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## Article

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## DEFICIT OF CIVIL TRUST IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FAILURE OF DEMOCRACY

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### Abstract

*The aim of the article is to point out the phenomenon of democracy in the context of socio-political development with an emphasis on the issue of weakening the civil trust towards the political sphere. Citizens' mistrust is at risk of endangering the development of liberal democracy. The undesirable consequence is the low interest in public affairs and the sensitivity of political elites to needs, opinions and electoral moods. The ambition of the article is to point to the necessity and sensitivity of civic trust and support, as they are the guarantee of a functioning democratic political system.*

**Key words:** democracy, trust, mistrust, participation, the crisis of democracy

**JEL classification:** D72, H11, R5

### Introduction

The phenomenon of democracy has been consistently accompanying our society since 1989, when the political regime was transformed. Nevertheless, democracy is still an inexhaustible topic, which needs to be given ever greater attention to the ever-changing and emerging society.

Democracy should be seen as the most precious political culture. The problem of post-communist countries, that is, countries that have undergone the transformation process, is not the imperfection of legal norms and laws, but the absence of civic powers. Real democracy is not just governance and the political regime, but also the social system, the culture of interpersonal relations, and others.

Democracy does not have its established definition, even though this term is often used in the political sphere. There are several definitions that complement each other and thus form a comprehensive content concept and its individual dimensions. The most frequent definitions include definition in the sense of the rule of the people, or the opposite to the undemocratic establishment of the state. According to some experts, it is an unachievable condition of the state establishment, because democracy is only theoretical and at present, all democratic states that Dahl (1998) called "polyarchy," are trying to get closer to democracy. In general, the constant holds that there is no better form of state establishment. But the bottom line is the question, is it really so? If we choose from all possible forms of state institutions we know,

then the answer to the question is clearly positive. However, democracy must not be impeded in time, it must take steps forward and modify and modernize constantly.

### **Theoretical principles**

The quality of democracy can be viewed from several angles. However, it is not right to interpret this term in the similarity with the United States of America, that is, as "the best democracy of the world", as stated by some research agencies. However, it should be noted that according to Freedom House's reports, American citizens are free, which means they have the right to express their will, to form political parties, etc. On the other hand, according to statistical data, more than half of the eligible American voters do not participate in the presidential election, public expression is sponsored by private interest, thereby eliminating its free character. Therefore, it is necessary to raise the question of whether US citizens are in fact free or can only act freely. Democracy could be called "a system of positive rights that automatically does not generate the necessary conditions for the exercise of these rights" (Kulašik and Tichá, 2014, p. 23). Another definition is offered by Holden, who understands it as a political system in which the decisions are either positive or negative in the will of the people, who are entitled to decide on public policy matters. The development of democracy and its advancement is in the transitional phase and are very important for business environment (Strielkowski, 2012; Ehrenberger et al., 2015). The destructive Bush agenda has taken a step back towards a more diverse set of concepts. The increasing power of China and Russia provides a differentiated international framework for democratic development, which was introduced in the early 1990s when Central Europe underwent transformation processes. Nevertheless, the idea of the development of democracy is firmly settled in international politics, as its actors are various international organizations, non-governmental institutions, etc. As a limit to this concept comes normative and political force, which can be considered a paradox. Often, the specificity of democracy comes to a halt, because it is universally understood to be good and a cure for all developing countries that face problems. In this sense, democracy involves a number of absolutist practices, and to take a more restrained view of the high value of democracy would be much more productive.

One of the key elements of building and continuously advancing democracy is public trust in the political system. American democracy supporter, De Tocqueville, once said that civil associations that are one of the primary attributes of a democratic establishment cannot function without trust. Considering that trust is a basic prerequisite for the effective functioning of the social system, the fathers of political participation Verba and Nie and many present authors, Putman, Fukuyama, Beck, Gunnarson, and so on (Kováčová, 2014; Jankelová et al., 2017).

### **Results and discussion**

In order to define the notion of trust, it is necessary to realize that, given that it is examined from the point of view of various disciplines, it leads to inconsistency and, moreover, it is also used in common speech in different meanings (e.g. trust in people, in their senses, religion, etc.).

Considerations of trust have a long-standing tradition in sociology, and due to the expansion of explicit theories of trust in the second half of the 20th century, this concept can be considered a steady sociological concept. Putman considered that "civic associations help to form social capital - trust among citizens, belief in social values, which forms the basis of cooperation on common goals, many of which grow to the political sphere" (Plichtová, 2010,

p. 18). Sedláčková distinguishes two basic types of trust: (Sedláčková, 2012): i) Trust to people, close people, or those we do not know; ii) Trust to the political system, institutions.

It is the second type of trust that can be labeled as a starting point in finding a response to the question of the effective functioning of democracy. Two streams, such as, for example, culturalism and rationalism. According to culturalism, trust for democracy is desirable, positively determines citizen participation and supports the activities of political institutions. The low level of civic trust in the political system leads to a weakening of the core of democracy and the loss of motivation for participatory action. On the contrary, if the government has strong public support, it has an open path to fulfilling the commitments, and its civic support will grow in the case of their successful implementation and modification in outcomes (Bútorová, Gyárfášová, 2010). Governments, corruption, scandals, unfulfilled promises eliminate electoral favor and lead to the loss of confidence that contributes to the crisis of democracy (Kováčik, 2012).

Rationalists rely on the assumption that man is a rational being, and trust is a form of action that is intended to be self-serving. E.g. Under the influence of rational choice theory, Coleman considers trust in the sense of calculation. He distinguished so-called. trust givers and trust recipients. Actors always enter into relationships rationally for a profit and fulfillment of their own needs, but they always carry the same risk. The actor is confident if he inserts it into an unreliable recipient. In the case of recipient, it raises the question of whether it is important to maintain or break the trust. The answer lies in our own inherent interests, which are marked by calculation.

Barber, as a supporter of the rationalist stream, has also emphasized the risks that trust brings. Trust in political elites is not a product of civic ignorance, unwarranted or the reason is the frustration of real political failures, as public demands have not been met. If there is enough in the political system, there is nothing to prevent politicians from participating in the realization of goals, using their power effectively and avoiding the abuse of trust (Barber, 2003). Despite some differences in the perception of both currents, they agree that trust itself has an irreplaceable role in the political system. Community trust is rather dominated by personal relationships and rational in impersonal. A. de Tocqueville, Dahl, and Putman agree that human trust makes it easier for democratic processes and thus the development of political trust.

Sociologist Kenneth Newton defined democracy in the existence of three kinds of trust: (Kulašik, Tichá, 2014):

- primary democracy: strong relationships of trust exist only at the local level,
- secondary democracy: trust between specialized elites and non-elites, the essence lies in the division of economic and political power,
- abstract democracy: trust between citizens of different countries.

In relation to democracy, it is necessary to reflect on the question whether confidence is the consequence or the premise of an efficiently functioning democratic system. It should be noted that there is no one universal model of the substitute relationship between trust and democracy, but these concepts interact. In an ambitious way to ensure citizens' confidence in the democratic system, it is necessary to appeal to the government's responsibility and to prevent the abuse of power. The functioning system should therefore reflect on achieving the satisfaction and clearly defined goals of those who trust him.

Dahl (1998) argued that the constitution should be set to allow citizens to call their political representatives to account for their actions and decision in office (Dahl, 1998) after a certain period of time. The effectiveness of democracy is conditioned by favorable conditions, and one of them, according to Dahl's words, is the preservation of citizens' trust towards politicians.

Easton, in line with Dalton, pointed out the importance of evaluating political elites (representatives) in the system. Citizens' dissatisfaction with political representatives is a signal of the necessary change that can be achieved through the electoral mechanism in the coming period. The wall of alienation from the political sphere to the civilian is sensible in the case of citizens getting a feeling of losing interest in their needs by politicians.

Citizens' mistrust is at risk of endangering the development of liberal democracy. The undesirable consequence is the low interest and the degree of perception of political elites towards needs, opinions and electoral moods. As politicians are considered by citizens as untrustworthy, they realize that there is no longer any loss of trust. This opens up room for a non-transparent and irresponsible exercise of political power. Another negative point is the fact that permanent mistrust of citizens is losing control and influence of politicians. That is why a functioning democratic political system directly demands and considers the necessity of civic trust and support. (Štefáníková, 2015)

Trust as a precondition for democracy can be seen in connection with civic participation. The concept of participatory aspect has been the subject of studies by several experts for example Verba, Nie, Ehrenberg, Mansbridge, Dalton, and so on. According to Greenberg, participation is the process of giving freedom to individuals, by which they become healthy and integrated beings. Milbrath and Goel define participation in a wider context, under which they do not understand only the active functions aimed at influencing the electoral results, but also the ceremonial, supportive activities. "The Czech expert Vrábliková understands that participation is an activity of ordinary citizen who, by his activity, modifies political outcomes" (Kováčová, 2014, p. 9).

A prerequisite for active participation is the conviction of citizens about the meaningfulness of their actions and a certain degree of motivation, which in this case indicates the existence of trust. On the other hand, however, there is no need to underestimate the importance of non-critical trust towards political actors, which results from political illiteracy, and opens up the scope for abuse of power, while at the same time it leads to low efficiency of political institutions, corruption and clientelism.

The sign of a democratic establishment is also the presence of civil associations, movements and associations in the system that logically predict the cooperation of citizens and the interconnection of those who are part of them. Assumption of functional ties is also their level of mutual trust. Fukuyama has said in this regard that trust is an indispensable attribute and it acts as a lubricant that leads to improvement of efficiency for each group or organization.

If we are talking about trust as a key element of democracy, we need to focus on what to do on behalf of trust and how to maintain it. In the basic hypothesis it is related to the character of the personality, so we can say that it is born at birth and it transforms through the process of socialization. Individual's trust to some extent corresponds to his view of the world, which is determined by his own experience and values. Ulsner argued that optimism leads to building trust and promoting civic participation, because it is the belief that the primary role in the idea is to change the world, contribute to its improvement and focus on the future. Assumption to confidence building is a fore past positive experiences, and the primary factor is played by social networks in terms of family, friends, etc. (Putman, 1993).

In the case of building a system trust strategy, the main emphasis is placed on the credibility of the institutions. Their priority should be to eliminate as much as possible the disgust and frustration of citizens from the political situation with regard to building trust. Citizens must feel the sense and mission of institutions in society and their real contribution to solving problems. Otherwise, civil confidence is weakened. Trust belongs to the basic and essential elements of democracy. "The mistrust of the state leads to civic passivity, which can then benefit politicians who do not care about democracy as much as culture, that need only the

external framework of democracy to use it for their own benefit or for the benefit of their close economic interests or interest groups." (Kulašik, Tichá, 2014, p.71).

Creating trust is helped by the favorable conditions of democracy mentioned by R. Dahl. In decision-making processes, all citizens have the right to express their opinion, ask questions, everyone has the same chance to vote, right to be heard, the right to obtain information, and all adults have the right to participate in the democratic process, because they all have the same laws (Kováčová, 2014).

Kováčová, S. stresses that "mistrust interactions undermine democratic governance and are a prerequisite for the birth of a malfunctioning system. Simply put, if the state is not competent to act in the interests of citizens, it cannot expect their full confidence. This problem may appear to be key in the transformation of post-communist countries, where the falling confidence in political institutions represents the primary barrier to democratic transformation" (Kováčová, S., 2011, p.53). The practice of these countries proves that it is much easier to build democratic institutions, than to achieve their effective functioning according to established democratic rules. Citizens' mistrust is at risk of endangering the development of liberal democracy. The undesirable consequence is the low interest and the degree of perception of political elites towards needs, opinions and electoral moods. As politicians are seen by citizens as untrustworthy, they realize that there is no longer any loss of trust. This opens up room for a non-transparent and irresponsible exercise of political power. Another negative point is the fact that permanent mistrust the citizens are losing control and influence on politicians. That is why a functioning democratic political system directly demands and considers the necessity of civic trust and support.

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