

Restarting from scratch

Humanist initiatives as an option for strengthening
civil society in the new member states of the
European Union

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Introduction

Inclusion and exclusion are direct results of how the concepts of human dignity, equality and justice are valued. This held true for the European Union (EU) as it was before the enlargement, but it is even more topical now that ten new countries have joined the Union in May this year (2004) followed by another four countries in 2007. Therefore a major process of reorientation on the question how to construct stable - and for most citizens comfortable - societies is going on both in Western, and Central and Eastern Europe.

Since the fall of the German Wall (and also before this event in a.o. the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe - OSCE) it has been essential for the future of Europe to consider carefully in what way the authorities and the individual citizens can make the effort to include all citizens in a new European Union. This regards both governmental changes, and non-governmental initiatives intended to contribute to a strong 'civil society'.

Generally the way states are organized on a governmental level, is the main point of focus when the organization of societies is considered. At this moment most of the subsidies from the European Union go to state-related organizations. But a-part from that, there is also a non-governmental part of society. This part is now becoming more and more prominent, because the non-governmental level of society, the so-called civil society, turns out to be almost as important as the official governmental level. Especially when considered from the point of view of the individual perception of one's freedom and opportunities to make an active use of one's citizenship. The rebuilding of civil societies in Central and Eastern Europe which had been practically absent for decades till 1989, will need our special attention.

All kinds of ideas from different disciplines can contribute to the orientation of how to strengthen civil society. This thesis is in so far written from a normative perspective, that

it explicitly tries to explore the possibilities that humanism (as a shared cultural-historical phenomenon in Western, Central and Eastern Europe) could offer on this subject.

In this thesis research will be done on the question whether - and if so how - humanist initiatives might be an option for strengthening civil society in the new member states. This is done from the conviction that the existence of civil society is a must for the inclusion of the Central and Eastern European member states into the enlarged European Union.

In Chapter One, the research question will be introduced. Most important the term 'civil society' will be explained. Different theoretical aspects of the term will be explored.

In Chapter Two it will be made clear, why and how the connection is made between the need for the existence of civil society on the one hand, and the integration of Europe on the other. The current state of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe and possible related problems will be listed.

Chapter Three investigates the reasons why humanism might or might not be an option in civil society rebuilding. Core elements of humanism are discussed that might be relevant to strengthening civil society. Both theoretical and practical humanism are examined in this regard.

In Chapter Four, an answer is given to the question on how these selected topics from humanist philosophy (of life) could be relevant in the strengthening of civil society when put into practice. Humanism in Poland was chosen as a case study.

In the conclusion it is evaluated to which extent humanism can contribute as a source of inspiration to rebuild and strengthen civil society.

Chapter one

Theoretical concepts of civil society

1.1. Introduction

As suggested in the introduction humanistics (the scientific study of all forms of humanism) and humanism as a philosophy of life might help strengthening or even rebuilding civil society. The research question for this thesis is therefore: **How can humanism as a philosophy of life in theory, and humanist initiatives in practices, play a part in strengthening civil society in the new Central and Eastern European member states of the European Union?** We think of The Czech Republic, The Slovak Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, which were formerly under communist rule. The research question is not applicable to Malta and Cyprus, since the two countries do not fit into the subject of this thesis geographically.

First of all we have to investigate the term 'civil society'. In this chapter we will try to sort out its theoretical aspects. Then Chapter Two deals with the next question which is: "Why is this concept of civil society important for this new, enlarged European Union in which the present and the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic region will have to work their way out together?"

To indicate the new Central and Eastern European member states we will use the standard abbreviation CEE (Central and Eastern Europe) which also includes the Baltic states.¹

One must realize of course that in all new member states the current situation is different. As it was also very different during the communist era.² These differences are mainly historically and culturally rooted. It is e.g. of utter importance whether former communist countries were once part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, such as Hungary, Slovenia, part of Romania, parts of Czechoslovakia and parts of Croatia and even

¹ Leslie Holmes and Philomena Murray, ed., *Citizenship and identity in Europe* (Hants/Vermont 1999) 1.

² Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the twenty-first century* (London 1994) 251.

Bulgaria, or that a country belonged to the Prussian empire such as Poland and parts of the Baltics. Or, which makes differences even larger since it means even less experience with civil society; to none of them.

Only when common problems are dealt with in this thesis the term CEE will be used. Otherwise, specific countries will be indicated when situations on the national level are discussed.

1.2. What is meant by 'civil society'?

Originally the term 'civil society' was invented by Aristotle. He called it a 'koinonia politike'. He introduced the idea of a 'community' as: 'a collection of human beings united within a legitimate political order'. In its original sense, it allowed no distinction between state and society, or between the political and what we now call the civil society.³ Later in classical antiquity Cicero introduced the term 'civilis societas'. He meant by this: the state (civitas) as a partnership-in-law for the inhabitants of that state (societas) with equality of legal status. So in ancient use, *civilis societas* referred to the condition of living in a civilized political community with a legal code.⁴ It became a generic term for a secular legal and political order, as distinct from a primitive order, or an ecclesiastical society.⁵

Also John Locke (1632-1704), who can be regarded as the inventor of the literal, English term of 'civil society', sees this 'civil society' as opposed to 'the state of nature'. For him this state of nature was a state of natural anarchy that had proved intolerable. For where every man was a law unto himself, life could not be orderly, peaceful and predictable. The weak had no protection from the strong, and the strong in their turn were in perpetual fear of their rivals. Thus people had joined together and formed political societies. They had entrusted sovereigns or civil rulers with power over them. 'Entrusted' is a key-word, for Locke did not believe that the authority of the civil ruler was ever absolute, it was entrusted for him and therefore revocable.⁶ For him i.e. Locke the political and civil society were taken to be identical and this contrasted with paternal authority and the state of nature. A state of nature which according to the political

³ Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, ed., *Civil society. History and possibilities* (Cambridge 2001) 17.

⁴ Michael Walzer, ed., *Toward a global civil society* (second edition; Oxford 1998) 41.

⁵ Kaviraj and Khilnani, ed., *Civil society. History and possibilities*, 40.

⁶ David Thomson, ed., *Political ideas* (London 1996) 74-83.

scientist John Dunn can return whenever civil society is absent. In his view this is what happened e.g. during the wars in former Yugoslavia.⁷

Where Locke introduced the term itself, Hegel brings in the contemporary notion of the term. He is (seen as) a pivotal figure in the discussion on how to define 'civil society' by his introduction of the distinction between the 'state' and the 'civil society'. The importance of Hegel's ideas lies in the fact that he no longer used the term civil society as a synonym for political society (as Locke a.o. still did), but that he defined it on the one hand as distinct from the family, and on the other (and most crucially) from the state.⁸ According to him civil society is a new concept (space) that had been existing in Europe since the year 1200, especially in the guilds, but was revived again with the nineteenth-century traditions of civil associations. Subjective freedom, higher spheres of art, religion and philosophy, which by nature transcend the boundaries of the state could thrive in this atmosphere.⁹ This introduction to the term seems elaborate, but it is important in tracing back different aspects of the currently used term.

We return to more recent times. The contemporary term civil society came up in the late 70s to interpret dissident movements in CEE.¹⁰ By these were meant such movements as *Solidarity* in Poland, *Civic Forum* in Czechoslovakia, and *Charta '77*.¹¹ All of these movements strived for what they called a more 'humanist' society.¹² The term civil society was now used to indicate every power which opposed the state. Thus it became the name for a lot of different concepts which had to do with initiatives to transform the former Eastern bloc into democracies. So how to define the 'civil society' today?

Civil society has by its popularity nowadays almost become what one would call in philosophical terms a 'family concept', a term introduced by Wittgenstein.¹³ This means that a concept has a great deal of different aspects, which all refer to same term and which are unmistakably interrelated, but not necessarily similar. Therefore it has become impossible to formulate a definition that covers all aspects of all theories that are currently describing this theme. Because of this impossibility, I tried to find the common factor in all these discussion instead of being inclusive. This leads to the definition of

⁷ See John Dunn in: Kaviraj, ed., *Civil society*, 57.

⁸ M. Riedel in: Kaviraj, ed., *Civil society*, 23.

⁹ A. Wood, ed., *G.W.F. Hegel: elements of the philosophy of right* (Cambridge 1991) 220.

¹⁰ Paul Dekker, ed., *Civil society. Verkenningen van een perspectief op vrijwilligerswerk* (The Hague 1994) 14.

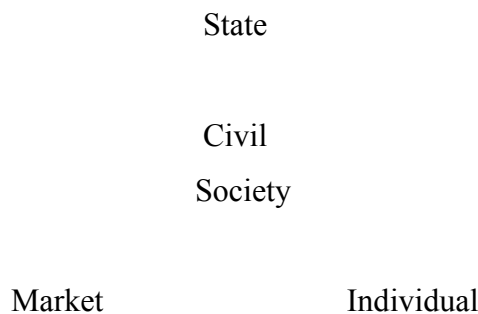
¹¹ George Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe* (second edition; Oxford 1994) 23.

¹² See for more information Chapter Three, paragraph 3.2. Humanism and civil society, page 27.

¹³ For more information on this concept, see: Ilja Maso and Adri Smaling, *Kwalitatief onderzoek: praktijk en theorie* (Amsterdam 1998) 129-130.

civil society as: the conceptual space distinct from, and between, the state, the individual and the market. So everything from a football club to a political party a debating club or an organization of housewives. Visually it can be thus depicted ¹⁴:

Figure 1: the space of civil society



At the moment the most relevant views on civil society in philosophy and sociology come from the communitarian, the liberal, and the radical-democratic think-tanks in the Western world. Typical representatives of those movements and leading figures formulating ideas on civil society are respectively: Michael Walzer, Ralf Dahrendorf, and Jürgen Habermas. ¹⁵ These three represent all major current ideas on civil society. Apart from the overall definition given above, ideas from each of these thoughts on civil society will be mentioned. In such a way of course that is indicated which concepts or ideas come from whom.

My selective approach is legitimized by the fact that - as mentioned in the introduction - this thesis is written from a normative approach in the sense that it does research into the field of philosophy of life, instead of into the field of a purely sociological, political or philosophical topic. Since every normative component in research always infiltrates the descriptive part of the research also, it must be clear that the selection of ideas from the above-mentioned authors is sometimes intrinsically

¹⁴ See also for a more detailed visual scheme of this: Paul Dekker, *De oplossing van de civil society. Over vrijwillige associaties in tijden van vervagende grenzen* (The Hague 2002) 14.

¹⁵ Dekker, ed., *Civil society*, 52-66.

normative. Now let us look more closely into what an (intrinsically slightly normatively described) civil society looks like.

1.3. Three poles: state, individual, and market

Before we start to explore the three poles which mark the area of civil society, one other remark on how to look at civil society should be made. The following angle from which civil society can be looked at, comes from Adriaansens and Zijdeveld.¹⁶

According to them, civil society can be regarded at the same time as a so-called 'associative' in-between structure and a 'bureaucratic' in-between structure. This means that on the one hand there is an aspect of civil society that is based on equality amongst citizens, informality, and individual action. In this variety citizens believe it is important for them to actively participate in society: their attitude - in their view to them - does make an immediate difference for the well-being of the community; on the other hand there is the part of civil society that is organized top-down. These last aspects of civil society are organized by elites for their grassroots support, and are typified by inequality of power and rigid structures.¹⁷ The unevenness of this kind of civil society relations bears similarities with the relation between the state and its citizens in the modern welfare state.¹⁸ For this thesis both ways of looking at civil society are important, and they will be used simultaneously. We will also refer to this in paragraph 1.4. which deals with the connection between citizenship and civil society.

Although civil society is defined in the previous paragraph as the space between and apart from either the state, the individual, or the market, one can imagine that these three poles do play an important role in facilitating civil society.¹⁹

First of all there is the level of the state. At this level the most important condition for the existence of a healthy civil society is that the regime tolerates and encourages individual initiative and that there is a state of law in which each individual is treated as equal.²⁰ We recognize the classical idea of a state of law as crucial for civil society. The

¹⁶ It must be noted that Adriaansens and Zijdeveld come from a quite conservative, confessional background.

¹⁷ As was the case with the Dutch so-called 'denominationalism', a compartmentalization of society along socio-political lines called 'pillars'. For more information about this system, see: A. Lijphart in: Jan-Erik Lane and Svante O. Ersson, Politics and society in Western Europe (third edition; London 1994) 30-35, and 270-272.

¹⁸ H.P.M. Adriaansens and A.C. Zijdeveld, Vrijwillig initiatief en de verzorgingsstaat (Deventer 1981) 99.

¹⁹ Charles W. Kegley jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, World politics. Trends and transformation (sixth edition; New York 1997) 11.

²⁰ Dekker, ed., Civil society, 13.

democratic state is most favourable for civil society. In a democracy, state and civil society are mutually dependent. Which does not mean it is the only possible state-form in which civil society can thrive. Therefore a certain trust from the state in the capacities of its citizens, is necessary.

Communist regimes however have the characteristic, that they monopolize many atmospheres. This makes them very unsuitable for the facilitating of a civil society, as every individual initiative is suppressed, and this potential is the very characteristic of a civil society. In the next chapter more will be said on the specific problems concerning the absence of civil society in post-communist states.

The second pole is the market. Civil society is inextricably linked to the productive base of a capitalist society.^{21, 22} Former Eastern bloc countries lacked this base, since private property was very limited and economic initiative came only from the state. As a precondition for civil society, the market pole is best served by a free-market system, combined with state funding of public facilities in the form of a welfare system, and subsidies for non-profit initiatives like Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Still, several varieties of this type of economic system will do for civil society.²³

The third pole is that of the individual. The way in which the individual contributes to the civil society is largely dependent on his notion of what is called 'citizenship'. This word has different meanings several of which will be discussed when we look at humanist thoughts on civil society in Chapter Three, and also - concerning the more theoretical details - in the next paragraph. The most important aspect of a civil society can be described in Alexis de Tocqueville's remark: "citizenship is the condition which makes that people are able to overcome their personal needs and desires, and are willing to put effort into the general cause". De Tocqueville also noticed that the more the state covers certain roles for its citizens, the less they will develop skills to realize their own initiatives.²⁴

So how should the civil society ideally relate to these above mentioned three poles? For Dahrendorf, the most important characteristic of a healthy civil society, is that in that

²¹ Kaviraj, ed., *Civil society*, 15.

²² How this came about is mentioned in paragraph 1.5. 'The function of civil society' by means of the ideas around *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. See note 45 on B.S. Turner.

²³ Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe*, 290.

²⁴ Patrick Stouthuysen, ed., *Alexis de Tocqueville; over de democratie in Amerika; tweede boek* (Leuven 1993) 48-51.

space, none of the three poles that serve as preconditions, exercise whatever monopoly on civil society. Therefore for example the army with its violence-monopoly and universities (except when they are privately funded) do not count as part of the civil society. But the numerous private projects people organize among themselves do count. Autonomy therefore is one of the main characteristics of civil society projects that are started up by citizens.²⁵ By which is meant the possibility for people to develop themselves optimally, within the state of law of course.²⁶

Then relations *among* people in society play a pivotal role in whether and how civil society is organized. Core notions necessary for building a strong civil society are: tolerance of each others ideas and the notion of solidarity (of belonging to the same community), which in its turn can lead to responsibility for the well-being of the whole community and not only of one's own.²⁷ About this last notion of responsibility, it has to be remarked that in modern societies this is thought to be a state duty as well, which has led to the development of the so-called welfare state. There is much discussion on this topic going on at the moment in both Western and CE Europe. At present, the system is putting too much of a financial burden on the economies of all Western European countries, because of the aging population. For CEE the issue is how to reform the former communist systems financially into welfare states in a realistic way.

Both are huge problems, that become even more prominent at the enlargement of the EU, since then ideally all 'welfare state' systems should be able to be combined. As this discussion has too large a scope for this thesis, we will use the term responsibility to indicate responsibility (e.g. in the form of voluntary welfare work) for those areas where the state is absent for whatever which reason.²⁸

1.4. The connection between civil society and citizenship

In the previous paragraph the term citizenship was mentioned to describe the condition which enables individual persons to contribute to civil society. Thus it was used to indicate the individual pole of the triangle in-between which civil society exists. In humanist thinking this pole of the individual will turn out to be very important - since it is a movement very preoccupied with individual responsibility. Therefore it needs extra

²⁵ Ralf Dahrendorf quoted in: Dekker, ed., Civil society, 15.

²⁶ Ralf Dahrendorf, The modern social conflict, (New York 1988) 14.

²⁷ Dahrendorf in: Dekker, ed., Civil society, 15.

²⁸ For more information about this topic see Van Houten in: P.B. Cliteur and D.J. van Houten, ed., Humanisme. Theorie en praktijk (Utrecht 1993) 145-146.

attention. But there is another reason why this term needs more clarification. Citizenship is also frequently used in the current (and past) discussions on the future of the welfare state. And although it is not the main topic of this thesis, it is a subject that is often referred to and that is relevant to an adequate description of civil society.

Moreover, there is another link with the academic debate about the welfare state and civil society. From the forties onwards, it has been the sociologists who tried to tackle problems related to the welfare state, and who brought forward interesting ideas on the two ways to look at civil society. This was earlier referred to in the context of Adriaansens and Zijderveld in the previous paragraph. There seems to be an interesting parallel between the two varieties mentioned by them how to look at civil society, and the debate of sociologists about citizenship. The debate I refer to in this regard, is the existing dichotomy between looking at citizenship from a perspective of rights or, from a perspective of obligations (or a combination of the two).

Starting with the British sociologist T.H. Marshall, the link was made between citizenship and the welfare state. He defined citizenship as: "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed".²⁹ To Marshall this concept of citizenship consists of a tripartite construction of civil, political and social rights. Which had their origins in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.³⁰ Further on, he defines the essence of citizenship as "being fully accepted as a citizen".³¹ Although the history of the term citizenship as described by him is very interesting in itself, what matters most for our story are the key elements in his famous essay 'Citizenship and social class' (1950). These are: membership of a community, the rights and obligations that flow from that membership, and equality.

In Marshall's view the state had the duty to safeguard the rights of citizenship - which he equated with freedom³² - for its citizens. Thus he is a representative of the group of scholars who emphasized the importance of *rights* concerning citizenship. All of the three mentioned types of citizenship rights were as important. This could logically be deduced from the fact that someone has to be educated (a social right), in order e.g. to make use of his (political) right to participate in elections.³³ The three categories are

²⁹ T.H. Marshall and Tom Bottomore, Citizenship and social class (second edition; London 1996) 18.

³⁰ Marshall, Citizenship and social class, 10.

³¹ *Ibidem*, 55.

³² *Ibidem*, 12.

³³ *Ibidem*, 8.

mutually dependent. It is clear that Marshall envisaged a great role for the state in the whole process of realization of citizenship.³⁴ This corresponds with the top-down 'bureaucratic' approach that Adriaansens and Zijderveld described in their book: 'Voluntary initiative and the welfare state'.³⁵

Later, especially from the feminist and other social movements, new ideas how to look at citizenship emerged. These movements focused on citizenship as a process and not just as an outcome. In their philosophy not only rights, but also *obligations* mattered, and most important, the synthesis between rights and obligations. The process to gain new rights and to give substance to existing ones, this struggle in itself was seen as being as important as the substance of those particular rights, as they were always started up by people from somehow marginalized groups.

It is by these social movements that the two varieties of how to look at citizenship in the 'associative' and the 'bureaucratic' way, were combined. From this new perspective citizens appear on the stage of both theory and practice not simply as the passive holders of rights. They actively engage in political and welfare institutions, both as individuals and in groups. One of the defenders of this twofold way of looking at citizenship is the feminist sociologist Lister. She introduced the bottom-up notion of citizenship. She finds proof for this in the numerous action groups of e.g. ecological or, feminist nature, which succeeded in making themselves heard.³⁶ This opinion is shared by the sociologist Turner, whom I would also like to mention in this context, who thinks that the accomplishments emancipationwise of these movements is partly due to their top-down granted rights, and partly to their own bottom-up initiatives.³⁷

Citizenship is thus conceptualised both as a *status*, carrying a wide range of rights, and as a *practice*, involving both obligations and political participation.³⁸ As a practice and in the relationship between that practice and rights, citizenship can be understood as a dynamic process.³⁹ Later in this thesis, both aspects of the top-down and the bottom-up approach will be taken into account.

Some key-notes of civil society mentioned in earlier paragraphs, are also mentioned by Lister as being essential for citizenship. The notion of autonomy, of the ability to determine the conditions of one's life and to pursue one's life projects, is the

³⁴ Ibidem, 17-21.

³⁵ Adriaansens and A.C. Zijderveld, Vrijwillig initiatief, 99 and further.

³⁶ Ruth Lister, Citizenship. Feminist perspectives (London 1997) 36.

³⁷ Turner, B.S., For Weber. Essays on the sociology of faith (second edition; London 1996) 362.

³⁸ Lister, Citizenship, 41.

³⁹ Ibidem.

crux to full citizenship.⁴⁰ Also responsibility and solidarity are concepts coinciding with civil society's key-notions. According to the supporters of this perspective this favours a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches.⁴¹

There is not only the passive enjoyment of rights bestowed upon the individual by paternalistic authority of the state, but also an active one. Habermas is one of the scholars that wrote about that.⁴² He combines this view with his vision on European integration, which will be discussed in the next chapter. First let us have a look at the actual *function* of civil society.

1.5. The function of civil society

We have seen the form and the key-notes of civil society, but what is actually the function of civil society? According to Habermas, the most important function of civil society is: the democratic containment of the living environment, to protect it from the outer attacks of the system with its everywhere penetrating imperatives. Civil society has - since it is not institutionalised - a limited political and public role, which at the same time is its power. For when it would become really political it would automatically become institutionalised, and hence part of the system.⁴³ Public and political opinion formed in civil society, can have *influence* on the public debate (which in itself is part of civil society) but they can't gain political *power*. This is a delicate balance, especially when talking about political parties, but keeping this demarcation line in mind is essential to keep civil society from being infiltrated by the system. This line is necessary to keep civil society as much as possible a place where communication can take place without all different kinds of power aspects playing a role - whether between people or between people and other actors, like the state.⁴⁴

In this context it must be noted that the importance of civil society as the cradle for all kinds of voluntary associations and in that sense as the basis for the ability for people to develop themselves freely, is also influenced by the sociological debate on the contrast between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. According to this debate the traditional, authentic communities disappeared during the Industrial Revolution and the therewith

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 16.

⁴¹ Ibidem, 21-23.

⁴² J. Habermas, 'Citizenship and national identity: some reflections on the future of Europe', Praxis International (Volume 12, April 1992) 1-19, 11.

⁴³ J. Habermas, De nieuwe overzichtelijkheid en andere opstellen (Meppel/Amsterdam 1989) 52.

⁴⁴ J. Habermas quoted in: Dekker, ed., Civil society, 82.

connected capitalism in Western Europe. Since people suffered from this loss of organic structures, they needed to replace these old communities by artificial associations.⁴⁵ Form and function of civil society have therefore radically changed since the Industrial Revolution, but in a sense that made civil society even more important for the self-realization of man.

Civil society's main value therefore is, that it is the only place in society where people can acquire political competence, can learn to win and lose, can learn to compromise, make friends and allies, and explore opposing ideas. It is here that people are offered to develop these so called civic skills.⁴⁶ As such it is clear that for a democratic regime that needs capable citizens to lead the country, a strong civil society is of vital importance.⁴⁷

We now have determined the nature and function of civil society. In Chapter Three the reasons why humanism might play a part in strengthening civil society are investigated, and if so how. However the state of civil society in CEE needs clarification first. It must be examined what kind of difficulties civil society faces in these countries at the moment. This investigation, and the question how the situation in CEE regarding civil society relates to the integration of the new member states into the EU, will be the subject matter of Chapter Two.

⁴⁵ B.S. Turner, ed., The Blackwell companion to social theory (Oxford 1996) 3-4.

⁴⁶ Dekker, De oplossing van de civil society, 34.

⁴⁷ Walzer, ed., Toward a global civil society, 81.

Chapter two

Civil society as a condition for inclusion of new member states into the European Union

2.1. Introduction

After the exploration of the different theoretical concepts in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that civil society can be defined as: the conceptual space distinct from, and between, the state, the individual and the market.

The most important characteristic of a healthy civil society is that none of the three poles that serve as preconditions exercise whatever monopoly within that space. It has been mentioned in paragraph 1.3. that in the communist society this situation was unheard of.

Then we found some key-notes for a stable civil society, being: autonomy, solidarity and responsibility. Now how does the situation in CEE meets these standards? In this chapter we will first consider this question, and then investigate what is the connection between civil society in CEE and the integration of those countries into the EU.

2.2. The situation of civil society in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, major problems on all above mentioned aspects existed in CEE. The state under communism had been omnipresent, therefore exercising monopolies over practically all spheres of life. For this reason communist regimes sought to encompass all spheres of social activity.⁴⁸ Not an optimal condition for the substantial amount of individual autonomy that is needed for the existence of civil society. On the contrary: communist regimes paralysed all private initiatives, and destroyed all private

⁴⁸ Walzer, ed., Toward a global civil society, 31.

abilities of citizens to cope by over-regulation and legal insecurity, which led to the exclusion of everybody who did not adjust to the system.⁴⁹ Autonomy of people was highly discouraged.⁵⁰ Social homogeneity on the contrary, was promoted in every possible way.⁵¹

The absence of private property and any form of market mechanism in the economies of communist states, is all too known. This is a large problem since there was a complete lack of know-how to organize association financially.⁵² People who had not been part of the *nomenklatura*, were e.g. not trained in administrative jobs.⁵³

Key-notes of civil society such as autonomy, solidarity and responsibility were therefore no longer self-evident in the states of CEE after the communist regimes had fallen. The logic of free interpersonal relations, and the therewith connected opportunities, had completely vanished. This in turn led to the loss of responsibility.⁵⁴

All this resulted in the absence of civil society in its practical form. Since there had been no freedom of opinion under communism, there was no longer any public discourse. As there had been a one-party system, people were unfamiliar with setting up political parties. Communism had suppressed all that, so people had to learn again (sometimes for the first time) how to express and organize themselves in organizations resulting from their own inspiration.⁵⁵

As a matter of fact one has to understand there were great differences among the countries of CEE, on the state of civil society after decennia of communist rule. Therefore only the common features were mentioned above.⁵⁶ To give one example of a country where civil society was not completely absent: in Poland the Catholic Church always remained very influential under communist rule. Although civil society is in principle a non-religious concept, churches are part of civil society in the sense that they are actors in-between the state, the market and the individual (although not always as we will see). So the presence of the church in society implied some form of civil society. More about

⁴⁹ Holmes and Murray, ed., Citizenship and identity in Europe, 129-135.

⁵⁰ Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe, 288.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 269.

⁵² Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe, European Humanist Federation. Secretariat for Central and Eastern Europe (Berlin 1996) 17 and further.

⁵³ Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe, 286.

⁵⁴ J. Habermas quoted in: Dekker, ed., Civil society, 40-42.

⁵⁵ Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe, 298.

⁵⁶ For more information about these differences see: Kennedy, Preparing for the twenty-first century, 216 and 251.

this relation between the Catholic Church and civil society can be found in Chapter Four, where the situation in Poland is discussed.⁵⁷

Despite this diversity, the paradox in *all* CEE countries however is that it is foremost the state - although explicitly not being part of it - which will have to play an active role in the rebuilding of civil society. National minorities will need help in organizing and sustaining their own cultural organizations. Philanthropy, mutual aid, and non-governmental organizations, churches and private universities depend on tax exemptions. Labour unions need legal recognition and professional associations need state support for their licensing procedures. And it needs to be pointed out: across the entire range of associations, individual men and women need to be protected by a state of law against the power of officials, employers, experts, party bosses, factory foremen, directors, priests and parents. Small and weak groups need to be protected against large and powerful ones.⁵⁸ For civil society left to itself, generates radically unequal power relationships, as already concluded by John Locke.

It should also be noted that civil society is intrinsically linked with both civil and political rights, and social, economic and cultural rights, all stemming from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.⁵⁹

While the Western world has always acknowledged the importance of the civil and political rights, the communist nations stressed the economic, social, and cultural rights. Therefore this resulted in two separate treaties, as the legally binding results of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, both signed in 1966.⁶⁰ By now it has become clear that both types of rights are indispensable for citizens to use their citizenship rights and to be able to build up civil society.⁶¹

⁵⁷ See paragraph 4.3.1. The relation between: state, individual, market and church, page 45.

⁵⁸ Dekker, ed., *Civil society*, 35-38.

⁵⁹ *Elementair Internationaal Recht*, T.M.C. Asser Institute (seventh edition; The Hague 1993) 132.

⁶⁰ *Elementair Internationaal Recht*, 159 and 172.

⁶¹ Douwe van Houten, *De gevarieerde samenleving. Over gelijkwaardigheid en diversiteit* (Utrecht 2004) 224.

2.3. Why post-communist citizens do not join organizations

So far the situation of civil society in CEE has been mainly looked at from the top-down perspective. It was concluded that one of the main conditions for a flourishing civil society: the non-exercising monopolies by either of the three poles, was not (very well) respected in CEE under communist rule.

But one could also look at the situation from a bottom-up approach. Why do post-communist citizens not join organizations? This phenomenon was thoroughly studied a.o. by Marjé Howard, but most other scholars also agree on this subject.⁶² The question is why post-communist civil society is still so distinctly weak, characterized by low levels of organizational membership and participation by ordinary citizens? Or, to take it a step further: why do post-communist citizens do not join organizations? When one compares the literature on this subject, the following three reasons present themselves.

The first reason is that people appear to transfer their mistrust of communist organizations to their current participation in organizations. It is apparent that the collapse of communism did not create a *tabula rasa* with regard to people's prior experiences; on the contrary, those very experiences influence people's current behaviour. Incidentally, I do not want to suggest that communist organizations have to be rated equivalent to civil society organizations. They were, on the contrary neither voluntary, nor autonomous, and participation in them was often forced, coerced, or undertaken for instrumental and career purposes.⁶³

Secondly, private networks developed within the communist system. They constitute another impediment for citizens in CEE countries to join or start up new civil associations. This might sound strange, but because of these networks there is less incentive for the formation of new voluntary associations. They were formed as the shortage economy created a climate in which people needed connections and help to acquire goods and services, and the public domain was so controlled and politicized that people formed reliable ties with their close friends and family. This - in combination with the first reason - means that those people who have maintained their vital friendship circles will feel less need or desire to participate in voluntary organizations.⁶⁴

The third reason is connected with the basic concept of disappointment, which has become a common theme in many post-communist countries, when people's high

⁶² Marc Morjé Howard is an assistant professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland.

⁶³ Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe*, 87-89.

⁶⁴ Marc Morjé Howard, *The weakness of civil society in post-communist Europe* (Cambridge 2003) 107-108.

expectations about the future were not fulfilled. Although one could conceivably argue that disappointed people are more likely to become active in protesting against the current system, it turns out that people who are disappointed are less likely to participate in voluntary organizations.⁶⁵

We have now an idea of the concept of civil society and the barriers Central and Eastern European countries are facing in this area. The next aim of this thesis is to see if, and if so how, humanism might be of help in the rebuilding of this civil society. But first however, it will be explained why the strengthening of civil society is of importance for an as inclusive and integrated Europe.

2.4. Rebuilding civil society as a means of integration into the new European Union

First something about the term 'inclusion'. A quick and complete integration of the Central and Eastern European and the Baltic states into the EU, will lead to an optimal inclusion - in the sense of taking part in society - of as many CEE citizens. Therefore integration and inclusion will from now on be used as synonyms when discussing the beneficial effects of strengthening civil society as a means of inclusion c.q. integration. The question is why would this strengthening of civil society be constructive in the process of integration in the first place?

Historically there has always been a notion of 'Europe'. It is clear that Western, Central and Eastern Europe have common cultural and historical roots. One of them is humanism, which we will come back to in the next chapter.

When the Berlin Wall came down, the question therefore was not *whether* the integration of Eastern and Western Europe should take place, but rather *how* it should take place.⁶⁶ The geographical boundaries of Europe may not be very clear, but all European countries are so interwoven historically that that bond can not be denied.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Kennedy, Preparing for the twenty-first century, 235-237, and Morjé Howard, The weakness of civil society, 109-111.

⁶⁶ Derek W. Urwin, The community of Europe. A history of European integration since 1945 (seventh edition; New York 1993) 229-246.

⁶⁷ In which way citizens of European countries see themselves mostly as Europeans, or either as members of their national state, or either as inhabitants of the smaller geographical region they belong to, and what to do with those feelings, is a fierce subject of debate in Brussels at the moment. There is a whole discussion for example about

Besides, all present and future member states agree on the fact that the future of Europe lies in a *democratic* Europe. This does not necessarily mean that the EU member states that were already in the Union before May 2004, do not face problems of democratic deficits and threats to the existence of civil society at the moment at all. Also in the 'older' EU member states, "colonisation of civil society by the system" as predicted by Habermas occurs.

Since the general agreement on the necessity to arrive at a form of integration of the Western and Eastern half of Europe, research started on how existing structures could be used to promote this integration. Hence it was simple to conclude that the European Economic Community (the present EU) was the most promising game in town.⁶⁸ In the beginning of the 90s it was thought - and it still is - that the three main criteria for successful transition of communist states and their integration into the European Union (at that time the European Economic Community) are the development of 1) democratic institutions and the rule of law, 2) a market economy, 3) a civil society.⁶⁹

At first the focus of CEE countries themselves and that of the EU as well, was on the economical and political transition. A great deal of money was pumped into starting up market economies, and in trying and organizing democratic elections. And as we have seen those are very important preconditions for the existence of civil society. But as Milan Kundera remarked already in the beginning of the 90s: "Europe is not just a 'common market', it also rests on a values and cultural identity".⁷⁰ And here the importance of civil society comes into view.

Civil society is indispensable for the transition to democracy of CEE and its integration into the EU.⁷¹ For a crucial ingredient for integration on both the national, but especially the international level, is trust. Trust is the most important pillar for real integration of different nation-states within both international governmental and non-governmental organizations.⁷² Trust can be both the initiator and the catalyst for cooperation in the international arena. This was also the way the EU started initially, when it was founded as the European Coal and Steel Community 1951. The idea was to maintain peace in Europe through mutual dependency on the economical level. And the

the concept of a 'Europe of the regions'. For more information on this subject see: Kennedy, Preparing for the twenty-first century, 256-289.

⁶⁸ J. Rubnik, e.a., ed., Challenges in the East (The Hague 1995) 11.

⁶⁹ R. Dahrendorf quoted in: Rubnik, ed., Challenges in the East, 14.

⁷⁰ Milan Kundera quoted in: Rubnik, ed., Challenges in the East, 19.

⁷¹ J.L. Cohen and A. Arato, Civil society and political theory (Cambridge 1992) 2.

⁷² Francis Fukuyama, Trust. The social virtues and the creation of prosperity (New York 1995).

reason why it could be set up, was an existing feeling of solidarity, of trust.⁷³ In the same way civil society could help to fortify the notion of Europeanism among the citizens of Europe.

An important factor for people in trusting each other, is to know each others way of life, and to recognize each others way of behaviour. Now civil society is typically the place where citizens of the whole of Europe can have a chance to get a view of each others lives and to recognize familiar, shared aspects.

This mechanism works both ways. First of all it supplies Western Europeans with a visible pattern of behaviour of a democratic society that they can relate to. It is easy to identify with people who also set up associations, engage in volunteer work, and organize sports clubs.

Secondly, these practical forms of civil society offer an enormous potential to create all kinds of inter-European (and also intercontinental) contacts. Through these contacts people will have the chance to get to know each other, which will also promote inclusion into the EU.

In this sense the rebuilding of civil society has another extra dimension. Some of the problems that certain social movements - often initiators of civil associations as discussed in Chapter One - aim to solve, just cannot be tackled on a national level. Such are e.g. peace, ecological and women's issues. But for the improvement of the living environment of individuals, they are of great importance.⁷⁴ An integrated Europe on the level of civil societies would thus contribute to a more integrated and effective approach of those issues.

In the next chapter we will see how humanism as a factor (or actor), might play a part in strengthening civil society in the new member states of the European Union.

⁷³ Urwin, *The community of Europe*, 43-47.

⁷⁴ Habermas, 'Citizenship and national identity: some reflections on the future of Europe', 12.

Chapter Three

Humanist ideas on strengthening civil society

3.1. Introduction

From the previous chapter we can deduce that when the rebuilding - thus strengthening - of civil society will be unsuccessful in CEE, this could lead to the exclusion of numerous citizens of the new member countries.⁷⁵

In this chapter, we will look into the question in what way humanism as a philosophy of life in theory, and humanist initiatives in practice, could play a part in strengthening civil society in CEE.

3.2. Humanism and civil society

Apart from the form and core concepts of civil society, we have also seen which function civil society has for the integration of the Eastern and Western half of Europe in the newly enlarged EU. Since democracy is by all member states considered the only desirable form of government, healthy civil societies - who are in their turn a precondition for democracy - are of vital importance.

It is also clear that the humanist tradition is one of the most important common roots in the EU. As can be deduced from the fact that in the preamble of the first European Constitution that was passed in June 2004, 'the shared humanist traditions of Europe' are mentioned. This in contrast to a reference to a shared Judaeo-Christian tradition, which appeared not to be viable because of too much resistance from several member states.⁷⁶

So far, so good, but one could wonder what civil society has to do with humanism which remains a philosophy of life, whereas civil society is in principle not concentrated around religion or life stance. In my view two reasons legitimize this connection. The first one is the fact that many Central and Eastern European leaders and scholars (often former

⁷⁵ Morjé Howard, *The weakness of civil society*, 162.

⁷⁶ 'Kernpunten grondwettelijk verdrag EU', NRC Handelsblad 19/6/2004, and website EU: [Http://europa.eu](http://europa.eu).

dissidents) make that connection regularly.⁷⁷ In their attempts to formulate concepts of an ideal civic community, they usually converge on a set of categories and arguments for a humanist vision of civil society. See the article 'Reinventing culture of 'humanism' in post-socialist society', by Venturelli.⁷⁸

Many Central and Eastern European scholars argue for the incorporation - within the tradition of civil culture - of historical sensibilities for the determination of the praxis of citizenship and virtue in relation to obligations and rights of a humanistic community. 'Humanistic' means here a way of looking at public life and civic virtue, from the perspective of humanist principles, originating from classical and renaissance humanist thinkers.⁷⁹

Their pleading offers - among others - a point against a reconstruction of CEE solely according to material criteria, to which we will come back in paragraph 3.5.⁸⁰ They also promote humanism as a way to restore social order without having to fall back on chauvinistic, excluding concepts of citizenship.⁸¹ A realistic risk when searching for new identities, as pointed out by Isin.⁸²

A typical example of these Eastern European scholars and leaders is Václav Havel, former dissident and later president of Czechoslovakia. In his essay 'The power of the powerless', which was published in 1979, he speaks explicitly about the reinvention of civil society by public *humanistic* virtue or morality.⁸³ Havel wanted to promote a system of humanness, away from domination - corporate or governmental - that would lead to think alternatively, to initiate self-organization, to create small streams of otherness, and to the rediscovery of individual responsibility as the root of social organization.⁸⁴

Nowadays we are so much into the 'rhetoric' of the EU used in the *Acquis Communautaire*⁸⁵ for example, that the texts of dissident writers are seen as historically interesting, but irrelevant to post-revolutionary European politics. This is not entirely

⁷⁷ Shalini S. Venturelli, 'Reinventing culture of 'humanism' in post-socialist society: new social thought on civic community', in: Aldona Jawłowska, and Marian Kempny, ed., Cultural dilemmas of post-communist societies (Warsaw 1994) 115.

⁷⁸ Venturelli, 'Reinventing culture of 'humanism'', 115-134.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, 122-125.

⁸⁰ See also paragraph 3.5. Practical forms of humanism as an option to strengthen civil society, page 36.

⁸¹ Venturelli, 'Reinventing culture of 'humanism'', 123 and 126.

⁸² See also paragraph 3.4. Core concepts of civil society as philosophy of life compared, page 31.

⁸³ Venturelli, 'Reinventing culture of 'humanism'', 130.

⁸⁴ Havel quoted in: ibidem, 129.

⁸⁵ The *Acquis Communautaire* is the body of preconditions under which a new country could possibly enter the EU. 'Possibly' means that the EU is never obliged to take a new country in, even when it lives up to all the standards of the *Acquis Communautaire*. In that sense it works only one way. One has to adapt to it to become a member, but once one has adapted to it, this does not mean one can automatically join the EU. See website EU: [Http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/dwn](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/dwn).

justified as their ideas on the fact that the rediscovery of classical humanist democratic theory could make possible the continuation of the traditions of emancipatory thought into the intellectually fragmented environment of post-communism, are still very relevant today.

The second reason to suggest a link between civil society building and humanism, is the fact that humanist scholars are, and have been very active in formulating how to promote civil society, both by ideas and practical initiatives. This in itself would be sufficient reason to investigate humanist thought on this particular subject.

What makes it even more relevant however are the striking similarities between Eastern European humanist thinkers (as abovementioned Havel) and Western European humanists thinkers (e.g. Van Houten and Buitenweg).

Both Eastern and Western European humanist thinkers suggest that it is important to look at the situation and articulate suggestions concerning the condition of civil society, gained: *via facti* (from (life-)facts) as Havel calls it.⁸⁶ Or as formulated by Van Houten: "it is from actual experiences of life that we have to start, and have to keep referring to".⁸⁷ This shared approach of a 'humanism in use'⁸⁸ as a means to look at possibilities to strengthen civil society and promote European integration, is also extensively discussed by the humanist scholar Toulmin. He regards 16th century Renaissance humanism as a source of inspiration for future European integration in the third millennium. In the next paragraph his ideas will be explored further.

Therefore humanism is not only of importance for its contribution to civil society content-wise, but also by the fact that it unites Eastern and Western scholars. So there are two ways in which humanism could play a role in promoting European integration: civil society building in itself (Chapter Two) and integration at an academic level.

In this chapter - as in the chapters before - not only the bottom-up and the top-down approaches to look at civil society will be taken into account, but another dimension is added. In such a sense that in our research from now also the more rational and the more experience based types of humanism will be included.

⁸⁶ Havel quoted in: Venturelli, 'Reinventing culture of 'humanism', 124.

⁸⁷ Toespraken opening academisch jaar 1992-1993. University for Humanistics (Utrecht 1992) 4.

⁸⁸ Douwe van Houten, and Lieteke van Vucht Thijssen, 'Citizenship, Europe, and Humanism. Towards a new Renaissance?', in: Aldona Jawłowska, and Marian Kempny, ed., Cultural dilemmas of post-communist societies (Warsaw 1994) 145-167, 160 and 161.

Now that it has been made clear how the connection between humanism and civil society came about as subject of research for this thesis, it is time to go into the actual question of why and how precisely humanism could play a role in the strengthening of civil society. We will look at 1) common historical roots which exist between humanism and civil society 2) common grounds concerning key-notes of humanism and the preconditions for civil society, and finally 3) practical humanist initiatives.

3.3. Common roots and common grounds

What was the reason why humanism was chosen as subject of research for this thesis? The idea that for several reasons it might be fruitful in this whole discussion on how to organize (civil) society - that is currently held on a European level related to the (probably ongoing) expansion of the EU - to look into this tradition of thought and practice.

Existing common roots might play a stimulating role as point of departure, or as point of orientation in the question: "What are common grounds onto which we want to build society?". Since centuries humanism is a tradition that has played an important role in European scholarship when it comes to critical thinking about social structures.⁸⁹

Renaissance humanism is a cultural historical movement, which started in 15th century Italy, and spread over both Eastern and Western Europe. That is the first reason to go and see whether this movement could be an option in thinking about rebuilding civil society. Although started in Italy it had soon not only important representatives in Western and Northern Europe, but also in the Ottoman Empire, Poland and the Balkans, the territories which now form Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltics.⁹⁰

The Renaissance humanist movement rediscovered texts from the classical antiquity, and started to reconsider the role of man in the world, thus opposing fundamental ideas and traditions from the Middle Ages. These first renaissance humanists were still part from the medieval era, in that many of them still were profoundly religious. The new feature was that they restarted the discussion on the responsibility of man for his own fate.⁹¹

⁸⁹ For more information on the humanist outlook on life as a possible point of orientation for contemporary Europe on how to organize society, see van Houten in: P.B. Cliteur en D.J. van Houten, ed., Humanisme. Theorie en praktijk, (Utrecht 1993) 141.

⁹⁰ Eugene F. Rice, jr., and Anthony Grafton, The foundations of early modern Europe, 1460-1559 (second edition; New York 1994) 7, 17, and 137, R.R. Palmer and Joel Colton, A history of the modern world (seventh edition; New York 1992) 62-63, and the website: [Http://:free.ngo/humanizm/enlight/htm](http://free.ngo/humanizm/enlight/htm).

⁹¹ Desiderius Erasmus, Over opvoeding en vrije wil (Baarn 1992) 32-26, and 57-76.

Currently the focus is mostly on the 17th century, when it comes to defining the beginning of our modern times. We then think of Descartes and Newton, who respectively founded rational thinking in philosophy and science. What is usually forgotten is that Renaissance men, such as Da Vinci, Rabelais, Erasmus, Shakespeare, Montaigne and Bacon, were the ones who broke with the Middle Ages. They were the ones who forced a breach with the past much more so than the 17th century rationalists did. ⁹²

One could even say, that while the Renaissance men had for the first time since Antiquity a broad open minded view on the world, the 17th century scholars narrowed this view down again by excluding all experience and life-facts from science in favour of the purely rational. In their search for The Truth, they displayed a longing for stability and uniformity in their academic research. They thought such an attitude was legitimate on the grounds that society could be seen as a *tabula rasa*, about which eventually everything could be explained and therefore everything would be able to be modified. ⁹³

According to Stephen Toulmin, a well known contemporary humanist, we should shift our focus slightly more from the 17th century to the 16th century when on the search for answers to the question how our present day European society should be organized. Renaissance thinkers had a more diverse perspective on all academic areas, and hence a much broader horizon of expectations. ⁹⁴ Meant is here the outlook one has on possible scenarios for the future. The horizon of expectations determines mainly to which extent people think they can change their lives and society, and consequently their options for action. According to humanism one might not be entirely sure what to do, but one is at least obliged to keep one's horizon of expectations as broad as possible, in order to keep the range of possible actions as varied as possible. ⁹⁵ By concentrating only on the most rational and logical options, one might miss out on the broadest possible overview over one's present social situation. According to humanists one should strive pre-eminently for this broad overview, since one can never be sure about all elements that will play a part in the future. It is wiser to incorporate the impossibility of omniscience into one's thinking, than constantly trying to eliminate it.

These renaissance humanist ideas about the promotion of diversity and plurality, could be useful when we look at the present day EU. ⁹⁶ An EU that is getting more and

⁹² Stephen Toulmin, *Kosmopolis. Verborgen agenda van de moderne tijd* (seventh edition; New York 2001) 41.

⁹³ Toulmin, *Kosmopolis*, 256.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, 37.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, 14.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 246.

more varied and multiple in its members and therefore less homogeneous. This tendency of variety will only get stronger. At present e.g. Turkey's membership is discussed, a country which in several aspects such as language, religion and human rights, is far more different from the Western European countries than the CEE countries that recently joined are (or were).

The way of the renaissance humanists to cope with new forms of social organization in society, was to stimulate people to adapt to new situations. Together with their notion of judging every situation according to its time and place, it makes it very worth while to reevaluate their approach in the face of the new, enlarged EU.⁹⁷

There is another reason apart from their ideas on diversity and capabilities of man, to look at renaissance humanist ideas in connection with the enlarged EU. This is the fact that the guilds - already mentioned in Chapter One as one of the starting points of civil society - and the connected lay-culture, were a renaissance humanist invention.⁹⁸ To the present day humanists like Toulmin, the presence of what was then called a lay-culture, but is now represented by NGOs and the state of civil society, is a reliable standard for the democratic quality of a country.⁹⁹ Therefore strengthening civil society is of vital importance for the well-being of individuals and society, something that was absent in CEE when under communist rule.¹⁰⁰

These renaissance humanist ideas sound already familiar, as we have discussed the optimal conditions for civil society in Chapter One. And indeed, apart from historic reasons of a shared past of Europe in which humanism functioned as an important component in the formation of our present day societies, there is another reason - related to this first one - to regard humanism as an option for rebuilding civil society.

Themes as autonomy, responsibility, self-realization, abilities to cope, and self-determination of man have always been important in humanism. It is from the assumption that - because of this similarity in subject matters - there might be a connection between this movement of thought and the strengthening of civil society, that we will continue our research.

⁹⁷ Ibidem, 256 and 257.

⁹⁸ Ibidem, 232.

⁹⁹ Ibidem, 287.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, 281.

Because of the fact that historically it is a movement always having been very concerned with individual responsibility (which is one of the preconditions for civil society), humanism as philosophy of life will be in the next paragraph compared to the conditions for civil society (as discussed in Chapter One).

After this comparison, research will be done about on the way humanism - in the form of practical initiatives - could function as an actor in civil society. And so strengthen civil society from within. Although we will be here reaching into the practical side of humanism, it will still be the theoretical part of the practical side of humanism as an option for strengthening civil society. The description of a real case study, on humanism in Poland, is in Chapter Four.

3.4. Core concepts of civil society and humanism as philosophy of life compared

Civil society is the conceptual space distinct from, and between the state, the individual and the market. This means that civil society covers all associations, private initiatives and clubs, founded by people on their own initiative. These associations might need subsidizing by the state sometimes (although preferably they do not), but the incentive for the foundation always comes from individuals who operate on a voluntary basis. Key-notes for the existence of civil society are: autonomy, solidarity and responsibility. We will now look into the humanist ideas on those three key-notes.

But first we have to reconsider a term that was introduced in paragraph 1.4. namely *citizenship*.¹⁰¹ This term is often used by humanist scholars when discussing social problems, also when - as in this case - related to civil society. When looking at the mentioned three poles of state, individual, and market, all three play an important role in facilitating civil society. But since humanism is a philosophy of life which is mainly concerned with individual responsibility, it is not surprising humanist scholars have been mostly preoccupied with the pole of the individual. So when it comes to humanistic ideas that might help strengthening civil society, the focus has been mainly on what attitude of the individual could be beneficial towards civil society. This typical attitude for a European context is accordingly defined as 'European citizenship'.¹⁰² Citizenship meant

¹⁰¹ See paragraph 1.4. The connection between civil society and citizenship, page 13.

¹⁰² Dies natalis 1994. Inleidingen publiek debat over Europees burgerschap en toespraken rectoraatsoverdracht ter gelegenheid van de vijfde dies natalis van de Universiteit voor Humanistiek gehouden op 29 januari 1994. University for Humanistics (Utrecht 1994).

as such by humanists, merely forms the *condition* on the intra-personal level for a flourishing civil society on the inter-personal level. This notion of citizenship is as it were *preliminary* for the functioning of civil society.¹⁰³ Therefore humanistic ideas on (European) citizenship will also be included in this paragraph in which we'll look at the key-notes of civil society from a humanist point of view.

First the key-note of autonomy. Here there is a clear similarity between civil society and humanism. For humanism and humanistics have everything to do with an ongoing strife for a more humane society by creating the greatest possible freedom for the individual.¹⁰⁴ Still, autonomy should not be confused with individualism, which is clearly *not* meant here. All human experiences take place in everyday life, which means they do not take place in a vacuum, but are always surrounded by social, political, ecological and cultural frameworks. For humanism as a philosophy of life that wants to take real life experiences into account, individualism is therefore no option.¹⁰⁵ The idea is to create a society in which human dignity, freedom of human beings, and solidarity are realized.¹⁰⁶ To humanists human beings are endowed with moral and mental capacities, with which they try to realize their goals. Every man should have the chance 'to live his life in truth' as Havel formulated it.¹⁰⁷

Humanism also affirms the importance of literature, music, and the visual and performing arts for personal development and fulfilment¹⁰⁸, because aesthetics are also part of the 'art of living' without which life is a miserable affair.¹⁰⁹

Humans need freedom, in other words they need to be enabled to live their lives as they see fit.¹¹⁰ Humanism - and we here refer to it as a worldview or life stance - holds these ideas because it believes ultimately in the capacity of man - when given enough autonomy - to make the best out of life.¹¹¹ Of course this freedom for self-realization and self-determination as it is also sometimes called, has to be compatible with the freedom of

¹⁰³ Dekker, ed., *Civil society*, 138.

¹⁰⁴ Website International Humanist and Ethical Union: [Http://www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org).

¹⁰⁵ *Toespraken opening academisch jaar 1992-1993*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Van Houten in: Cliteur and Van Houten, ed., *Humanisme*, 150.

¹⁰⁷ *Toespraken opening academisch jaar 1992-1993*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Website International Humanist and Ethical Union: [Http://www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org).

¹⁰⁹ *Toespraken opening academisch jaar 1992-1993*, 7.

¹¹⁰ Rob Buitenweg in: Annemie Halsema and Douwe van Houten, ed., *Empowering humanity. State of the art in Humanistics* (Enschede 2002)165-166.

¹¹¹ *Goed gezelschap. Gesprekken over burgerschap, levensbeschouwing en criminaliteit*. Directie criminaliteitspreventie. Ministry of Justice (The Hague 1994) 48.

others.¹¹² In this way humanism endeavours to be an alternative or a supplement to religion, in its efforts to give meaning to life.

As we see, there is a clear humanist view on the attitude of the citizen, which ideally would contribute most to the establishment of civil society.¹¹³ When given enough autonomy man will develop in close relationship with others, possibilities to realize and materialize his wishes, often given form in civil society.¹¹⁴

Since the Renaissance these humanist values have played an important role in the construction of civil society in Europe. They provided an answer to the since then arising longing of the Europeans to create their own world and take their own fate in their own hands.¹¹⁵ And the own (authentic) initiative forms the basis for civil society, by which the circle is closed.¹¹⁶

In the former communist Eastern bloc humanism was sometimes misused as ideology to legitimize measures taken by the state. The adjective 'humanist' was then often used as a synonym for humane, as in 'to the best of all people'.¹¹⁷ In fact humanism as described in this thesis, meaning the philosophy of life, has always been opposed to communism. To call certain unpopular governmental measures humanist is completely false. Since humanism *particularly* refuses to force changes in behaviour patterns upon people by explicitly disciplining them, or by means of force or threat. Things that under communist regimes often happened.¹¹⁸

Now the relation between autonomy as a necessary ingredient for civil society and as a fundamental element of humanist thought is clear, one can ask how humanism is related to the second key-note, that of solidarity. Humanism has a clear point of view in this regard. Jaap van Praag, the founding father of the Dutch Humanist Association, put it like this: self-realization and individual autonomy should be developed in strong relation with solidarity and feelings of humanity towards others.¹¹⁹ As mentioned in paragraph 1.3.¹²⁰ the welfare state is left out of this debate, as that is a different topic altogether. When humanists promote civil society this does not mean that it should replace the

¹¹² [Http://www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org).

¹¹³ Piet Thoenes in: Dies natalis 1994. University for Humanistics, 8.

¹¹⁴ Website of the European Humanist Federation: [Http://www.humanism.be/english/01_who-ehf.htm](http://www.humanism.be/english/01_who-ehf.htm).

¹¹⁵ Thoenes in: Dies natalis 1994. University for Humanistics, 5.

¹¹⁶ Walzer, ed., Toward a global civil society, 25.

¹¹⁷ Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe. European Humanist Federation, 10.

¹¹⁸ P.B. Cliteur, P.A. van Gennip, en L. Laeyendecker, ed., Burgerschap, levensbeschouwing en criminaliteit. Humanistische, katholieke en protestantse visies op kwaliteit van de huidige samenleving (Amersfoort 1991) 171.

¹¹⁹ Peter Derkx, and Bert Gasenbeek, ed., J.P. van Praag. Vader van het Nederlandse humanisme (Utrecht 1997) 157.

¹²⁰ See paragraph 1.3. Three poles: state, individual and market, page 11.

welfare state. Public utilities as e.g. healthcare and education are best when organized by the state. Civil society should be complementary to this.¹²¹ *Solidarity* should in a humanist context be understood as *humanity*.¹²²

With these ideas about solidarity and connectedness with others, humanism could offer an alternative to tendencies toward regionalism and nationalism, now present in entire Europe.¹²³ Since identity and citizenship are closely linked, as the sociologist Isin points out, humanism might - in the promotion of civil society - offer an alternative to other ways of strengthening feelings of identity by nationalism or regionalism.¹²⁴ These latter concepts will lead to exclusion of people who do not belong to either that particular nation or region. Humanism promotes therefore a far more inclusive identity concept, in the form of the notion of a European- or even a world citizenship.¹²⁵ All together one could say, that regarding solidarity, humanism promotes an open society in which there is connectedness between people. This means a society which is both tolerant and critical, and has a lively public debate.¹²⁶

This brings us to the third key-note of responsibility. According to humanism man is not only *capable* of shaping his own life, he is also *responsible* to give his life meaning and shape.¹²⁷ This means that one should not only be offered the space to develop oneself, or have a notion of connectedness with humanity, but that one is also obliged to actively try and realize a society in which all this is possible. Civil society is, as we have seen, the indispensable playground where people can practise this responsibility.¹²⁸ Ideal to humanism is a free society where there is citizen dignity, and at the same time a sense of commonwealth. This sense of commonwealth is developed and sustained by groups much smaller than the demos, the working class, the mass of consumers, or the nation. It takes place in the world of family, friends, and colleagues, where people are connected to one another and feel responsible for one another.

These ideas from humanism correspond with the concepts of strengthening civil society. And as the functional, practical aspects of life, should be our source of knowledge, the next step is to see how these ideas could be realized.

¹²¹ Van Houten, 'Citizenship, Europe, and Humanism', 160.

¹²² Toespraken opening academisch jaar 1992-1993.

¹²³ Douwe van Houten in: Dies natalis 1994. University for Humanistics, 18.

¹²⁴ Engin F. Isin and Patricia K. Wood, Citizenship and identity (London 1999) 123-126.

¹²⁵ Martha Nussbaum, Cultivating humanity. A classical defense of reform in liberal education. (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1997) 56-57.

¹²⁶ Goed gezelschap. Gesprekken over burgerschap. Ministry of Justice, 48-51.

¹²⁷ [Http://www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org).

¹²⁸ See paragraph 1.5. The function of civil society, page 16.

But first a striking similarity in key-notes between humanism and civil society should be mentioned: human rights. As we saw in paragraph 2.2. to be able to build a civil society and use their citizenship, citizens should be safeguarded against violations of their civil-political, their economic, social, and cultural rights.¹²⁹ Human rights form hence another common denominator between humanism and civil society, as humanists are also particularly committed to human rights.¹³⁰

As humanism is a philosophy of human freedom, humanists aim for a social order in which individual freedom and dignity, social justice, fundamental rights and the rule of civilised law are protected. In that sense the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, represents the humanist philosophical and ethical ideas about human dignity.¹³¹ To secure the essence of this declaration, humanists claim the rights deriving from the declaration in the two Covenants¹³², to be universal and indivisible. This means that human rights apply to anyone, anywhere, at anytime. And secondly, that civil-political, economic, social, and cultural rights, should be regarded as a whole.¹³³ Other-wise, these human rights reflecting the humanist values as equality of human beings, respect, individual freedom and responsibility, would not live up to their promise.

Since human rights are considered essential for a dignified existence, and since these rights are considered to be universal, humanists are supporters of the idea of the United Nations as holders of the violence-monopoly in a supranational context.¹³⁴ Humanist organizations are also active lobbyists on implementation of these principles of universality and indivisibility on a European level. This has gained extra relevance during the last four years when the European Constitution was being phrased.¹³⁵ The humanist ideas on how the European Constitution should look like to guarantee humanist values, can be read in the document: 'Clés pour l'humanisme Européen'.¹³⁶

This was just a brief introduction to the relation between humanism and human rights, since it is not the main topic of this thesis. For more information on this subject I

¹²⁹ See paragraph 2.2. The situation of civil society in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, page 18.

¹³⁰ See the website of the IHEU: <http://www.iheu.org/HUMANISM%20FOR%20THE%20WORLD.htm>, 1.

¹³¹ Ibidem, 4.

¹³² The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. See also paragraph 2.2. The situation in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, page 18.

¹³³ <http://www.hom.nl/hom/hom-visie.html>, 2.

¹³⁴ Marco Oostdijk, *Werken met waarden. Levenskunst en maatschappelijke betrokkenheid in de 21ste eeuw* (Amsterdam 2000) 52-53.

¹³⁵ *Chartre des Droits fondamentaux de l'Union Européenne. Audition de la société civile du 27 avril 2000.* European Humanist Federation (Brussels 2000) 1.

¹³⁶ *Clés pour l'humanisme Européen. Principes et fédération.* European Humanist Federation (Brussels undated). 12-15.

refer to the dissertation of Buitenweg.¹³⁷ We will now turn to the practical aspects of humanist initiatives that are also of vital importance for rebuilding civil society, because theoretical humanism - according to Toulmin and Van Houten - never works without practical experience.¹³⁸

3.5. Practical forms of humanism as an option to strengthen civil society

3.5.1. Humanist organizations in CEE as (f)actors in civil society

To many people in Europe, the precondition of a certain amount of individual autonomy, and key-notes such as solidarity and responsibility, are self-evident. Does one actually need humanist organizations to explicitly point out those themes? This is at the moment also a subject of debate in the Netherlands. They are legitimized by the fact that, although there are many people who are aware of these values, a great deal of them does not know how to put them into practice.¹³⁹ In my view humanist organizations can have this function in CEE too. And as discussed before, these key-notes are more self-evident in Western Europe than in CEE. Here practical humanist initiatives promoting certain key-notes of civil society will come in. They provide a way for people interested, to transform their ideas into practical projects. The way in which this happens is twofold.

In the first place humanist movements are themselves part of the civil society, since they are set up out of private non-profit initiative. After 1989 new humanist associations were formed in The Czech Republic, The Slovak Republic (together Czechoslovakia at the time), Hungary, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.¹⁴⁰ By the fact that they are entities where citizens come together to acknowledge sociological problems and actively participate in society, they intrinsically strengthen civil society. In post-communist Europe, it is apparent that some individuals and groups seek to enhance their own identity as Isin pointed out through more exclusive conceptions of citizenship. On the other hand some individuals and groups seek to enhance their own identity through

¹³⁷ A.W.J. Buitenweg, Recht op een menswaardig bestaan. Een humanistische reflectie op sociaal-economische mensenrechten (Utrecht 2001).

¹³⁸ Toulmin, Kosmopolis, 246.

¹³⁹ Els Meijers, 'De stem van het humanisme', Van mens tot mens, February 2004, 17.

¹⁴⁰ Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe. European Humanist Federation.

more inclusive concepts of citizenship.¹⁴¹ This is what humanist associations in CEE are trying to do at the moment.

Secondly, they set up their own projects and stimulate other individuals to do the same in areas of their own interests. Of course not all CEE humanist associations do the same projects, or stress the same key-notes necessary for civil society. In the next chapter we will take a closer view at the situation in one particular country: Poland. At this point we want to see whether some similarities in the way these associations operate can be discovered in practice.

From publications on this subject and material provided by these organizations like brochures and websites, it appears that when it comes to strengthening civil society three topics overlap. What are these three topics?

It is remarkable that all associations in those six countries are very active in stimulating the public debate in their country. As freedom of opinion was not something taken for granted under communism, the area of public debate has to be rediscovered again. This is a.o. done by supporting the free press, by offering independent journalists platforms to come forward with their stories, and to start up magazines in which different opinions can be expressed.¹⁴² The Humanist Associations of CEE are supported in this by EU programmes such as PHARE and TACIS, which also favour the strengthening of civil society, and contribute to programmes for free media.¹⁴³

Another topic these Humanist Associations have in common is their struggle in the educational sphere. They wish children to be educated with certain ethical values and virtues which are necessary to become democratic citizens. But they want no interference in the development of the child's world view or life stance.¹⁴⁴ Although humanism is itself a philosophy of life, for humanists it is crucial that everybody is able to believe freely in whatever he wants.¹⁴⁵

The last common topic is the relation of the three actors that we have identified as the poles in-between which civil society occurs: state, market and individual. Humanist associations are keen to prevent that this space of civil society will become dominated by one of these poles. This is necessary because the state in CEE is still used to interfere very

¹⁴¹ Holmes and Murray, ed., *Citizenship and identity in Europe*, 8.

¹⁴² *Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe*. European Humanist Federation, 15, and the website of the Humanist Association in Slovakia: <http://slovakia.humanists.net>.

¹⁴³ EU websites about their PHARE and TACIS programmes: http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/communication/pdf/soc_aspesc_text_en.pdf, and: http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/contacts/info_centre.htm.

¹⁴⁴ *Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe*. European Humanist Federation, 27.

¹⁴⁵ Jim Herrick, *Humanism: an introduction* (Oldham 2003) 28.

strongly in people's personal lives. If we look at the pole of the market, the great problem is that CEE countries only recently adopted capitalist market principles, and that people tend to get too focused on earning money - neglecting other aspects of life. Sometimes it even seems as if democracy is not the goal, but just a means to achieve a market economy. Humanist associations try to counterbalance this attitude by organizing volunteer work that explicitly takes place outside the market economy. This volunteer work consists mainly of helping people who are in need there where the welfare state is lacking, or people that need social help in their private lives. Support is also given by international aid programmes like the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), the European Humanist Federation (EHF), or national humanist aid organizations, like the Hivos Foundation (the Dutch humanist foreign aid organization).¹⁴⁶ But as civil society has so long been absent in CEE, it remains difficult to now restart from scratch.¹⁴⁷

3.5.2. The contribution of international humanist organizations to European integration via civil society

In the previous paragraph a number of international humanist organizations were mentioned. Helping rebuild or strengthen civil society via international relations contributes to European integration in two ways. As we have seen is the promotion of civil society in itself essential for integration between the countries of the newly enlarged EU. Doing so by means of internationally organized associations (non-governmental ones in this case) also promotes European integration because it stimulates trans-national contacts on a non-governmental level.

In this time of globalization one should not just speak of a national civil society, but also of what is called a 'global civil society'. Its definition is: the sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organizations, networks and individuals located between the family, the state, and the market and operating beyond the confines of national societies, polities, and economies.¹⁴⁸ This is the same definition as that of civil society on the national level, but with an international component added.

Because of the continuing process of globalization, we will now discuss a few initiatives of international humanist organizations considering civil society. The two

¹⁴⁶ Hivos jaarverslag 2002. Hivos Foundation (The Hague 2003).

¹⁴⁷ Howard, The weakness of civil society in post-communist Europe, 121.

¹⁴⁸ H.K. Anheier, M. Glasius and M.Kaldor, Global civil society (Oxford 2001) 17.

international humanist organizations most constructively active with civil society building in CEE are: the EHF and Hivos (see above for an explanation of abbreviations).

The EHF advocates enhancement of the Union-feeling of EU-citizens by bringing them closer to the European project. This can be done by explaining the achievements and advantages of the EU. In that way EU-citizens will no longer see themselves as nationals only, but also as European citizens associated in a project with a future. By such a project the EU will be able to reposition itself, and to defend its values and interests throughout the world in a more efficient way. The EHF has formulated five points of action. First they want to set up a training programme on European citizenship and the working of the Union in the curricula at primary, secondary and higher education levels. At the moment a beginning for this is made in the Netherlands for example.¹⁴⁹

Secondly, the SOCRATES programme aimed at improving the quality of teaching and the international exchange programmes between schools and universities, should be further stimulated. Thirdly, the existing European volunteer programmes, enabling young people to work on building sites with a social-cultural dimension in outer member states of the EU, should be extended.

Two further projects are: to launch European sustainable development programmes, and to set up or improve the communication channels between local, regional, national and European levels in such a way that the concerns of citizens can reach the decision-making bodies at European level. There are many resemblances of course with the national CEE humanist programmes. Extra here is the international dimension, which adds up to the amount to which these efforts contribute to European integration.¹⁵⁰ These European development programmes promote inter-EU contact *directly* instead of the rebuilding of civil society which does that *indirectly*.

Another humanist organization in the field of civil society (re)building in CEE, is the Hivos Foundation. This organization focuses on supporting projects they often do not set up themselves, but the ideas of which they subscribe. These ideas are: promoting respect for tolerance, human rights and the environment by means of civil society organization,

¹⁴⁹ 'Van der Hoeven wil burgerschap in basisonderwijs', NRC Handelsblad 9/3/2004.

¹⁵⁰ Contribution to the convention 'The future of Europe', June 2002, European Humanist Federation (Brussels 2002), Contribution au livre blanc sur la gouvernance Européenne, March 2002, European Humanist Federation (Brussels 2002), Newsletter 2001/3, European Humanist Federation (Vol. 1, Brussels 2001), and Contribution to the convention on the future of Europe, March 2003, Civil society and participative democracy, European Humanist Federation (Brussels 2003).

alliance-building, and the stimulation of citizenship-enhancing measures.¹⁵¹ In practice this comes down to supporting grassroots organizations which promote these 'humanist' ideas on citizenship and civil society, and creating an awareness of civil society related projects in CEE in the Western part of the EU. This last aspect of their strategy, trying to get citizens with experience in civic skills involved in helping to reconstruct civil society in CEE, has become more and more successful over the last ten years. Hivos operates only in Southern Eastern Europe. For more details on the way they work and the specific projects they support, I refer to their report: 'Civil voices on a global stage'.¹⁵²

For both the EHF and Hivos applies that they consider themselves actors of civil society in their own right. By their own (international) initiatives and within Europe linking up with (international) partners, networks and like-minded organizations, EHF and Hivos join and feed the public debate and use their experience to help strengthening civil society.¹⁵³

It can be concluded from the work of these two organizations that by their attitude they succeed in making a connection between the three elements that are deemed important for this thesis. They indeed unite humanism - and its key-notes of autonomy, solidarity, responsibility and the respect for human rights - with civil society building and globalization. This answers part of our research question. The EHF and Hivos demonstrate how humanism by means of ideas and practical initiatives is able to contribute in civil society rebuilding in CEE.

Largely theoretical, we have now seen how humanism as a philosophy of life can coincide with civil society. By means of stimulation of certain core values that are necessary for civil society and by being an actor of civil society in itself. We have also learnt why the strengthening of civil society is important for European integration.

A more detailed look into the condition of civil society and practical humanist initiatives of one of the countries of CEE, is offered in the next chapter. Before that first one particular problem regarding civil society in CEE must be mentioned.

¹⁵¹ Jan ter Laak, and David Sogge, Report of a review of the Hivos South East Europe Programme (The Hague 2002) 3-5.

¹⁵² Civil voices on a global stage. Hivos policy paper. Hivos Foundation (second edition; The Hague 2004).

¹⁵³ Civil voices on a global stage. Hivos. 24-25.

3.6. The relation between church and state in Central and Eastern Europe

Apart from the state there is another actor that tends to dominate the space of civil society in CEE countries. This actor is the church. Naturally churches can - just as humanist associations - play a role in strengthening civil society, exactly because of their intrinsically being part of that space in society. Churches used to be and are the very places where volunteer work was promoted (charity) and where people were being reminded of their responsibility for each other in the community as a whole.

The problem in CEE ¹⁵⁴ is, that the Catholic Church aims at expanding its power beyond civil society, into the personal lives of people *and* into the domain of the state. This process is against the core principles of civil society as formulated by a.o. Habermas. ¹⁵⁵ Since the existence of civil society is embedded in the vital condition, that all actions that take place in it possibly influence one of the three poles, but may not be structurally intended to gain actual power over one of these poles.

In the next chapter it will be investigated whether the role of the Catholic Church represents a problem in Poland. Chapter Four will be an in-depth case study of the possible links between humanism and civil society in one of the CEE countries which recently joined the EU: Poland.

¹⁵⁴ Although it is least in Hungary, see: Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe. European Humanist Federation, 29.

¹⁵⁵ See paragraph 1.3. Three poles: state, individual and market, page 11.

Chapter Four

A case study of possible links between humanism and civil society in Poland

4.1. Introduction

One of the reasons to take Poland for a case study was the fact that it has an active humanist movement. So have Slovakia and The Czech Republic. But the choice of Poland out of the CEE countries was motivated by the fact that the Polish Humanist Association has a very broad range of practical initiatives.

One can say of course that for that reason only, it might not be representative for humanist movements in general in CEE. This might be true, but it is my aim not to look at all possible actors and factors of civil society, but to look into options for *humanism* as being constructive in strengthening civil society. Since I do not have the opportunity to discuss all humanist initiatives in all CEE member countries, I chose a country that covers many different aspects.

Another reason to choose Poland is the fact that it is a typical example of a country that experienced renaissance humanism. As we saw in Chapter 3, such a shared past could be of significance for further European integration. Humanism developed in CEE principally among the Poles, Hungarians, Dalmatians and Czechs. It was nourished from the same sense of cosmopolitanism and universality as in Western Europe. Whenever possible, East-European humanists made intellectual pilgrimages to the leading Italian universities of the time: Bologna and Padua. Well-known Polish humanists of that era are a.o. the astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) and Marcin Kromer (ca. 1512-1589) a historian.¹⁵⁶

Humanist circles - at courts and elsewhere - sprang up in CEE and played also host to Western humanists. Examples of such visiting humanists (most of them travelled all over Europe) were a.o. Conrad Celtis (1459-1508) from Germany and Filippo

¹⁵⁶ Roy Porter, The enlightenment (second edition; New York 2001) 12.

Buonaccorsi (widely known by his name of Callimachus, 1437-1496) from the papal states.¹⁵⁷ These contacts definitely contributed to a sense of *Europeanness* which continues to play a role until the present time.¹⁵⁸

4.2. The Polish Humanist Association

In the time Poland was a communist state, there was no room for civil society. Most remarkable for this regime was the very limited - and most often completely absent - space that was left for spontaneous actions of individuals. The only places in society that offered a certain amount of freedom to people, were the church and private agriculture (in some respects).¹⁵⁹ Political strategy was built in such a way that all voluntary social relations and networks were destroyed.¹⁶⁰

As early as the 70s and 80s some resistance started - and as people felt less afraid of a Russian invasion after the signing of the 1975 Helsinki treaties - the way was paved towards the founding of the trade-union 'Solidarity'. Since then Solidarity has played an important role in the ongoing process of self-awareness of the individual, which finally led to the fall of the regime.¹⁶¹ But Solidarity acted still within the communist system, along the lines of communist organisational principles. So when the first chosen government of Mazowiecki came into power in 1989, civil society had to be rebuilt from scratch.

This was even more difficult because of the fact that Poland, as so many other countries in CEE, tried to effect into decades or years, what in the West had taken centuries. Plus that it tried to do so intentionally what in the West came about largely as the unintended result of decentralized decisions.¹⁶² The existence of a so-called middle class, one of the preconditions to civil society, had ceased to be since 1945. In a democracy the intellectual, political, educational, military and economic elites normally give impulses to civil society. In post-1989 Poland these elites needed to be replaced, since the former communist elites had purposely not shown any interest in civil society. On the contrary: an active civil society would have been a threat to the existing

¹⁵⁷ Harold S. Segel, Renaissance culture in Poland. The rise of humanism 1470-1543 (London 1989) 4-15, 83, and 120.

¹⁵⁸ Segel, Renaissance culture in Poland, 3.

¹⁵⁹ Andrzej Siciński, 'Elites and masses in post-communist countries. The Polish case', in: Aldona Jawłowska, and Marian Kempny, ed., Cultural dilemmas of post-communist societies (Warsaw 1994) 199-208, 200.

¹⁶⁰ Kazimierz Dziubka in: Dekker, ed., Civil society, 89.

¹⁶¹ Dziubka in: *ibidem*, 93.

¹⁶² John Elster, 'The necessity and impossibility of simultaneous economic and political reform', in: P. Ploszajski, ed., Philosophy of social choice (Warsaw 1990) 314-315.

regime.¹⁶³ Since the beginning of the post-communist phase, the forming of these new elites has faced two major problems. As a matter of course the most capable persons for these social activities were to be found in the former dissident movement. But the problem was first of all that the now called-for elite needs to be far more numerous than the oppositionist movement ever had been. Secondly, these former dissidents still capable and motivated to set up or give impulse to civil society, are now becoming quite old for the job.¹⁶⁴

Look for example at Bronislav Geremek, a Pole and former dissident, who ran recently for the EU-parliament presidency.¹⁶⁵ He is a typical example of a former dissident whose ideas on rebuilding society are still very relevant for the integration in Europe, as discussed in paragraph 3.2..¹⁶⁶ Although still active on the political stage, he is now in his seventies.

In spite of these starting problems, new civil society initiatives can be spotted. One of these attempts to build up civil society, is being made by the Polish Humanist Association, which was set up in 1991.¹⁶⁷ As in other CEE countries they met with distrust - by the fact that people were prejudiced about humanism - due to the misuse of the word 'humanist' by communist regimes.¹⁶⁸

This association is now part of a larger Humanist Federation in which all kinds of humanist oriented organizations, such as some political parties and former dissident movements are bundled.¹⁶⁹ The original Humanist Association started all this, being the first humanist organization to have been founded. Its founders were mainly young intellectuals: writers, philosophers, historians and artists. Their main themes of focus were politics, social issues, arts and philosophy.^{170, 171}

¹⁶³ Siciński, 'Elites and masses in post-communist countries. The Polish case', 202.

¹⁶⁴ Ibidem, 203.

¹⁶⁵ Stéphane Alonso, 'EU kan haar zingeving verliezen. Ex-dissident wil EP-voorzitter worden', NRC Handelsblad 12/7/2004. Geremek did not win though. On July 21, 2004 Josep Borrell (from Spain) was chosen to become the new president of the EU-parliament.

¹⁶⁶ See paragraph 3.2. Humanism and civil society, page 25.

¹⁶⁷ Website Polish Humanist Association: [Http://free.ngo.pl/humizm/introeng.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humizm/introeng.htm).

¹⁶⁸ James H. Satterwhite, Varieties of Marxist humanism. Philosophical revision in post-war Eastern Europe (London 1992) 13-14.

¹⁶⁹ See for an overview of these humanist organizations: [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/) and: 'Index of humanist groups in Poland', [Http://www.secularhumanism.org](http://www.secularhumanism.org).

¹⁷⁰ [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/introeng.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/introeng.htm).

¹⁷¹ Apart from formulating the goals they would be going to focus on, it also took sometime to establish their group identity. For example there was the question what to do with people who wanted to join, but said still to be members of a church? The Polish Humanist Association solved this problem by making the statement that religious people are allowed to join, as long as they do not believe in hell. Reason for this is that a religious belief can be united with humanist ideas according to the Polish humanists, but the concept of hell as an idea of

From the beginning onwards there has been close cooperation with the German humanist organizations. Later, alliances were formed with the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), and the European Humanist Federation (EHF). In that sense the Polish Humanist Association itself has become a means for trans-national integration, by the fact that it is steadily busy setting up new contacts with other European humanist- and other kinds of non-governmental organizations.¹⁷²

4.3. Practical humanist initiatives strengthening civil society in Poland

4.3.1. The relation between: state, individual, market, and church

One of the most important efforts of the Humanist Association in Poland, is to make sure that the new constitution (although itself not part of civil society) guarantees the possibility for civil society to develop. The Humanist Association took part in the work of the Constitutional Committee preparing the draft of the new constitution.¹⁷³ They expressed their views on freedom of conscience and belief, respect for human rights and freedom, equality of all citizens for the law, and the separation of state and church.¹⁷⁴ Another topic for the Polish Humanist Association is the fact that economic welfare should not dominate all efforts to transform post-communist societies in democratic societies - as is often the case.

The relation between the state and the Catholic Church is especially monitored by humanists, since the church tries to get legislative power in areas that actually belong to the state.¹⁷⁵ In this way the Humanist Association fought for legislation securing freedom of press, and freedom of education in the sense of the right to non-religiously based education. Also, they fiercely opposed against the law on the prohibition of abortion, which the church tried to get enforced.¹⁷⁶ In the first version of the new constitution

deserved eternal condemnation and suffering, is incompatible with humanist values.

[Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/introeng.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/introeng.htm).

¹⁷² [Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe](#). European Humanist Federation, 14.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*, 13.

¹⁷⁴ [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/letter.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/letter.htm).

¹⁷⁵ [Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe](#). European Humanist Federation, 13-15.

¹⁷⁶ 'Constitutional complaints', [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/complaint.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/complaint.htm).

abortion was not a penal offence. The Catholic Church in the end managed however to get that changed. At that point humanists were not successful.

The Polish Humanist Association is opposed to the Catholic Church whenever the church tries to dominate either civil society, or one of the three poles in-between which civil society exists. This happened not only with the issue of abortion, but also where the defence of the existence of free press was concerned. E.g. when the church put an official ban on the film "The Priest". The Humanist Association successfully objected to such a ban.¹⁷⁷

The difficulty the Humanist Association has to deal with here is the fact that in Poland the Catholic Church is regarded by most people as an *institution* instead of a *congregation*.¹⁷⁸ And that it is indeed acting as an institution trying to gain influence at every level of society, especially the political one.¹⁷⁹

During communist rule the church was so powerful as one of the places where a limited amount of personal freedom was allowed, that now it is difficult for people to stand up against its authority. Where during the communist era the church had always been a relatively liberal resort, it is now acting too authoritatively.¹⁸⁰ The church has not adapted to its attitude, although its role has changed under democratic rule. And people are still too impressed with its status under communism to dare go against it.

It must be said however, that this struggle with the clergy is not representative for all humanist movements in CEE.¹⁸¹ Although for example The Czech Republic faces similar problems.¹⁸²

4.3.2. Education in the humanities

It was mentioned in paragraph 2.2. 'The situation of civil society in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe'¹⁸³ that in order to re-establish civil society in CEE, an active attitude of the state and certain public institutions is needed. This is a paradox since intrinsically civil society exists purely out of people's own, authentic initiatives.¹⁸⁴ To

¹⁷⁷ [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/pseudohumanism.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/pseudohumanism.htm).

¹⁷⁸ Hanna Świda-Ziemia, 'The post-communist mentality', in: Aldona Jawłowska, and Marian Kempny, ed., *Cultural dilemmas of post-communist societies* (Warsaw 1994) 223-240, 234.

¹⁷⁹ *National secular society submission to EHF on concordats between member states and religious bodies*. 19 June 2004. European Humanist Federation (Brussels 2004) 1.

¹⁸⁰ Świda-Ziemia, 'The post-communist mentality', 235.

¹⁸¹ *Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe*. European Humanist Federation, 29.

¹⁸² *National secular society submission to EHF on concordats*, 2.

¹⁸³ See paragraph 2.2. The situation of civil society in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, page 18.

¹⁸⁴ Howard, *The weakness of civil society in post-communist Europe*, 38-39.

help civil society start up again, the Polish humanists are also active in the field of education, as already briefly mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Since 1989 Poland has gone through deep and often chaotic changes that have strongly affected young people. The crisis in politics, economy and social life has shaped their way of thinking and their lives. This means young people in Poland often feel insecure, alienated or lonely about the future. Logically this crisis has strengthened their natural need for a way to give meaning to their lives in the form of some outlook on life, which can stimulate them to go their own way. Humanism can empower young people who want to live their lives in a way not controlled by any institution (e.g. the Catholic Church) and who want to be independent in their life stance. Therefore the Humanist Association lobbies for the introduction of ethical in-stead of religious lessons in schools.¹⁸⁵

A major education programme is now running in Poland. It aims at the education of young people in democratic values. This in order to promote - in the educational sphere - tolerance and pluralistic views and ways of life. This programme also promotes teaching of the humanities in schools.¹⁸⁶ The idea is that when children are encouraged to appreciate masterpieces of literature and art, this will give them a feeling of need to participate in their own culture and to enlarge it with their own creative output thereby empowering that culture. Culture in this context should be understood as a material world of great human masterpieces (works of art, but also scientific achievements, discoveries and inventions) and at the same time as a community of people trying to be creative. Thus a bond could be created between 'world citizens': people living in various countries but still forming a community. The idea of stimulating people to gather around reading classical literature, goes back to Renaissance humanists like Pico della Mirandola. People are thus stimulated to use their capacities optimally in their own creative way, which often will mean an active involvement in civil society.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ [Http:// free.ngo.pl/humanizm/youth.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/youth.htm).

¹⁸⁶ Jan Wolenski, 'Humanism and rationalism', [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/wolenskiang.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/wolenskiang.htm).

¹⁸⁷ Andrzej Nowicki, 'Humanist ideas of supranational community', [Http://free.ngo.p/humanizm/nowickieng.htm](http://free.ngo.p/humanizm/nowickieng.htm). See also: Nussbaum, [Cultivating humanity](#).

4.3.3. Human rights for children

The Polish Humanist Association started the project of the 'Charter of Youth's Rights' for young people.¹⁸⁸ Reason for starting this project was the appalling quality of the medical care system for children in Poland. The rights of young people in hospitals and clinics are not well respected. When under 18, the patient has no say in the treatment that is decided upon him or her. Young people are not even entitled to be given information about what type of treatment they are getting. The Humanist Association has developed the 'Charter of Youth's Rights' in order to give people over 15 years of age the right to decide on the treatment they are subjected to. This project is mainly aimed at raising social awareness about the quality of paediatric medical care in the country. A quote from the Charter: "Young people are although they are obviously less experienced, aware enough of their own selves, and certainly would feel much more secure, if they were provided with information on their treatment in the language comprehensible to 9-12 year-olds. There is no doubt that all children, regardless of their background, deserve the same approach and respect for their feelings and dignity. We advocate to give teenagers more freedom and more rights. We try to encourage social debate and make society and authorities more sensitive to young people's rights with regard to respect and equality. Therefore initiatives such as The Charter of Youth's Rights are developed".¹⁸⁹

Another right the Polish humanists are trying to establish for young people is the right to get sexual education lessons in school.¹⁹⁰ A necessary project, since until recently these lessons were completely nonexistent due to interference by the Roman Catholic Church.

The Humanist Federation (the umbrella organization under which the Humanist Association resides) also set up a programme to give young people more opportunities to get themselves heard by policymakers. The programme was called: 'Constitutionalism as a state of social consciousness. The preparation for living in society'. The aim was to prepare young leaders to act in their local environment. The programme consisted of meetings with politicians, lectures and exercises on elementary rules for democracy, human rights and social activities. In this way, young people could get acquainted with the policy making level and get experience in how things can be changed in society.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ 'The rights of young people in Poland. An outline of the situation and humanist proposals', [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/youth.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/youth.htm).

¹⁸⁹ 'The rights of young people in Poland'.

¹⁹⁰ [Http://www.free.ngo.pl/stowarzyszenie_wolnomyslicieli/](http://www.free.ngo.pl/stowarzyszenie_wolnomyslicieli/).

¹⁹¹ Ibidem.

By stressing this aspect of youth and children's rights, the Humanist Association seems to have succeeded in attracting young people as shows from their publications.¹⁹² These are young people who are dedicated to improve the situation of other young people in their country, who are concerned with existential questions but do not want to turn to the church. A survey dating from 2001 showed that 22 per cent of young Poles rejects the idea of God, as compared to only five per cent of the total population.¹⁹³ So in that sense the Humanist Association is fulfilling a need for people in search of a non-religious life stance.

Moreover, by attracting young people another problem is remedied namely, the disproportionate amount of elderly people (the former dissidents) capable of rebuilding civil society.

4.3.4. Stimulating public debate

As already mentioned, humanists try to establish an atmosphere for people in which key-notes of autonomy, solidarity and responsibility are stimulated. One of the ways humanists try to realize this, is to activate the public debate. In Poland the Humanist Association tries to achieve this by the launching of two magazines which function as platforms for a variety of opinions on all sorts of political, social and cultural issues. The names of these magazines are: *Bez Dogmatu*¹⁹⁴ and *Res Humana*.¹⁹⁵ They also participate in a magazine called *Nie*.

All these magazines try to stimulate the political and social awareness of their readers, also on an international level. For instance they inform the public about the elections for the European parliament. They pay attention to the position of Poland within the now greater alliance of the EU.

Res Humana is a popular scientific bimonthly devoted to outlook on life and philosophical issues. The journal's motto and main perspective (according to the editorial) is 'secular humanism' expressed in the form of moral issues, and the dilemmas facing contemporary humanity. *Res Humana* is a platform for philosophers, historians, specialists in religion, and cultural theoreticians representing these and related disciplines.

¹⁹² See for example: Malgosia Minta, 'Polish youth perspective', in: Humanism and democracy in Central Europe. Coexistence of different life stances. European Humanist Federation (Brussels 2002) 20-22.

¹⁹³ Humanism and democracy in Central Europe, 20.

¹⁹⁴ Website of 'Bez Dogmatu': [Http://www.iwkip.org/bezdogmaty](http://www.iwkip.org/bezdogmaty).

¹⁹⁵ Website of 'Res Humana': [Http://katalog.czasopism.pl/pismo_en.php?id_pisma=433](http://katalog.czasopism.pl/pismo_en.php?id_pisma=433).

It contains articles and essays, profiles of leading humanists, interviews with scholars, journalistic pieces and reviews on books on sociological themes.

Typically positive for the explicit strengthening of civil society is that the editors are concerned about enhancing and extending their circle of contributors to people from all walks of life. For example by introducing a special section entitled *Young People Write*. Young people are stimulated to express themselves and speak out about whatever subject that interests them. About 1000 copies of the magazine are printed every two months.¹⁹⁶

4.4. Conclusion

These are not the only practical humanist initiatives in Poland at the moment. There are numerous other projects concerned with a.o. setting up voluntary social services for people in need, fighting discrimination, and the fight for women's rights.¹⁹⁷

The Polish Humanist Association does not only set up projects in their own sphere of interest: they stimulate citizens also to set up projects in any field of civil society that are relevant for those peoples themselves. This is done by informing people that they can get financial support for small scale projects that strengthen civil society. The Dutch embassy and 'Environment Contact Eastern Europe' e.g. provide such grants.¹⁹⁸

Generally, it can be concluded that - as demonstrated by the case study of Poland - humanism can function as an option for strengthening civil society not only by its ideas, but also in practical ways.

The above study also indicates that it is very difficult (if not impossible) to predict what impact humanism eventually will have. The challenges faced are enormous.

The research question was however not *to what extent*, but *in what way* humanism can be an option for strengthening civil society. And I think the humanist initiatives mentioned in this case study, show several of them.

¹⁹⁶ [Http://katalog.czasopism.pl/pismo_en.php?id_pisma=433](http://katalog.czasopism.pl/pismo_en.php?id_pisma=433).

¹⁹⁷ [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/introeng.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/introeng.htm).

¹⁹⁸ The Dutch embassy runs the project: 'Small Embassy Projects Programme', for which individual citizens can apply. [Http://www.nlembassy.pl/funds/c_funds2.htm](http://www.nlembassy.pl/funds/c_funds2.htm). So does 'Environment Contact Eastern Europe': [Http://www.milieukontakt.nl/?show=projects&country_id=0](http://www.milieukontakt.nl/?show=projects&country_id=0).

Conclusion

Similar key-notes, common roots, and active participation in civil society as factors for success

We can formulate the answer to our research question as follows. In the effort to integrate - and therewith include - the new European member states as well as possible into the new European Union, the rebuilding of civil society appears to be crucial. Civil society being: the conceptual space distinct from, and between the state, the individual and the market. This means it can be represented by anything from a football club, to a political party to a debating club, to an organization of housewives. In the decades before 1989 civil society had been practically absent in Central and Eastern Europe. So from then on it had to be rebuilt from scratch - or strengthened where still weak.

Humanism is shown to be able to attribute to this civil society, by the fact that a number of core values of this philosophy of life, of this movement that started in the Renaissance and goes back to ancient times, are similar to the ones needed for the development of civil society. Those key-notes being: autonomy, solidarity, and responsibility. All three are of vital importance for the (re)construction of civil society. Besides, humanism fervently supports the implementation of human rights, making no difference between civil-political, economic, social or cultural rights. Exactly the observation of these rights is another important precondition for the existence of a civil society.

Apart from these similarities in thought, there is another reason why connecting civil society building to humanism is justified. This is the fact that many leading Eastern European leaders (often former dissidents), see humanism as a potential option for rebuilding their civil society.

Another explanation for the fact that humanism seems to function successfully as a source of inspiration for the development of shared European ideas how to organize (civil) society, can be found in history. Western, Northern, Middle and Eastern Europe share a common history in the tradition of humanism as a philosophy of life. It reaffirms therefore the common roots of all the different parts of Europe.

Apart from the aspect of similarities in attitude and goals which are present in theoretical humanism, and which are necessary to rebuild civil society, one question remains. How can humanism in a practical way be an option for strengthening civil society?

To answer this question we looked both at the top-down and bottom-up ways of strengthening civil society. We also considered humanism as a philosophy of life that can only function as a source of knowledge when it keeps to real life experiences. Therefore in this thesis the focus was on what is called 'humanism in use', rather than an abstract philosophical notion. Real life humanism was the object of study.

In Central and Eastern Europe, it turns out that a new humanist movement has come up since 1989. Research showed that this movement contributes actively to the rebuilding of civil society. This process of humanist initiatives strengthening civil society and thus European integration, works threefold.

First of all humanists embrace the abovementioned key-notes on an individual level. By representing these humanist values and acting upon them, awareness of the importance of civil society and citizenship are promoted. It is also a fact that humanist movements - since they are set up out of private non-profit initiative - are themselves part of the civil society. After 1989 new humanist associations were formed in The Czech Republic, The Slovak Republic (together Czechoslovakia at the time), Hungary, Romania, Poland and Bulgaria. They contribute to the debate on how society should be organized. By the fact that these are communities where citizens come together to consider sociological problems and actively participate in society, they intrinsically strengthen civil society.

Secondly, the humanist movements are active in civil society in the form of practical initiatives. To stimulate civil society they started up all kinds of projects. And they promote the founding of volunteer associations that originate from personal initiatives, in order to stimulate people creating environments in which they can develop themselves. Key subjects for all humanist associations in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe are: education, free media, public debate, and various volunteer work.

They also help individuals to make a contribution to civil society in areas not of specific interest to humanists themselves. For example by lending them know-how. Or by indicating ways to get initial grants.

In the more in-depth case study of the Humanist Association in Poland, more detailed investigation was done into the practical ways in which humanism can assist in re-establishing civil society. A civil society which in Poland had been almost absent for decades. *Almost* in the sense that the Catholic Church always remained an important factor in society. So that at least one aspect of civil society was represented. It is discussed how in these days however, this still very powerful position of the church actually represents a threat to civil society. For the Polish humanists their relation with the Catholic Church and the position of the church within civil society is an important issue.

Besides this job of guarding the free space a civil society needs to flourish in-between the state, the market, the individual and in the Polish case: the church, the Polish humanists display a wide range of other activities to strengthen civil society.

Examples of such humanist initiatives are: the launching of two independent magazines, promoting education in the humanities, actions to stimulate free public debate, and efforts to protect human rights of children.

The third and last way in which humanism contributes to the strengthening of civil society and European integration, lies in its international aspect. Inclusion into one European society is forwarded by the Central and Eastern humanist movements, by the fact that they have established many inter-European contacts with other humanist (or humanist related) organizations.

International humanist organizations as the European Humanist Federation and the International Humanist and Ethical Union also promoted this integration. Which leads to the conclusion that both national and international humanist organizations, are contributing to what in these times of globalization is becoming more and more a 'global civil society'. The establishment of these trans-national contacts will in due time automatically improve mutual integration of the Eastern and Western half of Europe at the level of civil society.

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