czechoslovakia, KOR in Poland, and the democratic opposition in Hungary to act more openly not only within their societies, but also with each other.

At the core of these ideas and analyses was a strong belief that events could proceed in new, historically unprecedented ways. Terms and phrases of a new language, such as 'parallel polis' and the 'power of the powerless' surfaced in the new discourse of dissident movements. This new vocabulary expressed a new attitude towards the weakening authoritarian regimes. Vaclav Benda, a Charta '77 spokesperson, emphasized that the 'parallel polis' does not compete with power, and accordingly Charta '77 was seen not as a political movement, but rather as a 'civic initiative'. In short, the new language signalled a new type of politics from below.

The birth of the new language and new thinking was primarily restricted to the national level, but there were also promising cross-border civil initiatives. There was regular cooperation between East Central European opposition groups and alternative movements in order to strengthen each others' cases and support each others' activities (Kaldor 1997: 8). This risky and unprecedented enterprise produced a growing regional – that is, Central European – awareness of a shared and common identity that strengthened solidarity. There was not only cooperation among the main democratic oppositional movements, but also among smaller movements and groups, such as environmentalists, peace activists and professional associations. In order to protect the emerging civil society and its new social movements throughout East Central Europe, Vaclav Havel, the spokesman for Charta '77, suggested the need to establish an alternative European Parliament for social movements which became the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly.[8]

Kaldor draws our attention to the fact that the emergence of social movements and citizen groups was global. The 'growth of small circles of freedom' (*Solidarnosc*, Charta '77, the East German Swords into Ploughshares, the Dialogue Groups, the Polish *Wolnosc i Pokuj*, the Hungarian Danube Circle and Fidesz, and so on) did not occur in isolation. The 1980s also saw the re-emergence of strong and dynamic social movements in the West. This was an expression of the need to radicalize democracy and of the emergence of a new public sphere. Together with the birth of a new language, East-West dialogue began in Europe and reflected a hitherto unprecedented global consciousness and responsibility. This dialogue certainly expanded the space for a new European and global public for East and Central European movements, which successfully filled up the new public space. The artificial military bureaucratic and ideological division of Europe became unacceptable to

younger generations that had not witnessed the terror of the 1950s. For them, the new language and thinking was a natural given. Suddenly a new *Zeitgeist*, a new 'feeling' began to radiate from the civil discourse of the 1980s. The attitude: 'I have the right to make my voice heard' gained momentum within the alternative movements. It was this common feeling that bound them together and created a common language and milieu for civil society.

Despite widely different political and cultural contexts, there was a fundamental consensus among the participants of East-West dialogue that one could no longer remain silent on fundamental political, social and ecological issues. The new language became the common denominator for all of these public concerns and provided the loose, rather psychological connections of belonging to a new community of independent civil movements and initiatives. Kaldor argues that the Western peace movement contributed 'transnationalism in practice' to the new discourse of the emerging Central European civil world. END (the European Nuclear Disarmament Movement) and the European Network of East-West Dialogue that grew out of it demonstrated that networks can be effective and that cross-border networking is not only possible but fruitful in terms of protest, defence of human rights and the elaboration of new concepts and ideas. It is also remarkable that concepts such as *empowerment, participation, deliberation, transnational and European public sphere*, even *global civil society*, were born in the mid-1980s. All these concepts, ideas and phrases later became objects of academic research and a new language of power in the 1990s. Curiously enough, there is very little investigation of and interest in their recent origin.[9]

## After 1989: Institutionalized Democracy and the Linguistic Turn in Civil Society Discourse

The rapid establishment of new institutions of representative democracy radically changed the dynamics of civil society. An overwhelming majority of former civil society activists became members of the new political elite and occupied leadership positions in the new institutions and political parties. Accordingly, their perception of civil society versus state relations changed dramatically. The leaders and the ideologues of the new political elite claimed that the time for social movements was over. They stated that grassroots mobilization was unnecessary, if not downright dangerous for new democracies. Political parties, they said, provided sufficient arena for the competition of ideas, ideologies and socio-political alternatives. According to this neo-liberal and at the same time etatist credo, the everyday political participation of citizens is unnecessary. Their role should be restricted to maintaining the new

institutions and to legitimizing the political regime by voting every four years in 'fair and unharrassed elections'.

Following Fowler (1996), among others, we can identify civil society as the social environment where interest groups turn themselves into political parties, competing to become the ruling regime. In the case of East Central European countries, one has to alter this general truth according to the special socio-economic and historic context. A gap developed historically between the rulers and the ruled due to the lack of a strong middle class who, after the period of successful capital accumulation and saturation of wealth, would support the social and cultural sphere. In the absence of a strong democratic culture, the values of solidarity, social responsibility and citizenship could not develop. Citizens view themselves and were indoctrinated to view themselves as helpless, exposed subjects at the mercy of the State and its authorities. For good historical reasons, citizens (who are still called 'state-burghers' after the German *Staatsbürger*) and official authorities were – and in many transition countries still are – mutually suspicious of each other. It is important to recognise this special relationship between the rulers and the ruled in order to form a realistic picture of the present state of civil society in East Central Europe.

Although this attitude towards power started to change during the transition, the survival of paternalistic and authoritarian elements remained significant determinants in the relationship between civil society and the political elite. The attitude that 'it was always like this and will always be this way – so what can I do?' which characterized post-Second World War East Central European societies was challenged by the new social movements of the 1980s. This period, which we can call the 'Golden age of the renaissance of civil society', proved rather short-lived in terms of erecting strong roots for a new political culture based on the rights and duties of engaged citizens. After the first democratic elections in 1990, continuity remained strong in public institutional life. The restoration of authoritarian patterns of behaviour, between citizens and their institutions, remained tenacious.

If we accept Jeffrey Alexander's conceptualisation, that civil society can be viewed as the universal expression of social solidarity, we might also say that without trust there is no civil society. In East Central Europe, illusions rapidly vanished at the beginning of the 1990s. The central values of civil society were quickly marginalized. Alexander observed the following:

> Just when intellectuals in Poland and Hungary were celebrating the return of civil society as an idea … [they] are not at all sure they want it….The practical task of social reconstruction makes these social ideals difficult for the intellectuals to sustain (Alexander 1998: 1–2).

Amidst the joy of bringing down the communist state, numerous institutions and movements took up the adjective 'civil'. Borislaw Geremek said in August of 1989: 'we don't need to define [civil society], we see it and feel it' (cited in Smolar 1996: 24). Jiri Dienstbier's famous formulation, that 'civil society is in power' quickly became ironic, although the former spokesman for Charta '77 was certainly correct in observing the great stream of former 'dissidents' towards positions of power. With the formation of political parties, however, civil society lost its moral constituting power for the public good. The new political elite believed that moral civil society, along with its movements, had fulfilled its destiny, and should now stop stirring up the waters – some even stepped forward openly against the idea of civil society. Vaclav Klaus, for example, went so far as calling it a perverted idea, seeing in it the ideology of collectivism and an ambiguous third way.

After the Velvet Revolutions, civil society went through a real metamorphosis – some of it disappeared completely, some of it was transformed. Several movements turned themselves into political parties; local initiatives either faded away or were co-opted by local politics, and many civil organisations were forced to sell themselves in a financial or political sense to survive. A desperate struggle awaited those who managed to preserve their identity: they needed time, willpower, money and expertise to continue to operate. In the meantime, a process of disintegration and atomization rather than civilization swept the region of East Central Europe.[10]

During the last decade, sociological literature – especially in Poland and Hungary – has repeatedly called attention to the continuity in institutional and social mentality. Aleksander Smolar speaks directly of a new 'socialist civil society'. 'Shadow society' is the term he uses to describe the collection of informal social relations that were created by people in the 1970s and 1980s to defend themselves from the existing forms of authoritarianism (Smolar 1996: 35–38). These genuine, grassroots networks of social cooperation contributed greatly to the acceptance of shock therapy and the initial hardships of the transition. In time, however, as enthusiasm for 'a return to Europe' receded and the pain caused by the reforms intensified, the emphasis shifted to the defence of material-existential interests. The re-strengthening of the anti-liberal, etatist hierarchy of values came together with nostalgia for the socialist state that had offered a certain kind of protection and security. In societies that have uncertain futures, democratic politics with half-established and not entirely accepted rules and practices frequently deter or alienate rather than attract the majority. The trust invested in informal family relationships and close ties of friendship then gains weight.

Smolar calls it the irony of history that real socialism found refuge precisely in the very world of civil society that it had previously sought to

strangle. Even though this phenomenon is not characteristic of the ever-changing sphere of civil societies in East Central Europe as a whole, it reveals a number of deep contradictions that determine social values and personal life strategies. The presence of trust at the social level provides the basis for order and dependability. After a short-lived rise in social trust, cooperation and solidarity, the societies of democratising East Central Europe are once again characterised by distrust and a strong tendency towards atomization. In the post-Cold War period the challenge for civil societies in East Central European countries is twofold: globalization and European integration. In order to address these challenges, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) have to link their domestic activities to the global – or at least regional – context. Networking is already very much present, but its full potential has not been realized. Escaping from their narrow and parochial framework and political climate, they need to find donors who are able to cooperate as partners and equals with commonly shared values and goals.

The breakdown of the communist party-states in East Central Europe, coupled with the retreat of the welfare states in the West, naturally gave birth to NGOs both in theory and practice. The negative definition of NGOs refers to the lack of something, to the uncertainty and unpredictability of the transitory epoch. This situation is naturally comprised of positive tendencies as well, like the further articulation of the need for social democratization and participation of citizens in decision-making. Potentially, NGOs could play a vital role in buttressing and facilitating social democratization and citizen participation. This is, however, not self-evident. In many cases, NGOs are not genuine agents of authentic civil society. In weak democracies, loaded with an unelaborated and anti-democratic past, they are often creatures of governments, parties or individuals who employ them to enhance their power, prestige or material interests.

One of the main problems with the new NGOs in political cultures dominated by the lack of trust, independent resources and traditions in citizens' initiatives, is their limited legitimacy in the local societies. NGOs either turn to the State, automatically losing their independence, or look for external resources. In both cases accountability and transparency become questionable. It is also very often the case that western (mostly American) donors, sometimes with the best intentions, are ignorant of local, social, political and cultural conditions and are therefore unable to select the appropriate partners from civil society. In many cases those who receive internal financial support are those who are already in the external circle of a global NGO elite. They possess not only the necessary language, Internet and application-writing skills, but are able to 'talk civil society' fluently using the most trendy and fashionable buzzwords.

On the other hand, the East Central European development of NGOs and CSOs reveals a consciousness of their role in strengthening democratic values, mobilizing society for participation, and contributing to a new civil culture of decision-making and dialogue. This is required to strengthen their bargaining capacity with authorities on local, national and international levels, but this is also not a given. According to Lars Jorgensen:

> There are some risks in taking on civil society. It is of course perfectly legitimate for NGOs not to be openly political or to take sides in whatever constellation of parties or factions which is forming at a given moment, but they must recognize that their work has political aspects and relate to the authority of the state and to the political development of their society. (Jorgensen 1996: 36)

An unbalanced and undemocratic relationship, based on a new dependency between Western donors and Eastern NGOs can seriously undermine and bias this potential. Therefore, a critical assessment of their relationship and its development during the transition period is of crucial importance. Sometimes well-intentioned donors impose their values or policies on recipients who then act rather as dependent agents instead of as genuine local actors in the civil sphere. The scarcity of domestic resources, a growing dependency on state support and an unequal, dependent relationship with Western donors, combined with a growing rivalry rather than solidarity among NGOs, has seriously undermined the spirit of an independent civil society in transition countries. This tendency is reinforced by the emergence of a global and local NGO elite with high technical skills and 'networking capital' that contributes to the fake image of a civil society constructed from above (Jensen and Miszlivetz 1998a: 83–98).

Civil society, with its proliferating interfaces, is a remarkable asset for the global, regional and domestic representatives and configurations of the emerging bureaucratic, political and market strata to demonstrate their allegedly 'good intentions'. In this context, by 'talking civil society' and nominating and signifying 'civil society', these social actors become themselves part of civil society. The slippery language and the new praxis of 'dialogue with civil society organizations' initiated by non-CSOs (from above or from the outside) have the potential to dissolve sharp contradictions and antagonisms. 'Civil society speak' can smoothly annihilate diametrically opposing interests and provide mutually satisfying results. This process we can call the 'co-optation of civil society'.

'Talking civil society' provides the common denominator for Western donors, the new NGO-elite, and national governments who want to 'co-opt' them. It can be lucrative to display the 'right' liberal democratic values and at the same time avoid the uncomfortable consequences of strong and genuine civil societies. 'Co-opting' and taking over means

surpassing and weakening. A new network of dependent NGOs undermines rather than serves the interests of genuine civil society. However important and inevitable the institutionalization of civil society is, we can only move beyond the practical and theoretical impasse if we assume that civil society is not equivalent to the sum total of NGOs. The permanent slipping between the terms 'civil society' and 'NGO' is a source of theoretical inconsistency, practical misunderstanding and political or ideological manipulation.

In the second half of the 1980s, it did not seem illusory that East-West dialogue would lead to a sustained cooperation of civil society which would strengthen autonomous, democratic social space in the East and revitalize democracy in the West. After the 1989 transformations, however, the situation changed fundamentally. With the disappearance of the bipolar logic, the common foundation for wide social mobilisation also disappeared. Opinions on the unity of Europe were too divided. Once the main political and ideological barriers fell, economic, welfare and security concerns came to the forefront. In contrast to unconvincing rhetoric, the reality showed that the western half of Europe was turning its attention inwards. It cautiously closed itself off, while in the eastern half fragmentation, disintegration and uncertainty became the main features. The concept and language of civil society did not altogether disappear, but it underwent a metamorphosis in comparison to the practice and visions of the 1980s (Jensen and Miszlivetz 1998b:141–70).

Increasingly professionalized civil organizations and NGOs replaced or outnumbered bottom-up initiatives and movements. In places where the *ethos* and mentality of civil society was preserved from the 1980s, it was either incapacitated against nationalist tyranny (as in several republics of the former Yugoslavia), or it was pushed into the background, as in Hungary, Poland and former Czechoslovakia. A new world was created by the mid-1990s, the world of professional NGOs, civil organisations and foundations. Most of these NGOs took over some of the responsibilities of the State, and they did not have particularly warm feelings about the civil *ethos* or new forms of cooperation. Those civil organisations, however, which carried out their work in the fields of human rights, minority questions, education, culture and the protection of the environment, had every right to regard themselves as institutions of civil society. Most of these have integrated into international – predominantly Eastern or Western European – networks, as a result of which their weight and ability to survive has increased considerably. In the second half of the 1990s, the symptoms of fragmentation and introspection also seemed to have diminished and the idea of Central European cooperation once again gained modest influence in the civil sphere.

## Civil Society and European Citizenship in the New European Space

If we consider civil society to be a sphere of solidarity, we need to be able to answer the question: what causes and maintains this solidarity? This is especially important in the post-1989 period within the framework of the European Union and of European integration. There have been many criticisms of the EU's unification policy and the concept of a European social and political community. These critiques, a typical example of which can be found in the work of Timothy Garton Ash (1998), usually agree that in a social sense it is impossible to talk about a unified Europe; there is little reward in having a European *telos* if there is no European *demos*.

It is true that EU member states have voluntarily given up a considerable part of their national sovereignty and, in general, European nation states have indeed become weaker after the Second World War. They are no longer capable of exercising control over a great number of economic, political and ecological processes. Thus, the framework in which democracy had previously operated has weakened, and in certain cases it has fragmented. This would not present a problem in itself had a new political form replaced the old. This has become a focus of the present debate: can we accept the European Union as the new framework, or are we to accept the re-strengthening of European nation states? At the moment, there is one point on which the advocates of both the strengthening and the weakening of nation states agree, namely that Europe as a political and social framework still lacks coherence. It is therefore unclear what the basis and framework of a Europe-wide civil society could be. Victor Pérez-Diaz argues that neither international markets nor transnational voluntary associations and bureaucracies have the capacity to create the solidarity and trust that could form the basis of a democratic European political community (Pérez-Diaz 1998). Without a vivid European public sphere, there will not be European citizenship.

During the decade after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, European societies have been predominantly made up of national societies whose citizens are mostly concerned with problems at the national or domestic level. The discourse of agitation for Europe was inconsistent with the actual policies of main political protagonists and as a result it was not easy to formulate narratives that contributed to strengthening the feeling of belonging to a European community. Apart from the feeling of belonging to a community, the other dominant values of civil social associations are trust, a readiness to cooperate, and inclusion. According to Dahrendorf,

> A civil society is a society of citizens who have rights and accept obligations, and who behave in a civil and civilized manner towards each other. It is a society which tries to make sure that no one is excluded, and which offers its

members a sense of belonging as well as a constitution of liberty. (Dahrendorf 1997: 78)

How strong are these values in the societies of the EU member states? What are the chances that they might be extended to the societies of Central and Eastern Europe once they become integrated into the enlarged European social space? The answer to the first question is rather ambiguous. Recent empirical studies have shown that nationalism has decreased significantly within the EU Fifteen, and the willingness to cooperate between former adversaries has increased decisively. In contrast, certain social groups and countries who have suffered material losses as a result of the ongoing process of expansion have employed tactics that are far from civilized. What values the EU Twenty-five along with potential new members will represent, especially in terms of national identification in the coming years, is hard to predict. Nationalism, it seems, has not been eradicated in the new European border regions.

However much the most important constituting values and elements of a civil society might be present Europe-wide, the common public sphere that would facilitate the evolution of a transnational civil society has not yet developed. The creation of a European public sphere, which is of utmost importance for the development of a European civil society is, according to Pérez-Diaz, hindered for a number of reasons:

1) Due to economic and political uncertainties public interest is focused predominantly on questions inside the framework of the nation state (such as levels of unemployment, the question of the welfare state, and so on).
2) the conduct of the European transnational political establishment contradicts its own rhetoric; on the level of day-to-day management it still follows the vested interests of nation states.
3) the criterion of accountability is missing.
4) the logic of the Founding Fathers is still in effect, according to which any step forward in the realm of economics or finance will induce a chain reaction on a European level and will facilitate social and political interaction.
5) the fragmentation arising from the diversity of languages and cultures is further accentuated by the lack of common myths and a common historical narrative.

Pérez-Diaz is certainly correct to point out that the expansion of a European public sphere will first of all be the result of active citizenship, and not exclusively the work of a transnational political class, and 'secondly, this citizenry could develop a certain critical awareness towards

performative contradictions in European policies' (Pérez-Diaz 1998: 236). At this point we enter a vicious circle: the commitment and attachment of Europeans will only strengthen once their institutions guarantee them a greater number of substantive civil rights than any other political medium. Without this it is indeed hard to imagine an efficient European civil society. But who in fact will convince institutions of this necessity? Who else but the sporadically dispersed elements of transnational civil and social networks and institutions, together with the citizens who make them function? This act of creation and emergence would be a magic trick worthy of Baron Münchhausen.

The EU's soft spot is that its institutions are not thoroughly transparent and lack democratic social legitimacy. The democratic deficit during the 1990s continued to grow. The consensus that was symptomatic of the integration-orientated elite drained away after the Cold War. This consensus played a key role in the regular and effective cooperation between Western European governments and societies. This is no longer clear in the case of Eastern enlargement. The Director of the European Policy Centre, John Palmer, mentions a growing turmoil and doubt in connection with the fundamental aims of European integration (Gillespie and Palmer 2001). Palmer comes to the conclusion that the 'Future of Europe' debate – owing to the uncertainties surrounding fundamental aims – cannot mobilize a critical social mass. This standpoint is also underpinned by public opinion polls from the *Eurobarometer*, the lack of social resonance after the Convention debates, and the aloofness of the Western European political arena. One should not be surprised by the failure of Maastricht where the creation of a polity was attempted from above. The Amsterdam and Nice Treaties attempted to implement long-term reforms in order to reach a civic engagement to the broader political community or the creation of a normative order that is maintained by the independent source of the input-orientated legitimacy (Gillespie and Palmer 2001).

These forced attempts from above to create a common identity or the public comprehension of public good have regularly flopped. Dimitris Chryssochoou indicts 'Amsterdam as having failed to incorporate any substantive civic rights in a formal 'constitutional' document addressed to the citizen directly, thus reflecting the insistence of sovereignty-conscious states on codifying existing trends in both jurisprudence and legislation' (Chryssochoou 2001: 5). In other words, national interests overshadow the broader vision. Amsterdam and Nice – adjusted to fit the EC's and the EU's developmental history – were under the necessity of creating and/or addressing the political community, in spite of which policies were produced and developed. Chryssochoou argues that without the normative frames of transnational civil society, institutionalization at the European level will not occur.[11] We can agree that the 'Europeanization'

of civil society could significantly influence future reforms and aid in the creation of a civil identity from 'the present fragmented *demos*'. Agreements based on costs and benefits are inadequate and unable to generate civil engagement. Therefore, it is difficult to say what fundamental reforms should look like.

When we contemplate civil society we encompass more than just society with the notion; the phrase contains added value. When we discuss the notion of European civil society it connotes a further qualification. If we study present European societies with their democratic forms of government and, on the other hand, the lack of democracy at the transnational level of the EU, it reveals why the notion became so relevant to decision-makers, bureaucrats, politicians, regional planners and also for civil society activists. These actors, one way or another, are the architects of the new Europe. The future of Europe depends on the extent to which they will be able to cooperate, compromise and mobilize their social environments on the questions that will determine the European constitution, political community and society.

Today, European civil society is more a promise than a fait accompli and there are no guarantees, despite the fact that there are visible signs of emerging representations of a European civil society. Caution is necessary when employing the notion, otherwise we fall into the traps of ideology, wishful thinking and illusion. For the time being, we have to deal with open and unanswerable normative questions. Can the formulation of European civil society become instrumental in the handling of social exclusion and open new channels of social affiliation? Will this result in the implementation of new policies, thereby activating participation in the processes of integration and Europeanization? Or, on the contrary, will there be only protest? In other words, is there any substantive change in attitude on the part of civil society organizations towards more effective cross-border cooperation and networking?

From the early 1970s to the end of the 1980s, the notion of civil society primarily functioned as an umbrella concept and encompassed social movements and initiatives, as well as trade unions and the critical discourse of the independent white-collar workers. After that the notion moved through from the world of NGOs in the 1990s to reach its widest usage at the beginning of the new millennium. It appears in the reports and projects of the European Commission, the UN and the World Bank as well as in the programs of political parties, governments and multinational firms. Although the meaning of the notion varies with the cultural, political and institutional context, the practice proves what Jeffrey Alexander argued that all of these actors would create their own civil societies in order to qualify themselves and their activities. Civil society relates in this way to the public sphere – to a defined manner and mentality as well as to the community of NGOs. This expanded usage

preserves the ambiguity of the notion. It can serve to fight political battles, to mantle social and political problems, but can also turn into the language of power.

The need for new players and movements ensures prominent status to the concept of European civil society. It is often the only tool to link the contradictory processes of integration, Eastern enlargement and Europeanization. It suggests that there is a European way to restructure and unite disintegrating elements of society, political community and culture. All this can happen under the conditions of equal access to opportunities, democratic participation, individual freedom, peace, social welfare and civility. For centuries the development of civil society was exceedingly inequitable in Europe as it was confined to certain segments of societies in Western Europe. From its rebirth through the 1980s it has gained newer and newer connotations and conquered wider social spheres; in the process, the notion itself has been democratized. Today Europe is a broadening, multi-level social space. Individuals, NGOs, and coalitions provide its colours. Social innovators, independent media, and trade unions act out the European drama. At the end of the twentieth century, the lack of bipolarity, the acceleration of globalization and widening European integration led to the beginning of an era different from the last 250–300 years, when civil society was principally evoked inside the borders of the nation state. Today civil networks increasingly cross national borders and there are signs that its leaders perceive the complexities of this new period. Many civil society groups in Europe lobby governmental and intergovernmental organisations, form coalitions with international associations and experiment with new forms of cross-border cooperation. These new cross-border networks can potentially create new identities or resuscitate old ones in new forms and in this way contribute to the social Europeanization of Europe. When attempting to understand the transnational mobilization of interest groups, sub-national agencies and citizens, we need new notions and a new central concept.

## The 'Great Signifier' in the White Paper on European Governance

The gap between rhetoric and reality is uncontested. It seems that civil society serves as an umbrella and shelter, the redeemer of the European project. European elites need their own civil society as well as national governments and political parties. Under these conditions, European civil society discourse could easily become the new language of dominance and power if genuine civil society is unable to articulate itself at the transnational and European levels. The crucial question is whether the frames and structures needed for the development of a transnational,

European civil society will come into existence in the near future. This would be the moment for simultaneous democratization both from below and above. Then, the alienated and unspeakable techno-bureaucratic language that determines the operation and *ethos* of the EU would loose omnipotence. However distant this may be, it is not impossible that the language of unilateral bureaucratic 'provisions' will be superseded by the language of social dialogue. How can we overcome the present situation? Can the EU escape from its crisis of social legitimacy and perpetual monologue disguised as dialogue? If we want to look for answers, it is worth examining the EU's own self-reflections.

The *White Paper on European Governance* released by the European Commission in July 2001 was produced in response to the demand for strong self-reflection and can be recognized as an attempt to start real dialogue. What counts most from our viewpoint is that civil society and the citizen stand at its core:

> Democratic institutions and the representatives of the people, at both national and European levels, can and must try to connect Europe with its citizens. This is the starting condition for more effective and relevant policies. (*White Paper*: 3).

The *White Paper* emphasizes that immediate reforms are needed. At the same time, the authors make clear that the power of the Commission alone is not enough:

> The Commission cannot make these changes on its own, nor should this White Paper be seen as a magic cure for everything. Introducing change requires effort from all the other Institutions, central government, regions, cities, and civil society in the current and future Member States. The White Paper is primarily addressed to them (ibid.: 3).

The most important recognition in the *White Paper* is that (similar to many official EU declarations released in the past years) the continued success of integration depends on stronger and more effective interaction between 'regional and local municipalities and the civil society' (ibid.: 9). At the same time, authors of the document hold the nation states responsible for what invariably refers to the survival of state-centred thinking and a hierarchical approach. The Commission disengages itself from responsibility to:

> Establish a more systematic dialogue with representatives of regional and local governments through national and European associations at an early stage in shaping policy. (ibid.: 4)

In spite of its weaknesses and imperfections, the *White Paper* can be regarded as a change in the process of European construction. It is an

official recognition that the process is not proceeding on the right track and that the Commission has reached its limits. To develop further it needs to find new and different partners:

> European integration has delivered fifty years of stability, peace and economic prosperity …Yet despite its achievements, many Europeans feel alienated from the Union's work. (ibid.: 7)

At one point the self-criticism goes especially deep and elicits, *expressis verbis*, the possibility of the paralysis of the Union:

> The decreasing turnout in the European Parliament elections and the Irish 'No' vote also serve to show the widening gulf between the European Union and the people it serves.… There is a perceived inability of the Union to act effectively where a clear case exists, for instance, unemployment, food safety scares, crime, the conflicts on the EU's borders and its role in the world. (ibid.: 7)

Then the critique turns against the member states:

> By the same token, Member States do not communicate well about what the Union is doing and what they are doing in the Union. 'Brussels' is too easily blamed by Member States for difficult decisions that they themselves have agreed or even requested. (ibid.: 7)

After the critique and expression of frustration, the *White Paper* examines the role and possibilities of civil society. This is a new development in the history of the EU that reveals the birth of a new rhetoric, that is, the *White Paper* emphasizes civil society's outstanding role in the creation of the future Europe. There is a whole sub-chapter on the topic of civil society entitled 'Involving Civil Society'. This not only enhances the possible role of civil society, but also emphasizes its responsibility in the shaping of good governance. The first recommendation of the closing chapter ('From Governance to the Future of Europe') also looks at civil society. It recommends the restructuring of the EU's relation to civil society in order to promote mutual responsibility and accountability. The EU admits the need for civil society, so it urges dialogue with it. In as much as this experiment continues according to the five fundamental principles laid down in the *White Paper* (promotion of transparency, participation, accountability, efficiency, and coherence), it can create a new context driving the process of integration and Eastern enlargement through new channels. If it remains just rhetoric, it can only worsen the already tarnished credibility of the EU in the circles of institutionalized and non-institutionalized civil society.

Acknowledging the crises and accepting the problems coupled with the recognition that there is a need to create a new relationship with a wider circle of actors is noteworthy. The *White Paper* gives the impression

that the community method, amended with the civil society method, could be an efficient mechanism on which to base the future of European integration. It is also remarkable that the notion is not limited to present EU countries, but is extended to the civil societies of the (then) accession countries as well. It is questionable, however, whether the initiative to establish transnational dialogue with civil society will meet the expectations, aims and visions 'from below'. Developments so far are not reassuring. At present, most European societies – both member and candidate countries – are fairly sceptical about influencing European affairs. A refreshing exception is an Internet publication entitled 'Common Europe' (http://www.common.org.pl/), published by independent Polish intellectuals and NGOs in 2001 who identify themselves as 'the voice of Polish non-governmental analytic centres'. They share and support a vision of Europe 'where solidarity is a common standard, which is not divided between better and worse Europeans, and which is not founded on a fear of unification'.

Similar to the *White Paper*, they believe that the involvement of citizens in the process of shaping the new political and social image of a common Europe is the key to the real and democratic legitimation of European integration:

> The voice of European citizens is increasingly heard as a result of the activities of various civic organisations – associations, foundations, churches and informal groups. We are witnessing the birth of a European civil society, which, despite all its deficiencies, is a real expression of the concept of solidarity, the fight against social exclusion, discrimination, and for a clean environment and education. The activities of the organizations of civil society reach into those areas where the state cannot act effectively, and stop integration being limited to elites. (ibid)

Echoing the challenges of the *White Paper*, the authors of the document encourage 'civil dialogue' and the involvement of civil organisations.

Despite these seductive calls from different corners of Europe, our mindset and our language are still determined by an economic and technical efficiency that is controlled from above, by governments and intergovernmental organizations. Larry Siedentop warns that we are still 'sacrificing at the altar of economic growth instead of citizenship' (Siedentop 2000: 217). While analyzing the evolution of European democracies and the historical differences between them, Siedentop purports that Europe, which is principally covered by a French political design, was basically engendered in economic terms (ibid.: 226). Similarly to Chryssochoou, he criticizes first of all the European elites who he believes are the cause of a moral and institutional crises in Europe since they fell victim to 'the tyranny of the economy language' (ibid.: 226). The rediscovery of civil society at a European level, combined with the

introduction of openness, participation and accountability from above, can be regarded as an attempt at rectifying this imbalance. It is hard to deny that since 1957 European construction arose primarily through economic mechanisms. Consequently, it has its own peculiar reasons for employing the language of market efficiency and bureaucratic control which has blanketed the language of politics and leaves little space for the development of the language of civil society. As a consequence, a common language for the European public is still missing. We are witnessing an interesting experiment, that is the creation of a new European language and public sphere simultaneously from below and from above.

## Europe's New Role: the European Project in a Global Context

The protection and enlargement of the values of the European social model is unthinkable without a European Union that takes a leading role in world politics. Politicians, visionaries and social scientists like Delors, Fischer, Jospin, and Habermas emphasize plausibly and consequently that a European constitution would increase the ability of member states to act together by providing the legal framework. In this way, too, something that was lost at the national level could be regained – the ability to have a voice in world politics. On the one hand, there is fundamental agreement on this among leaders, experts and analysts of the EU; on the other hand, there is no consensus on what kinds of changes and reforms are needed to strengthen and make more effective the representation of European interests and values.

As questions about the European construction and Europe's role in the world mount, world system theory can increasingly be found under the surface in analytical essays. José M. Magone, who set out one of the most complex and comprehensive approaches, borrowed the title from Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System and European Civil Society: A Reconstruction of the Long Durée of the Modernity of the Millenium* (Magone 2000). Magone based his analysis on the post-national constellation and continues by examining the slow but fundamental change in the international system. He argues that this change resulted in a paradigm-shift in the field of international relations, and that essentially the nation state is no longer the only or central player in international society. The EU which itself is a 'result' of this slow and radical metamorphosis, significantly contributed to this much-analysed paradigm-shift.[12]

Magone's approach is new, because he connects world system theory and European integration to the change in the role and function of

European nation states and the transnationalization and Europeanization of civil society. Other notions, however, such as democracy, civil society, sovereignty, regionalization, representation, identity and multi-level governance also need rethinking. Magone considers the EU as a political system *sui generis* that was created by a set of treaties.[13] He first examines what impact the world system and the capitalist world economy has on the realignment of the European space; whether a new political economic structure could be created as a counter-balancing force to globalized financial capitalism (ibid.: 3). These questions are relevant because while the European nation states have matured to the level of intergovernmental cooperation, in other parts of the world, completely different trends are proceeding. Consequently, the sharing of power and hegemony at a global level is greatly asymmetric. The international system, especially as represented by international organisations, has reacted slowly. Magone's important recognition concerning the future of Europe is that 'although a global multilevel governance system is emerging, it is asymmetrical in its integration in different places of the world' (ibid.: 2). This asymmetry and dilatory institutional reaction opens the door to civil society in the new, enlarged European space as well as in the global arena. Logically, we have reached a crucial point: will the European Union as a political system *sui generis* together with civil society mobilize towards the paradigm-shift; in other words, diluting national-orientated capitalism with 'proactive cosmopolitanism' (ibid.: 3).

This does not mean that we should consider the EU or European civil society as a blueprint for the world or a completed project. Rather cautiously we could speak about tendencies and possibilities. One outstanding trend is the transformation of the Westphalian system of European nation states into a post-Westphalian system which replaces conflict with cooperation and networking. In the new world of increasing complexities and interdependencies, the much appreciated institutions of global governance such as the UN, IMF, World Bank or WTO have to be restructured in order to survive. A possible positive outcome of this restructuration is that the American model of twentieth century capitalism would be replaced by a 'global negotiated model' (ibid.: 14), and into this new model the EU could transfer genuine and innovative elements. This is the point where European civil society enters the scene since its role has become indispensable.

Those who are concerned about the possibilities of an emerging European *demos* understand well that a common currency or the single market are not sufficient to establish a political community in the minds of people. Eurosceptics and opponents of a more unified or deeply integrated Europe deny the democratic legitimacy of a supranational institutionalization, claiming that a European *demos* as such does not exist. Consequently, the process of constitutionalization lacks its subject:

there is no European collective singular. Habermas strongly disagrees with this view, arguing that a political community does not necessarily presuppose a community of common origin, common language or common traditions. On the other hand, it is true that in the course of European history, democracy and nation states developed in a circular process, strengthening and consolidating each other. Civil society could be interpreted primarily within the boundaries of the nation state:

> There are two lessons to be learnt from the history of the European nation states. If the emergence of national consciousness involved a painful process of abstraction, leading from local and dynastic identities to national and democratic ones, why, firstly, should this generation of a highly artificial kind of civic solidarity – a 'solidarity among strangers' – be doomed to come to a final halt just at the borders of our classical nation-states? And secondly: the artificial conditions in which national consciousness came into existence recall the empirical circumstances necessary for an extension of that process of identity formation beyond national boundaries. These are: the emergence of a European civil society; the construction of a European-wide public sphere; and the shaping of a political culture that can be shared by all European citizens. (Habermas 2001: 16)

Although the political structure of a democratic European Union still needs to be constructed, Habermas believes that the process of construction has reached a critical point where conscious state-building can take the lead. Therefore, the process of constitutionalization plays a decisive role in further development.

The importance of a new, European public sphere and interrelated publics is salient. Without it, it is impossible to imagine overcoming the democratic deficit and the crystallization of a positive European identity. This new European public sphere will most likely take the shape of a network which 'gives citizens of all member states an equal opportunity to take part in an encompassing process of focused political communication' (ibid.: 17). One of the inevitable consequences of the European transformation process is that the European nation states increasingly lose their all-encompassing ability to control. The demand for collective control over negative externalities transferred a lot of power to Brussels that used to be under national control (such as environment, migration and the fight against illegal trade). The establishment of the single market required a set of measures that would be impossible to control at the national level.

The process of sharing power for the time being favours Brussels over national governments and modifies the relation between central institutions and municipalities. This change is quite advanced in the case of the Western European societies, but still remains a long-term aim for new and future member states from East Central European countries

and the Balkans. If new players, such as independent social groups, movements and initiatives, successfully adapt to the possibilities provided by new supranational structures, their survival will not only be assured but will also expand the narrow national public spaces. In the words of Yves Mény, they will contribute to changing national squares into a European circle. These attempts, however successful they may be, will not immediately and automatically lead to the evolving of a homogeneous European public sphere.[14]

This European experiment and the talk of European civil society from both above and below (and, to a certain degree from in-between, by social scientists) certainly contributes to expanding horizons, including linguistic ones, even if the existence of such a civil society (to what extent, in what forms and how efficiently?) still invites inquiry. This attempt at the creation of a more or less unified European public sphere has the character and the precariousness of an experiment, while it is certainly conditioned by the European civil society discourses emanating from both above and below. As with every other social issue, social scientists themselves undoubtedly contribute to the wealth of the experiences and visions concerning the ongoing creation of the languages of civil society. Not only does this proliferation of discursive perspectives open up unprecedented possibilities for the future development and further democratisation of the nascent European polity, but it also invites further reflection, research and actions on the part of social scientists and civil society actors alike. It can only be hoped that the present chapter succeeds in showing the urgency with which this task announces itself and its importance for the future of democracy and pluralism in European civil society, while pointing at the same time towards the conceptual and theoretical developments that are necessary to adequately understand the complex and often indeterminate current state of affairs.

## Notes

1. They all assumed a rapid and fundamental political change: the reclaiming of national independence and the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.
2. István Bibó was a minister without portfolio in the government of Imre Nagy during the 1956 Revolution.
3. Besides single-issue movements, a whole set of colourful initatives oriented more directly towards actual social and political issues also came into existence. By the mid-1980s, discussion and study circles known as the 'Club Movement' and the 'Movement of University Colleges' emerged around the country. Communication and networking among these new groups occurred naturally and created a special spirit for civil society and dialogue. A strong feeling of solidarity and the new experience of increasing

freedom of expression released creative energies and blurred or hid the political, cultural and ideological differences between them.

4. See also Butterfield and Weigle 1992: 1–2: 'expanding independent activism increasingly contradicted the legitimacy and power base of the single ruling party, leading to the end of Communist rule'; and Arato and Cohen 1992: 64: 'groups, associations, and indeed movements outside the official institutions would have the primary task of pushing the reforms through'.

5. 'They obscure the impact of the Leninist regimes as repressive agents and negotiating partners in the reconstruction of the states. These regimes were not simply overcome by political protest led by independent groups but shaped the patterns of reconstruction independently of the efforts of the movements. They cannot explain the reconstruction of the state because they lack a model to explain the interaction between states and movements that created the political institutions of post-communist states … They misunderstand the strategic nature of the discourse of civil society and the conditional nature of public support for the civic movements' (Glenn 2001: 24).

6. This aligns with Krishan Kumar and Michael Walzer's analyses; see Kumar (1994: 127–30) and Walzer (1995: 170): 'Only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society: only a democratic civil society can sustain a democratic state.'

7. Staniszkis's evaluation stresses the continuity in East Central European societies after 1989 and sees the self-limiting strategy of social movements as rather defensive, and not suited to fundamental social change. She believes that 'from the perspective of the society the aspect of continuity is more strongly experienced than the sense of change, and this perception itself … may take on the features of a self-fulfilling prophecy, inducing social apathy and feelings of revolution for the elite only …' (Staniszkis 1991: 181).

8. The Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (HCA), established in 1990 in Prague, is the only international and institutional offspring of efforts to create civil networks across borders in the 1980s. It reveals a significant continuity in the protection of human rights and support for local grassroots initiatives.

9. The term 'European civil society' was introduced in the public debate in the late 1980s (see Kaldor 1991 and Muetzenfeldt and Smith 2002).

10. Elemér Hankiss observes: 'Millions of people have lost, or fear that they may lose, their traditional roles and positions in the sphere of production and distribution. They have lost their way in the labyrinths of social and industrial relationships, which are in the midst of a chaotic transformation. People no longer know what the rules of the new game are, what their duties and rights are, what they have to do for what, what is the cost and reward of what? There is no authority to tell them; there are no values to refer to' (cited in Smolar 1996: 34).

11. Chryssochoou's critique of European elites – in accordance with the opinions of numerous European social scientists – reaches the gist of the problem: 'The significance of tying the self-image of the elites to the dialectic between citizenship and demos-formation is that no common civic identity may come into being unless all major actors engaged in European governance see themselves as part of a polity-building exercise that has to evolve from the lower level upwards. Likewise, a transnational political space must be built up in the everyday networks of civic engagement, instead of being constructed from the top down' (Chrysochoou 2001: 17).

12. See, for example, the works of Jürgen Habermas, Jeremy Rifkin, Iván Vitányi, etc.

13. Magone regards this phenomenon so important that he introduces a new term: 'treatism'.

14. William Outhwaite, too, believes that the European integration process requires 'some sort of civil society dimension'. He tries to answer the question whether we can talk about an emerging European civil society by looking at European identities and

European institutions. 'A European identity might be seen as taking shape in opposition to, on the one hand, national or subnational identities of a traditional kind and, on the other, alternative supranational identities such as an Anglo American Atlantist identity …' (Outhwaite 2000: 135–36). Outhwaite understands the significance of the European experiment to establish transnational, European identity via postnational citizenship and constitutionalization for global citizenship and global governance. 'Europe is pioneering a mode of governance, this time transnational rather than national, which gives some practical embodiment to the current extension of democratic thinking into conceptions of cosmopolitan democracy' (ibid.: 135–6).