

# Democratic Consolidation in East Central Europa

## 1. Introduction

Eight years after the collapse of Communism democratic rules and institutions as well as market economies seem to be well established in most countries of East-Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic). Only Slovakia remains a borderline case as far as political rights and civil liberties are concerned. However, even the latter country has a pluralist political system, the opposition is vivid inside and outside parliament and market reforms are progressing with considerable economic success. To a certain extent the uncertainties in Slovak politics can be explained by the problems of nation building and ethnic conflicts. Furthermore one should not forget the experience taken from other, now firmly consolidated postauthoritarian democracies: Germany, Italy and Austria in the 50's or Spain in the 70's certainly were far from meeting all the requirements of functioning traditional democracies, e.g. the United States, Great Britain or Switzerland.

In this paper we are looking at the "subjective side" of democratic consolidation, the political culture of the population. Following Almond's (1987) division of system culture, process culture and policy culture, we shall concentrate on indicators for specific and diffuse political support (Easton 1975; 1979). The data basis is provided by representative mass surveys conducted by the GfK-group between 1990/91 and 1997 at regular intervals<sup>1</sup> (PKOM-project). A more elaborated discussion of the conceptional framework as well as results on other aspects of political culture have been published recently (Plasser, Ulram and Waldrauch 1997), an updated English version is forthcoming in 1998.

## 2. Satisfaction with Democracy

Although the indicator "satisfaction with democracy" is strongly influenced by evaluations of government performance, economic development etc. (Beetham, 1994 and 1996; Westle 1989) it can serve as a first hint for the progress of consolidation<sup>2</sup>: "There is no objective criterion by which to determine how widespread satisfaction must be before we can talk of a stable democracy. However it is implausible to assume that a democracy is in jeopardy if a majority of citizens are content with a political system" (Fuchs, Guidorossi and Svensson, 1995, p. 342).

PKOM's data series on satisfaction with democracy point to trend patterns and developments which are highly specific to each country, and do not present a united picture; crises of economic adaptation, the social costs of transformation, structural and functional deficiencies, political polarisation and conflict among rivalling elites all account for fluctuating levels of satisfaction in the individual countries. Temporary increases of dissatisfaction in some countries contrast with a general move toward consolidation in others. Discontinuity, rather than linearity, is the key characteristic of the dynamics of system satisfaction in reform countries.

Data on the Czech Republic indicate that levels of regime support there are higher and fluctuate less than in the other countries. The exception was in 1994, when temporary economic decline caused a rise of dissatisfaction with democracy. Stable and moderate contentment has been characteristic of Czech citizens' attitudes towards their country's new regime. In 1997 the economic downturn and instability within the governing coalition once again caused a decrease in Czech's satisfaction with democracy though it did not reach the nadir of 1994, the "crisis year". In contrast, the situation in the Slovak Republic appears much more volatile and unstable. Satisfaction with democracy rose in 1992, the year national independence was attained. The next year, however marked a phase of disillusionment and worries about the economic consequences of Czechoslovakia's "velvet divorce". In contrast to developments in the Czech Republic, the share of individuals satisfied with Slovak democracy in general and the political system in particular again increased in 1994, only to plummet in the following year to its lowest level since

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<sup>1</sup> PKOM-Project (Politischer Kulturwandel in Ost-Mitteleuropa) by the Austrian research group; Plasser and Ulram (1992a,b; 1993 a,b; 1994 a,b; 1996).

<sup>2</sup> For a further discussion, see (Gabriel 1994a, b; 1996), (Mishler and Rose, 1996), (Niedermayer and Westle, 1995).

1990. As 1995 drew to a close, 55 percent of Slovaks were explicitly dissatisfied with the political system, a phenomenon which was caused by crises of economic adaptation, but primarily domestic political strife, power struggles and elite conflicts. The data for 1997 again indicate a rise in satisfaction with democracy which is linked, in part, to a (relatively) prosperous economy. Trend patterns in Hungary tend to be stable but negative. In 1991, 39 percent of respondents said they were dissatisfied with democracy and the political system. This figure had risen to 57 percent by 1995 but declined a little to 52 percent in 1997. Poland unlike Hungary, saw a steady increase in political dissatisfaction among its citizens until 1994, but in the following year, moderate contentment for the first time exceeded disillusionment and criticism. Supported by encouraging growth rates of the Polish economy, the upward trend continued: in 1997, 79 percent of Polish respondents declared to be satisfied with democracy and the political system. Thus, general satisfaction with democracy in Poland exceeds levels found in the Czech Republic and in Austria (71 percent in 1997). The present data on satisfaction with democracy in the four countries surveyed indicate four divergent trend patterns. In the Czech Republic and in Poland, moderate satisfaction with democracy is the rule, even though trends and levels differ considerably. In Hungary and Slovakia, the share of politically dissatisfied individuals exceeds that of those who are basically content.

These data on trends and levels of satisfaction with democracy in postcommunist societies should not, however, be dramatised. The methodological problems which still plague the indicator detract from its political meaning as do comparisons of the data for East Central Europe with those, for a manifestly consolidated and highly stable democracy such as Austria. Thus, our present data show that in 1995, the level of satisfaction with democracy in the Czech Republic was higher than in Austria, where 1995 levels of satisfaction with democracy were approximately the same as 1997 levels in the Czech Republic and Poland. Only Hungary and the Slovak Republic scored significantly lower than Austria.

**Table 1:** Satisfaction with democracy and the political system (1990 - 1997)

<b>In general are you satisfied with democracy and the political system in ...(in percent)</b>					
<b>satisfied</b>	<b>CZ</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>PL</b>	<b>A</b>
1990	14	9			9
1991	4	2	2	5	
1992	4	1	3	1	
1993/1	6	2	1	2	5
1993/2	4	2			
1994	3	3	1	2	
1995	3	2	1	4	7
1997	5	2	0	5	5
<b>somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>CZ</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>PL</b>	<b>A</b>
1990	60	55			73
1991	72	56	56	62	
1992	69	68	55	54	
1993/1	73	61	33	35	71
1993/2	60	29			
1994	59	70	47	43	
1995	72	43	42	59	59
1997	68	51	45	74	66
<b>not satisfied</b>	<b>CZ</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>PL</b>	<b>A</b>
1990	19	28			17
1991	24	41	39	32	
1992	26	29	40	39	
1993/1	20	36	64	57	23
1993/2	35	67			29
1994	37	27	48	53	
1995	25	55	57	37	32
1997	27	47	52	19	29

Source: Politischer Kulturwandel (1990 - 1997)  
 Politischer Kulturwandel in Österreich (1990 - 1997).

PKOM data allow for a comparison of segments of the population in which political dissatisfaction and regime criticism are especially widespread. In 1995 in the four countries studied, above-average levels of dissatisfaction were found primarily among the following groups:

- Supporters of opposition parties, except in Poland, where government supporters were actually more unhappy with the state of their democracy than were those who sided with the opposition.
- (Former) members and cadres of (former) communist parties, who harbour distinctly critical views of the democratic regime. Hungary and the Slovak Republic present two notable exceptions, insofar as former Party members and non-members are equally dissatisfied.
- Workers and industrial laborers. Especially in Hungary and the Czech Republic, there are important differences in the attitudes of blue collar or white collar workers and civil servants.
- Persons with fundamentally antipluralist attitudes. Respondents stating a preference for one-party-systems are far more critical of democracy than individuals with faith in pluralism. Again, Slovakia is an exception: the data indicate an across-the-board, wholesale dissatisfaction or disillusionment with the current political situation.
- Persons whose predominant impression of current politics is that of an endless series of failures. With the exception of Poles, those who are thoroughly disgruntled with politics are also inclined to criticise the regime most harshly and/or express the greatest dissatisfaction with it.
- Economic pessimists, who tend (everywhere except in Hungary) to translate their predictions of doom into a relatively pronounced dissatisfaction with democracy and the political system.
- Individuals whose personal hopes for system change have been disappointed.
- Persons who are generally dissatisfied with their standard of living.

**Table 2:** Dissatisfaction with democracy by subgroups in four countries compared

percent of respondents who are <b>dissatisfied</b> with democracy and the political system in general	<b>CZ</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>PL</b>
government supporters	9	38	44	48
opposition supporters	38	68	62	32
former communist party members	41	52	53	50
non - members	21	55	57	37
employees / civil servants	20	58	49	34
blue collar workers	38	60	64	37
preference for one-party system	43	53	71	50
preference for multi-party system	23	55	51	32
viewing current politics as overall failure	47	72	68	43
economic pessimists	51	70	62	54
very disappointed by system change	74	77	76	58
dissatisfied with personal well-being	50	65	68	54

generally dissatisfied	25	55	57	37
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Source: "Politischer Kulturwandel" (1995)

### 3. Trust in Institutions

While the indicator "satisfaction with democracy" suffers from a blurred distinction between, in the terminology of Easton's seminal model, diffuse and specific support, trust in institutions is first and foremost an indicator of specific support (Listhaug and Wiberg, 1995). It differs widely even in consolidated Western democracies where different levels of trust reflect especially whether an institution's public profile is primarily corporate or predominantly centred around a leader or representative. (Fuchs, 1989; p.116; Klages, 1990 p.56); and whether it is seen as a competitive (hence contentious and partial) or "neutral" and "all-encompassing" body (Plasser and Ulram, 1993c, p. 137ff).

Trust in institutions, however, is also of importance for any analysis of diffuse system support:

- The overall level of institutional trust would seem to indicate the extent of diffuse political support. But a high level of trust in some institutions may also either compensate for low or declining confidence in others, or cushion and blunt the effect of their temporarily deficient credibility<sup>3</sup>.
- If the level of confidence in predominantly hierarchic and authoritarian institutions (e.g. armed forces) differs greatly from that in institutions of political control and/or pluralist politics, liberal-democratic consensus is likely to be shaky<sup>4</sup>.
- Different levels of confidence in non-competitive executive institutions on the one hand, and government and/or parliament on the other, indicate similarly divergent patterns of functional and/or attitudinal democratic consolidation<sup>5</sup>.
- No full assessment of levels of trust is possible unless we understand the dynamics and development of trust in each particular institution, as well as confidence in each institution relative to each other.

For these reasons, our analysis of trust in institutions in East Central Europe does not limit itself to political institutions in the narrower sense, i.e. to institutions which compete in elections and have, "directly and indirectly", acquired democratic legitimacy in the process. We also include executive institutions, as well as other associations which, taken together, constitute societal and political pluralism.

#### Political institutions and institutions of political pluralism/competition

Confidence in East Central European presidents depends to a considerable degree on his institutional role. If it is a strong and powerful executive position, as in Russia or, to a certain extent, in Poland, we find a lack of trust. If, conversely, the president is primarily a moral and balancing agent, if his executive position is weak and he remains above daily political bickering, as in the case in Hungary and the Czech Republic, trust is very high and matches West European standards<sup>6</sup>. Government and parliament generally enjoy much less public confidence, and political parties as well as old trade unions formerly associated with communist parties are seen as least trustworthy. The case is somewhat different in the Czech Republic, where explicit trust in the government and even in political parties exceeds not only that

<sup>3</sup> A current example of this is Italy, whose political crisis reached a climax at the beginning of this decade: Here, a profound and constantly growing lack of confidence in the political class and civil service contrasted notably with increased levels of confidence in (parts of) the judiciary (Nelken, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> On the importance of Rechtsstaat and fundamental principles of social and political pluralism for the consolidation of liberal democracies, see (Diamond, 1996) and (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the different levels of trust in parliament found in Switzerland and in the postauthoritarian democracies of (West) Germany and Austria (Plasser and Ulram, 1993c).

<sup>6</sup> Due to a prolonged struggle between the president and prime minister plus government and parliamentary majority, the Slovak Republic is an exception to this rule. Trust in the president declined dramatically between 1994 and 1995.

of its East Central European neighbours, but also that of some consolidated West European democracies<sup>7</sup>. This is the result not merely of government performance, but also of systematic institutional and organisational party-building across the political spectrum.

### **Institutions of societal pluralism**

Poles express a high level of confidence in the Catholic church (53 percent trust, 28 percent distrust, 19 percent neutral) based in large measure on its traditional role as, among other things, a seat and vehicle of national identity and its deep structural roots in the population. More than 90 percents of Poles claim to be devout Catholics, and nearly two out of three attend mass regularly. In other countries, the share of confessionally committed respondents is much smaller. Here, too, the Czech Republic marks the other extreme: it also shows the lowest level of trust in religious institutions. Environmentalist groups, examples of political figures with no party affiliation or salient ideological profile, enjoy high levels of trust which generally exceed those of competitive political organisations. The same holds true for the media, which are considered relatively untrustworthy only in Russia, the former GDR, and, more recently, also in the Czech Republic.

### **Executive and judiciary**

Trust in administrative institutions, as well as, in some cases, in courts of law and police forces - precisely those institutions which citizens most frequently encounter - is remarkably low. This is especially true of the Czech Republic, and to a lesser degree of Hungary and Slovakia. East Central Europeans are generally much more wary of the states' public representatives than Austrians, West Germans, and East Germans who are now emulating their compatriots' faith in the judiciary. " As a result of this latter development, the structures of trust in institutions are becoming more similar in East and West Germany. Beneficiaries of this trend have been first and foremost the executive and judiciary. By contrast, all institutions which represent interests, with the sole exception of trade unions, have suffered from declining trust" (Gabriel, 1996). Obviously, East Central Europeans' past experiences with officials and the judiciary play an important role in this, as do functional deficiencies, doubts concerning the present claim to impartiality, and the widespread conviction that bureaucracies have been left more or less unaffected by transition. As in Western Europe, trust in the executive and judiciary generally exceeds trust in competitive political institutions, but as a rule, East Central Europe lacks the "basic trust" in the web of state institutions which could, if it existed, absorb legitimacy crises of particular political institutions or compensate for their still rather fragile foundations<sup>8</sup>. The low levels of trust in East Central Europe appear less dramatic, however, when compared to those which prevail in Russia. Here, only the armed forces' public standing seems in any way balanced, while the bureaucracy, police and judiciary are subject to much more severe criticism than their East Central European counterparts. Among East Central Europeans there seems to be no consensus on whether or not to trust the armed forces. The two extremes are Poland, where nearly three quarters of respondents declare their confidence in the national army (17 percent expressing distrust), and the Czech republic, where distrust is predominant (27 percent trust, 46 percent distrust).

The patterns of the development and dynamics of institutional trust in East Central Europe show great divergence. Public confidence in Hungary's political institutions began to wane as early as 1989 and continued in this vein for at least three more years (Bruszt and Simon, 1991; Ilonszki and Kurtán, 1992). Following the parliamentary elections of 1993, executive institutions improved their standing somewhat, only to lose it again in 1997. Churches and the army continued to lose credibility. In Poland, the armed forces and police were discredited as "henchmen of the old guard" in the wake of the change of regime, while the church and new democratic institutions enjoyed a surge of popularity. Soon, however, the latter had all but used up their bonus of confidence: political and pluralist institutions were increasingly judged

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<sup>7</sup> Austrian figures on trust in government seem to be a negative exception within Western Europe. Only Italy has experienced a comparably endemic rejection of parties and criticism of the political class which has increased steadily for more than a decade. Cf. (Plasser and Ulram, 1993c), (Mannheimer, 1991), (Mannheimer and Sani, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Thus in both Germany and Austria, a public increasingly disgruntled with politicians and parties has, for some time now, also shown less and less confidence in political institutions. In the same period, public trust in the civil service, executive and judiciary has only been marginally affected.

by their often poor performance during the first years of transformation and consequently suffered a "punitive" withdrawal of trust. In turn, army and police forces re-emerged in the public consciousness as supposedly neutral agents of order and security. Even trade unions affiliated with the former Communist Party were considered more trustworthy than Solidarity in 1992 - a trend which, however, proved short-lived. Courts of law, the civil service sector and the media consistently improved their confidence ratings, as did the Catholic church and independent unions. Trust in the parliament and government is still low, but somewhat higher than in 1991.

**Table 3:** Comparison of trust in institutions

Percentage of those who gave grades of 5, 6 or 7 on a scale of 1 (no trust) to 7 (complete trust)	CZ 97	SK 97	H 97	PL 97	SLO 95	RUS 94	EG 95	WG 95	A 96
President	74	31	46	44	57	24	n.a	n.a	51
Government	39	25	17	27	43	18	36	41	30
Parliament	24	19	19	24	25	12	39	46	31
Political Parties	17	14	9	14	12	14	n.a	n.a	14
New independent trade unions	16	17	14	26	22	14	41	34	29
Old, formerly party-affiliated trade unions	8	13	10	14	30				
Church(es)	23	38	36	53	25	n.a	n.a	n.a	28
Environmentalist associations*)	(54 )	(54 )	(35 )	(41 )	(41 )	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
Media	32	36	39	40	51	30	30	33	21
Government authorities and civil service	27	26	27	30	38	18	n.a	n.a	46
Courts of law	30	35	34	39	43	25	45	50	60
Police	25	30	31	38	39	21	n.a	n.a	62
Army	27	55	37	63	45	50	44	46	44

\*) 1995

Source: Politischer Kulturwandel (1995 and 1997), Plasser and Ulram (1996:18) for Russia, Gabriel (1996) for East and West Germany; "Politischer Kulturwandel in Österreich" (1996).

Shifting grounds and volatility are salient characteristics of trust in Slovak institutions. With national independence attained, some symbolically charged institutions of the new nation state (armed forces, government) improved their reputation significantly, while the civil service, police and judiciary remained largely unaffected, and trust in political and / or pluralist institutions declined. Church(es) and the media still have not recovered from the loss of confidence suffered once the initial enthusiasm of transition had begun to fade. But the government's confidence bonus also diminished within a few months. Parties, finally, never seem to have reaped the benefits of independence euphoria at all. Today, nearly all Slovak

institutions command less trust than they did in 1991 with political and executive institutions, judiciary and the media primarily bearing the brunt of the general chagrin.

In contrast to this scenario, Czech confidence in institutions has remained stable over a long period. The only exceptions to this rule are the churches and the army, whose reliability is being questioned by an ever-increasing number of citizens. In 1997, however, against the backdrop of slowing economic growth, austerity measures and fierce conflict within the government, trust in institutions eroded for the first time. The media, government, political parties, trade unions and security forces have served as targets of discontent, while President Havel has managed to strengthen his position as a moral authority and stable force in the face of political strife. The salient role accorded to the president forms an obvious link with the democratic traditions of inter-war Czechoslovakia.

In all four countries, trade unions with no party affiliation are winning employees' loyalty at the expense of unions associated with communist successor parties. Finally - and despite all the differences - the Polish, Hungarian, Slovak and Czech Republics are all characterised by a low level of confidence in political parties, most of which rank below other institutions of political pluralism. There is an important difference between this democratic consolidation and that in Austria and Italy (see Ulram, 1990), as well as a loose analogy to post-Franco Spain (see Morlino, 1995): the role of political parties as agents of democratisation is relatively limited, while that of civil society is correspondingly strong.

**Table 4:** Development of institutional trust (1991 - 1997) - Czech Republic, Slovak Republic

Sums of grades 5, 6, 7 on a scale of 1=no trust to 7=high trust in percent	Czech Republic						Slovak Republic					
	91	92	93	94	95	97	91	92	93	94	95	97
President	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	68	66	74	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	61	37	31
Government	50	48	48	56	45	39	23	49	33	31	29	25
Parliament	32	19	25	32	25	24	34	24	20	22	24	19
Political Parties	22	20	20	24	24	17	20	20	12	15	15	14
New independent trade unions	35	24	21	20	26	12	39	31	21	22	29	17
Old, formerly party - affiliated trade unions				11	12	8				12	12	13
Churches	27	33	27	28	25	23	21	45	39	45	35	38
Media	42	40	41	>43	59	32	47	39	39	38	39	36
Government authorities and civil service	25	27	24	27	24	27	28	30	26	26	22	26
Law courts	39	38	32	40	34	30	39	37	29	33	32	35
Police	33	36	36	36	32	25	35	35	31	31	28	30
Army	52	42	40	39	33	27	31	52	44	47	44	55

**Continuation Table 4:** Hungary, Poland, East Germany



Sums of grades 5, 6, 7 on a scale of 1=no trust to 7=high trust in percent	Hungary					Poland					East Germany		
	91	92	94	95	97	91	92	94	95	97	91	93	95
President	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	55	46	n.a.	n.a.	19	29	44	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Government	26	16	21	19	17	26	22	25	23	27	36	25	36
Parliament	29	20	23	21	19	18	12	24	25	24		27	39
Political Parties	16	10	11	10	9	7	8	8	8	14	19	18	n.a.
New independent trade unions	20	16	23	23	14	29	9	14	20	26	39	40	41
Old, formerly party - affiliated trade unions	18	20	14	14	10	9	21	13	9	14			
Churches	46	42	39	34	36	50	41	36	47	53	23	25	n.a.
Media	40	34	30	45	39	30	35	34	44	40	n.a.	18	30
Government authorities and civil service	33	24	33	29	27	19	23	24	26	30	24	21	n.a.
Law courts	44	40	46	43	34	30	32	34	38	39	44	36	45
Police	43	34	45	44	31	30	46	41	38	38	37	36	n.a.
Army	47	40	44	40	37	53	63	59	54	63	35	39	44

Source: "Politischer Kulturwandel" (1991 - 1997); Gluchowski and Zelle (1992, 1993); Gabriell/(1996) for Eastern Germany.

#### 4. Democratic Orientations

Decisive for democratic consolidation on the attitudinal level is whether or not democratic rules are accepted as "the only game in town" by a majority of the population. "Attitudinally, a democratic regime is consolidated when a strong majority of public opinion, even in the midst of major economic problems and deep dissatisfaction with incumbents, holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life, and when support for antisystem alternatives is quite small or more or less isolated from prodemocratic forces" (Linz and Stepan, 1996: p. 16).

Diffuse support for democracy presupposes the acceptance of a multi - party system, since democracy without pluralist competition and parties would constitute the hybrid "authoritarian or delegative democracy" (Huntington, 1996: p. 9) prevalent in some Latin American and Asian states. Country-specific variations notwithstanding, a majority of the population in reform nations favour a multi-party system. According to data from 1997, 86 percent of respondents in the Czech Republic support pluralist party competition, as compared to 84 percent in Slovakia. Hungarians and Poles seem to embrace the pluralism of parties with markedly less enthusiasm; in both countries, roughly one fourth of respondents say they would prefer a single-party system to pluralist party competition. In Hungary and Poland, there is a strong correlation between preference for single-party or multi-party systems on the one hand, and education and professional training on the other. Among persons with only elementary education, 35 percent of respondents in these two countries prefer a single-party system. Lack of interest in politics, affiliation or closeness with communist party groupings and pronounced disappointment with the social and economic consequences of the transition in turn increase a weariness vis-à-vis pluralist party

competition. Periods of exacerbated domestic conflict, power struggles between competing elites or signs of economic downturn similarly trigger scattered resurgences of latent antipluralist attitudes (Plasser and Ulram, 1993a: 49f). But due to its inherent passivity, resignation and lethargy, this potentially antidemocratic force does not pose an immediate threat to consolidating democracies, however receptive to populist appeals it may seem. Juxtaposed with the sparse data on the consolidation periods of other postauthoritarian democracies, the findings on postcommunist democracies appear less dramatic. Thus in the early 1950s, 24 percent of West German respondents favoured a single-party system, but within a decade this rate fell to just 11 percent (Weil, 1993,p. 211). A similar development took place in the consolidation period of Austrian postwar democracy (Plasser and Ulram, 1992a,p. 46).

**Table 5:** Preference for single-party or multi-party system (1991 - 1997)

Do you think it is better for a country to have only one party, where there is a maximum of unity, or several parties, so that diverse views may be represented?				
In percent	<b>CZ</b>	<b>SK</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>PL</b>
Only one party				
19916	14	18	19	
1992	8	14	22	31
1993	8	16		
1994	6	20	22	23
1995	6	13	24	24
1997	5	16	24	29
Several Parties				
1991	93	84	75	74
1992	90	73	61	
1993	91	80		
1994	94	77	74	73
1995	95	87	72	73
1997	86	84	72	67
No answer				
1991	1	1	7	6
1992	2	5	5	8
1993	1	4		
1994	1	3	5	4
1995	0	0	4	3
1997	9	0	4	4

Source: "Politischer Kulturwandel" (1991 - 1997)

More stability is found regarding the core indicator on diffuse support for democracy, the choice between democracy on the one hand and authoritarian solutions on the other. In the Czech Republic, the share of respondents who prefer democracy to any dictatorial regime under any circumstances has exceeded 70 percent since 1990, with only slight variations. Worsening economic conditions and the exacerbated political conflicts associated with them caused diffuse support for democracy to fall from 74 percent in 1995 to a mere 68 percent in 1997. In the Slovak Republic, 68 percent of respondents explicitly favour democracy as the best form of government even though, at the same time, 57 percent are dissatisfied with the current realities of the political process. In Hungary, political dissatisfaction has increased steadily during the period examined, but has also had no effect on diffuse system support. Thus, 65 percent of Hungarians prefer democracy to any form of dictatorship under any circumstances. In contrast, the dramatic decline of system support which Poland experienced between 1991 and 1992 was directly related to the economic and domestic upheavals taking place at the time. But support has increased since 1994 and has exceeded the 1991 figures continuously since 1995.

The "hard" core of antidemocratic respondents who give preference to dictatorship over democracy amounts to roughly 11 percent in the Czech Republic. In Hungary, 17 percent expressed antidemocratic preferences in 1997, whereas 18 percent did so in both Poland and Slovakia. There has been very little fluctuation in this segment over the time period surveyed. Pronounced antidemocratic attitudes prevail, mainly among (former) members of the Communist party, but also among the unemployed and / or those who are pessimistic about their economic situation and prospects. Between 19 percent (Czech Republic) and 12 percent (Hungary) of interviewees react with indifference or despondency when asked to specify the form of government they most favour; such indifference is particularly widespread among persons who claim to have been sceptical of system change from the outset, and whose gloomy predictions of its consequences for their lives have apparently been borne out. Compared with relevant data from Western Europe, Southern Europe or postauthoritarian democracies of Latin America, however, these findings do not confirm the impression of weak support for democracy in the reform countries of East Central Europe. In contrast to fragile democratic support in the Russian Republic (50 percent) or in Brazil (41 percent), democracy seems by and large to have taken hold attitudinally in the four countries studied here.

**Table 6:** Support for democracy as a form of government (1990 - 1997)

On this sheet, you will read several opinions on democracy and dictatorship. Which do you agree with?				
In percent	CZ	SK	H	PL
Democracy is preferable to dictatorship under any circumstances.				
1990	72	63		
1991	77	67	69	60
1992	71	68	69	48
1993	72	60		
1994	75	68	73	64
1995	74	66	67	65
1997	68	68	65	65

In some cases, dictatorship may be preferable to democracy.				
1990	8	11		
1991	7	10	9	14
1992	10	11	8	16
1993	9	11		
1994	11	11	8	17
1995	9	12	11	15
1997	11	18	17	18
For people like me, it makes no difference whether we live in a democracy or dictatorship.				
1990	12	18		
1991	15	22	18	23
1992	18	19	21	30
1993	17	28		
1994	14	19	16	16
1995	16	22	17	17
1997	19	12	14	13

**Table 7:** Diffuse Legitimacy in international comparison

<b>Democracy is preferable to dictatorship under any circumstances</b>				
	<b>Affirmative answers in percent</b>			
1. Denmark	93	(1989)	92	(1992)
2. Austria	91	(1989)	90	(1996)
3. West Germany	82	(1989)	83	(1992)
4. Uruguay	n.a.		80	(1995)
5. Spain	68	(1989)	78	(1992)
6. Argentina	n.a.		77	(1995)
7. Great Britain	77	(1989)	76	(1992)
8. Italy	74	(1989)	73	(1992)
9. Czech Republic	72	(1990)	68	(1997)
10. Slovak Republic	63	(1991)	68	(1997)
11. Hungary	69	(1991)	65	(1997)
12. Poland	60	(1991)	65	(1997)

13. Chile	n.a.		52	(1995)
14. Russia	n.a.		50	(1994)
15. Brazil	n.a.		41	(1995)

Source: Fuchs, Guidorossi and Svensson (1995,p.349);  
 Politischer Kulturwandel (1991 - 1997):  
 Montero and Torcal (1990,p.126);  
 Morlino and Montero (1995,p. 238):  
 Linz and Stepan (1996,p.222);  
 Plasser, Ulram and Waldrauch (1997 and 1998)

## 5. Conclusion

An even deeper insight in the degree of democratic consolidation can be gained by using the typology of core democratic attitudes developed by Morlino and Montero (1995) as well as Linz and Stepan (1996) for the postauthoritarian democracies of Southern Europe and Latin America. These authors define confident democrats as individuals who prefer democracy as a form of government to dictatorship and who are convinced that democracy will be capable of solving the crucial difficulties of their country. Worried democrats basically harbour prodemocratic attitudes but have doubts concerning the problem-solving capacity of democratic systems of government. Alienated individuals remain fundamentally indifferent as to which type of government rules their country. Authoritarians, finally, would prefer a dictatorial regime to democracy under certain circumstances.

In East Central Europe, confident democrats constitute a relative majority of 50 percent in Poland, 48 percent in Slovakia and 43 percent in the Czech Republic and Hungary. Except in Poland, worried democrats make up the second largest group. Predictably, there is evidence of strong connection between latent authoritarian to antidemocratic attitudes on the one hand, and scepticism regarding democratic governments' problem solving capacity on the other. Linz and Stepan's conclusion that "preference for the authoritarian alternative is always higher among those not believing in the efficacy of democracy" (1996,p.226) has thus been confirmed for the case of East Central Europe.

The changes which occurred in basic democratic orientations remained within the bounds of the extensively defined democratic spectrum, or, in rare cases, turned democratic attitudes into alienated ones and vice versa (1992 in Poland, 1997 in the Czech Republic). Correspondingly the only notable increase in the number of antidemocrats (1997 in Hungary and the Slovak Republic) did not affect the strength of democratic orientations but was due to a reduction of alienated respondents. This is a remarkable finding which seems to touch on the core of democratic convictions in East Central Europe, given the exacerbated economic crisis and the many material and social hardships of economic transformation that a majority of the population has had to cope with for several years.

A differentiated analysis of confident democrats points to three factors critical for the spreading and intensifying of basic democratic orientations in East Central European countries. First, there is education: to an exceptional degree, individuals with higher education tend towards prodemocratic orientations. Given the developed system of education and training in East Central Europe, the cognitive resources of postcommunist societies lend decisive support to democracy. A second important factor are evaluations of the old regime: personal affinity or nostalgic feelings towards to the old regime tend to weaken support for democracy as a form of government. Finally, the initial expectations in regime change are a third important factor in democratisation: individuals who regard their hopes and expectations in political and economic system change as largely fulfilled are much more likely to become stout democrats than persons whose hopes have been disappointed, who have been disillusioned as a result or whose expectations have been primarily negative from the outset.

It is revealing to juxtapose the share of confident democrats in East Central Europe eight years after the beginning of democratisation to that in Latin America. In compiling the following table, percentages of confident democrats, according to the above typology, have been calculated on the basis of

representative data sets from postauthoritarian democracies of East Central Europe (PKOM project), South America and, as an example of a consolidated democracy, Austria.

**Table 8: Democratic Legitimacy and Efficacy in Postauthoritarian Democracies**

In percent *)	A	CZ	SK	H	PL	ROU	RA	RCH	BR
Confident Democrats	70	43	48	43	50	57	55	38	32
Worried Democrats	21	23	21	25	17	29	28	17	16
Alienated	4	21	12	14	13	6	6	28	27
Authoritarian	6	13	19	18	19	8	11	19	25

Source: Fessel - Gfk, Politische Kultur in Ost-Mitteleuropa (1997)

Fessel - Gfk, Politische Indikatoren: Österreich (1997)

Linz and Stepan (1996, p. 227-230); data for Latin America were called in 1995.

Note: percent of respondents answering both questions.

Comparing the levels of diffuse support for democracy in East Central Europe, Western Europe, Southern Europe and in postauthoritarian democracies of Latin America, we do not believe that the preference for democracy is weak in reform countries. Czech figures, for instance, indicate support levels which are only slightly lower than those of Britain or Italy. Figures for Hungary, the Slovak Republic and Poland are by and large identical with those in Spain in 1989. Compared to the fragility of support for democracy as a form of government in the Russian Republic (50 percent) or in Brazil (41 percent), the process of anchoring democracy attitudinally seems to have progressed remarkably far in the four countries studied.

This is even more apparent if the percentages of authoritarians in these countries are compared. In 1997, 13 percent of Czechs, 18 percent of Hungarians, and 19 percent of Slovaks and Poles belong in this category. In Russia, the corresponding figure was 25 percent in 1994. For Chile and Brazil, Linz and Stepan established the figures of 19 and 25 percent of authoritarians respectively, using a comparable tool of analysis (1996, p. 226f).

Eight years after the collapse of communist regimes and the beginning of unprecedented changes in political, economic and social structures (Brunner, 1996), democratic attitudes have taken hold, with country-specific variations, among a sizeable majority within each postcommunist society. On the other hand there are unmistakable signs of problems in the fields of policy culture and process culture. This holds especially true for Hungary and Slovakia where both the evaluation of the output side (e.g. economic development and social and individual justice) and the legitimacy of the current order are shaky.

Criticism of performance is not limited to the socio-economic realm. With regard to process culture, subjective awareness of political competence and assessment of the responsiveness of political elites is less developed in all countries, except the Czech Republic, than in established traditional and postauthoritarian democracies. As opposed to countries such as Austria or Italy, where disappointment with elites and below-average evaluation of subjective political competence are embedded in relatively stable institutional structures, the attitudinal consolidation on the meso-level of East Central European political system is much weaker. The low affective identification with political parties and the lack of integration into institutional networks are indicators of this, as are the weak intensity of political cleavages. Latent configurations of conflict are reflected in structures of political competition to a limited extent only; low levels of trust in both competition-oriented political institutions and executive or judicial institutions alike point in the same direction. In sum, low levels of political efficacy and responsiveness in conjunction

with an intermediary vacuum combine to give the impression of a process culture barely consolidated so far. Both sets of difficulties were predictable at the start of democratisation. Profound economic system change is invariably linked to high (economic and social) transformation costs; in addition, less wealthy societies - and no amount of differences in economic resilience among East Central European countries will conceal the fact that none of them are wealthy - have only limited means of cushioning social hardship. Against the backdrop of decades of an (partly totalitarian) authoritarian past, a pluralist and democratic process culture will have to evolve step by step<sup>9</sup>. At the beginning of consolidation in Southern Europe, temporary setbacks and deficits of integration were also felt (Morlino and Montero, 1995; Morlino, 1995). Given these obstacles, the process of consolidation has been relatively successful, considerable differences between countries notwithstanding. There has not been a reverberation of difficulties on the levels of policy and process onto the system level of political culture, not even in countries with a temporarily (Poland, Slovakia) or permanently (Hungary) negative evaluation of output and a pervasive intermediary vacuum. Without doubt, however, the creation and extension of pluralist institutions and the correction of deficiencies in social integration, besides increases in material output, will be of central importance in all further consolidation.

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<sup>9</sup> By comparison, the totalitarian period in Western Germany (1933 - 1945) and in Austria (1938 - 1945) was much shorter; the destruction of traditional subcultures and networks of civil society remained incomplete. The Franco-regime in Spain never tried a thorough political penetration of civil society. Furthermore, during the last years before the political transformation Spanish economic, societal and cultural institutions and attitudes had been approaching patterns found in democratic West European societies. Cf. (Linz, Stepan and Gunther, 1995, p.98 ff).

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