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A PECULIAR CONTRIBUTION OF THE SLOVAK MEDIA TO THE LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE IN POST-COMMUNIST SLOVAKIA[1]

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The author outlines the development of confidence in the institutions of representative democracy in the 1990s in Slovakia. She shows that in its first weeks, the Velvet Revolution became closely intertwined with the process of testing the trustworthiness of various kinds of leaders and managers at all levels of political and economic (working) life. The active participation of people in these processes went hand in hand with increase of social trust and civic self-confidence, documented by the public opinion polls of that period. Then the author focuses on the rapid decline in trust in the 1990 and considers possibility of various factors that might contribute to its decline. She gives the main attention to the Slovak media and puts forwards the hypothesis that the way the media had represented the privatization process of the Slovak economy exerted a negative impact upon the self-confidence of citizens. She suggested that mainly the extensive play with a law of the jungle metaphor could deepen the sense of civic powerlessness in the face of the new economic and ruling élite.

Two stories can be told about political trust (confidence in public and political institutions) in postcommunist Slovakia: a more optimistic and a more pessimistic one. An optimistic story is based on the comparison of the data collected by the European Value Study in 1991 and 1999. The story suggests that from the 1991 to the 1999, there was a slight but clear increase in Slovak people's confidence in the democratic institutions. Table 1 shows this increase. The confidence increase is, however, made a bit misty by the increase of "do not know" answers.

[1] The first version of this paper was presented on the international seminar Confiance et transition démocratique dans l'Europe postcommuniste: les analyses de psychologie sociale, de sociologie et de philosophie politique held at Maison Suger, Paris, 8-9 June 2000. I thank Ivana Marková for inviting me to think about the topic, and the Slovak Grant Agency VEGA for funding my research project Collective Representations, Common Sense and Sociological Analysis (No 2/5132/98), in the context of which I have worked on this paper.

Table 1: The degree of confidence in selected institutions in 1991 and 1999

Slovakia	Church		Press		Parliament		Judicial sys		Education		Eur.Union	
year	1991	**1999**	1991	**1999**	1991	**1999**	1991	**1999**	1991	**1999**	1991	**1999**
do not know	0.9	**6.0**	1.5	**4.8**	1.7	**9.8**	1.8	**8.8**	0.9	**5.6**	4.9	**19.7**
Trust a great deal and almost	49.2	**64.6**	39.7	**46.8**	28.4	**38.6**	44.3	**32.4**	68.8	**72.0**	42.6	**43.8**
not very much not at all	40.0	**19.3**	58.8	**48.5**	69.9	**51.6**	53.8	**58.8**	30.4	**22.3**	52.4	**36.5**
total	100.	**100.**	100.	**100.**	100.	**100.**	100.	**100.**	100.	**100.**	100.	**100.**

I choose the second, more pessimistic story. It is the story, English people would say, of how in (Czecho)Slovakia, people missed the boat. This story starts earlier – in 1989. Its main plot is how enormous social capital of political trust of the winter of 1989 could vanish away and how it was that the withdrawal of peoples' hopes in just competition and the possibility of participatory democracy was done so peacefully.

Though my 'velvet revolution' experiences were fleeting, they were strong enough to doubt the socialization or cultural determinism as the appropriate explanation model. I chose the institutional or political performance approach to the issue of political trust (Rose et al., 1997, Mishler, W., Rose, R., 1999) as a framing narrative of my story. My story tries to show that the media representations of the rules of political and economic life in Slovakia substantially contributed to the decrease of the political confidence and self-confidence of citizens. I argue that it was the prevalent descriptions of the privatization process that entered into relations with and continued traditional fatalist expectations of the nobs' arbitrariness in dealing with the law and nourished the feeling of civil helplessness.[2] In other words, my story suggests that it is not only a repressive state, but also the media discourse that significantly contributes to, as Richard Rose put it, enlarging or narrowing the neck of the 'hour glass society' (Rose et al, 1997: 7).

Past tense of confidence

The high confidence people in Slovakia (Czechoslovakia) had in organizational forms of social life during the first weeks of the Velvet Revolution, is nearly forgotten. No wonder. It is difficult to keep the memory of things that cannot be com-

[2] My argument is based mainly on the findings of the economic privatization discourse study done in the mid-1990s. I will describe the study later in this text.

bined with one's long-term and/or dominant experiences. The Velvet Revolution political capital did not live to Ivan Szelenyi's cross-national social stratification survey in 1993. Szelenyi's survey (also) studied the ideas people in postcommunist countries had about the importance of various preconditions for upward social mobility before November 1989 and in the present. The comparison of people's views on the past and present social conditions of upward social mobility was striking, at least in Slovakia. The survey findings suggested that nothing had changed since the fall of totalitarian regime. People in Slovakia continue to take the *mobilization of informal networks* ("to know people in the right place") as *the most effective instrument* of social and economic advance (Tuček, M., 1994, Kusá, 1995a).

The findings of the same (highest) relevance of networks "before 1989 and now" suggest the stability of collective representations of social rules and seemingly support the "socialization" explanation. Besides personal experiences and various archive materials (that can be, of course, doubted as lacking representativity) there are the findings of representative public opinion surveys of the similar topic held before the political change (August 1989), just after (January 1989) and in the "stabilized" period of 1993. These findings summarized in Table 2, describe the issue differently.

Table 2: "What is the relevance now in selecting people for posts in the state administration and organizations controlled by the state?"

Period	August 1989	January 1990	February 1993
Expert and professional competence	43%	56%	29%
Educational credentials	48%	53%	17%
Connections, friendly and kinship terms	**60%**	**35%**	**62%**
Opinion of fellow workers' group	**6%**	**34%**	**4%**
Organization skills	20%	29%	14%
Moral qualities	9%	24%	8%
Political membership	**57%**	**17%**	**53%**
Other	3%	6%	4%

My summaries (Kusá, 1995b) of the findings of a series of the surveys carried out by the Institute for Public Opinion Research by The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic in the framework of the project Processes of Political Control in Citizens' Eyes (Názory 1990, No. 1, Názory 1993, No. 1).

Table 2 suggests that in January 1990, there was a remarkable shift in collective beliefs: the belief in the relevance of expert competence, the opinion of the fellow workers' group, and moral qualities for a professional career significantly increased. There was also a significant decrease in beliefs in the relevance of party membership and connections. However, in February 1993, the confidence pendulum returns on its original place.

I do not wish to suggest that the media solely provide experiences and representations of the social world. Indeed, the Velvet Revolution was held *both* on the main squares of cities (and then workplaces and local councils) and in the media. The media multiplied and strengthened people's experiences and their courage to face them. Therefore, I say that the changes in collective beliefs recorded in January 1990 (Table 2) do not reflect only the Velvet Revolution *moral vocabulary* and hopes that were multiplied and disseminated by the media. Traditional (dis)beliefs were also eroded by the extensive personal changes in leading positions in nearly all formal (economic, cultural, political, sport, etc.) organizations. And mainly, by the fact that these changes had the form of a *local plebiscite* – so-called "confidence giving".

Confidence giving to superiors, chiefs and managers was a part of "social dialogues" spontaneously organized at workplaces and in local communities. Public voting about the confidence of managers and superiors was the revolutionary instrument of removing the managers who had obtained their posts due their communist party membership. In January and February 1990, the confidence giving did not have any centrally established rules (the media, however, disseminated the pattern by the reports of the confidence giving held in the increasing number of workplaces). For the majority of people, it was the first opportunity to express their views publicly and to take part in decision-making concerning their managers' career (more see in Kusá, 1997). This direct political participation and associated experiences of the relevance of fellow workers' opinion, were not preserved.[3]

Why media?

It seems a truism to emphasize the crucial role of media discourse[4] in reproduction of collective beliefs. Media supply our imagination by basic construction materials and rules of their organization. They can reproduce such representations of the rules of social life that encourage people's confidence in their civil entitlement and competence. Or, the other way around, representations may make people perceive themselves again as "helpless citizens".

What is taken for granted, goes without saying and often remains apart from one's attention, apart from the insider's attention, and apart from (mainstream) sociology's attention. This holds true for the role of media in postcommunist countries. There are only a few studies that focus on the analysis of how representations

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[3] In the case of top managers' posts, they were substituted by standard public competition even before the first democratic elections in June 1990. The decision was undoubtedly urged by the significant decrease of political preferences of the leading political subject of the Velvet Revolution in Slovakia – the civil movement *Public against Violence* that could be associated with confidence giving processes, compared by "touched" people to "political purges". For more about the processes see: Kusá, 1996.

[4] With B. Lincoln and many others, I understand the discourse as, in addition to force, the chief means of construction of society that "may be strategically employed to mystify the inevitable inequities of any social order and to win the consent of those over whom the power is exercised, and thereby obviating the need for the direct coercive use of force" (Lincoln, B., 1992).

of certain phenomena are constructed in particular newspapers, television, etc.[5] My mid-1990s analysis of the newspaper economic privatization discourse[6] was a modest attempt to at least partly fill a gap in this domain.

An important finding of my study was that in spite of the different status of their authors (politicians, public servants, journalists, social scientists, lay people writing letters to editors), the articles dealing with the topic of "upward economic mobility and its conditions" *did not differ in the level of factuality, details or abstraction.* Each category of authors (the élite, "mediators", lay persons) tended to describe their privatization experiences and views *on a very general level.* Neither lay people nor top politicians proved their standpoints by factual reports; they "illustrated" them by assumptions, hints and vague allusions. Moreover, during the period of the study (September 1994 – March 1995), except three brief reports on a lawsuit against a mayor accused of taking bribes and a report on lower rank policemen taking bribes, no other information about lawsuits against public representatives accused of corruption or misuse of their posts appeared (see Kusá, 1996).

In the examined period, *"power of connections"* belonged to the stable and fundamental elements of collective representations of social life. Many articles indicated that social (economic) competition was controlled by informal networks. Representations suggesting that informal networks were more influential than the achievements in the selection of top officials could hardly leave no scratch on the trustworthiness of the described institutions.[7]

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[5] There are studies of the freedom of media (see for instance J. Drucker, 1993) and objectivity of information; and the issue of objectivity is reduced to proportionality of representation of the parliamentary political party voices that is permanently observed by the Radio and TV Broadcasting License Council. Less focus is available on the professionality of informing (Školkay, 1996) and the way of social problems construction (Bunčák, Harmádyová, 1996a, 1996b).

[6] The study was done in the context of my research project Functions of Social Networks in Developing the social mobility opportunities and in the moments of social decline (1995-97) Most of the texts under study were articles from between September 1994 and March 1995 in the former Communist Party daily Pravda, and its weekend issue Nedeľná Pravda and the left-wing weekly journal Nové slovo bez rešpektu. This selection was based on the assumption that the journalists and other contributors would have "traditionally" rather critical attitudes towards the post-communist élite in power and therefore would be more alert towards the contingent disharmonies between the declared ideals of free social competition, democratic access to information, the supreme relevance of achievement criteria and the actual everyday institutional practice. For analytical aims, the texts were classified into three categories according to the power position of their authors: 1. élite's investments, 2. mediators (journalists, social scientists) and 3. lay persons investments. For the details see Kusá, 1995, 1996.

[7] The operation of informal networks, especially among the élite, appears as contradictory to the basic preconditions of a democracy (Rose, 1997) especially to a free and equal competition among the members of a society. That is why the élite's inclination to networking should be "restrained by the specific structural arrangements, that could guarantee at least a relative autonomy of political and economic élite" (Etzioni-Halevy, Eva, 1990). The institutionalization of such arrangements might be, however, slowed down, if not prevented, by *winning the consent of people with the mystification of incorrigible characteristics of social life.*

The idea of decisive impact of informal networks, which, according to Ivo Možný had finally managed to colonize even the communist state (Možný, 1990), was also operative in the sociological transformation discourse. As I showed elsewhere (Kusá, 1995), the mid-1990's sociological diagnosis resembled the media discourse in its empirically unsupported theorizing about the dysfunctional operation of informal networks. It seems that nobody – scientists, journalists, politicians and "ordinary" citizens – had a need (and possibility) to demonstrate the cases of breaking the rules of just social competition by connections and corruption. The taken-for-granted omnipresence and omnipotence of connections was a part of common knowledge that did not require any further testing (Kusá, 1995).

A jungle law metaphor

Economic privatization discourse started at the beginning of the 1990s. From the outset, it had doubted legal warrants of the promised "just competition". The privatization discourse in the press has provided the prolific soil of parables and allusions that strengthened and "proved" the collective belief in dishonest and illegal ways to property.[8] The doubting climate seemed to reach its peak in the mid-1990s in the metaphor of the law of the jungle. The law of the jungle metaphor, like all metaphors, served as a "parable that helps people to make sense of their experiences, assumptions or suspicions" (Lakoff, G., Johnson, M., 1980).

Representation of the privatization process in Slovakia and the Slovak way of developing democracy and the market economy as the power of the law of the jungle was also common for all sorts of contributors to the public discourse.[9] Their articles did not focus on problematic provisions and regulations in particular acts. They were engaged in a *general critique of the legal purity of privatization*. The law of the jungle metaphor was an efficient armoury in this critique. It offers devices for understanding "the rules" of the privatization process and of the recruitment of the emerging affluent strata. It suggested that the privatization (jungle) is a mysterious chaos beyond ordinary people's recognition. That it is no use to call for an unbiased judge. The jungle is a world without morals, or at least, morals do not have relevance. The jungle then is not favourable to survival of cultural beings (Kusá, Z., 1995).

The significant factor was that the law of the jungle metaphor was not *employed only by "ordinary people"* who lacked information. It was also used and developed by the actors who are considered to have thorough knowledge of the situation, such

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[8] In the mid 1990s, 83% of Slovak population held the opinion, that at the time, people in Slovakia grew rich mostly by "dishonest ways" (Rosová, Kuska, 1995).

[9] The sharp critique of the legal purity of privatization was developed by right-wing politicians as well, when they were in political opposition and were excluded from the privatization decision making. The privatization organized by the former government is considered by the present government to be the main source of the economic problems of the country – it is said to have been led by political commitments and not by economic efficiency criteria.

as politicians, officials or public prosecutors. Even they satisfied themselves with "general summaries" of the situation instead of giving detailed descriptions of the cases of misuse of power. Why did they describe the privatization process in that way? Instead of trying to answer such a malicious question,[10] I would rather put a different one: What could a reader infer from this practice? I think that the suggestions that even the most competent and informed actors failed to give a good overview in the privatization cases, strengthened the assumption that in such a complex issue, an ordinary citizen has no chance to know the ropes.

Thus, the law of the jungle metaphor nourished the mistrust in the legal system, in the generally binding nature of law and its observance by the political elite. In its (dark light), the way out could hardly be seen in elaboration and improvement of legal warrants and their *public control.* The only resolution how to take the nation out of the jungle was to put enlightened moral politicians and unbiased experts in power...

Character as a necessary guarantee of observation of law

The majority of programmes of political parties in the 1994 Parliamentary elections[11] relied upon and used citizens' mistrust in the legal purity of social life. Promises to improve legislation after being elected were often linked with presenting the party as an association of fair people, determined to purify social life. The excessive drawing from the moralistic vocabulary in self-presentation of political parties was apparently led by the effort to meet the popular demand for "moral politicians".[12] This demand is, in my view, the reverse side of the belief in the fragility and insufficiency of the present legal order.

The 1994 election programmes shared the view that the observance of law was not a natural matter. They suggested that observance of law requires people of firm principles, or even courage and valour. It can be said that the campaign rhetoric brushed up collective representations of "obvious misuse of the public posts for private economic interests" and gave them fresh "evidence". On the other hand, the idea of *public control* went into deeper shade. No political programme stressed the

[10] The analysis of their motives could be only a speculation. However, if we link a well-known fact that the core of the emerging proprietors' strata was former managers of communist state firms and the fact that the press under study was the former Communist Party daily, we can form a hypothesis about an inclination, to supportive or at least considerate relations between the left wing journalists and left wing proprietors. This considerate relation could mirror in a 'factless' and abstract critique of economic privatization.

[11] The study of party Electoral Programmes was the part of the privatization discourse study – see Kusá, 1995, 1996.

[12] The findings of the Institute for Public Opinion Research survey "Which kind of politicians do the citizens of Slovakia trust?" carried in April 1 – 8, 1994 show that the leading one was "fairness, sense of honour, justice" – 56% of respondents. "Solid expert knowledge and professionalism" – set out by 42% of respondents – was also in demand (Názory, Vol. 1994, No. 2).

necessity to improve the public information and to make the public participating in the control of privatization or other decision-making.[13]

Civil competence versus expert view

People from the post-communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe call for experts. The Slovak population is the most united in this call.[14] I assume that the call for experts could be inversely proportional to the feeling of civic helplessness. Calls for experts (so tempting for social scientists) can indicate the absence of the organizational forms that would mediate people' opinions, needs and interests to those who make large scale decisions.[15] Experts seem to be taken as the warrant of an unbiased (not led by individual private interests) decision-making. The ideal of "*experts governing the country*" is going to replace the (nearly forgotten) ideal of *social dialogue and civil participation* (participatory democracy).

The above presented brief view back was to suggest that the Slovak press in the mid-1990s did not operate as a public control mechanism. It exerted the role of a mourning person that reads loudly complaints on miserable fate that have to be repeated in chorus. The abstract and snivelling form of media discourse in Slovakia was also shared by top politicians. Their "arguments" as well as missing experiences of positive social integration and public control of the political élite[16] helped to stabilize the representation of the "eternity" of the élite standing above the law. This "true picture" of social life was reinforced by the feeling of distance between one's daily troubles and the interests of the political élite as well as disbelief in one's own impact on improvement of social life. The mourning media discourse could be seen as the agency that significantly narrowed the point between the top and the bottom parts of the "glass hour society".

At the end of the 1990s, the media discourse has become more positively and less vaguely focused on the topics of the rule of law and quality of the judicial (legal) system in Slovakia. The topic frequency increased due the ambition of Slovakia to meet the "pre-entry requirements" of the European Commission and

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[13] The Act on Free Access to Information (passed on 17 May 2000) is a partial correction of this long-term gap in public control and citizen participation. However, its main emphasis is on individual effort and seeking the information and not on the elite's (powerful actors – public servants) obligation to make their actions publicly accountable.

[14] According to New Democracies Barometer III, respondents from Slovakia are the most keen to agree (89% respondents) that the most important decisions about the economy should be made by experts and not by the government and Parliament (Rose, 1997b: 26).

[15] They can of course indicate the fatigue of the forced participation and political activity in the past, the resigned fatigue because of the exhaustion by survival troubles and overall lack of free time of people in Slovakia.

[16] Without positive examples and knowledge of procedural rules that would commit the élites to account for their acts, the idea of positive integration seems a mere Utopia.

join the European Union. The pre-entry requirements create the dominant frame for interpretation and evaluation of social reality in the country. And it is not an exaggeration to say that references to European Union standpoints are made the final argument in the majority of political discussions.

However, the development of the rule of law and warranted civil rights do not seem sufficient to increase the self-confidence of citizens and encourage their political confidence and participation. On the contrary. We observe citizens' reconciliation with their "civil helplessness" and lack of confidence in their ability to play an informed part in public life.

Besides the legal system approximation and balanced state budget, the present political discourse in Slovakia makes *maintenance of social peace* the most urgent requirement of the European Union. The requirement of social peace seems to be taken (by politicians, journalists and, probably by social scientists, too) as potentially threatened by revitalizing public discussion and participation.

It is understandable that the government is not keen to initiate discussion about problems like unemployment rate (20%) because to discuss the problem might multiply its volume. However, not only the politicians in power, but journalists as well, discourage public discussion. The reports from trade union actions (for instance, from negotiations concerning the railway workers trade union warning strike in January 2000) comprise, as a rule, warnings that the European Union (and institutions like the NATO or the World Bank) would take strikes and demonstrations as indications of undesirable instability, that is, a potential danger to Slovakia's integration effort. The trade unions are often criticized for populism and indirectly assisting the political opposition that growing influence is not internationally wished.

Expropriation of public space

The present Slovak government (since the 1998 elections) seems to win international recognition as a democratic one. However, there are but few traces of the resurrection of the public participation idea. Social scientists who sharply criticized the government of Vladimír Mečiar (1994 – 1998) for authoritarianism, are not attempting to revive public discussion about social problems and strategies to overcome the economic crisis. It seems that their fear of the political opposition's misuse of social science discourse restricts their public activism. Voluntary disciplined thinking is intensified by 'pre-entrance' anxiety.[17] Some activities of social scientists seem to directly contradict the need to support public confidence. I will briefly illustrate such a practice on the two following examples.

[17] The anxiety could be higher in Slovakia in comparison to the other post-communist countries not only because of economic and political troubles but also due the complications of international political acceptance of the country under the period of the government of Vladimír Mečiar (1994 – 1998).

The first example is the agreement on the preparation of social insurance reform signed by the representatives of all parliamentary political parties.[18] The Proclamation document was published in the journal of the research institute of the Ministry of Social Affairs and on the Internet in the autumn 1999. It did not attract the attention of journalists or social scientists, though agreement between the "coalition and opposition" political parties is a very rare event. It is noteworthy, that though (except one) all the signatories of the Proclamation are active politicians, they labelled themselves several times as "experts". All the parliamentary parties (represented by their "experts") commit themselves to professional and unbiased reform of the pension system. Further, though the reform objective is the well being of citizens, the Proclamation states that solely the experts are charged with designing the way to this well-being. At the same time, the Proclamation warns against populism. By this, the document opens the possibility to label any critical view on the reform as a populist one. It disqualifies alternative views on the social security reform in advance, as well as the possibility to negotiate its course or speed. The unity of the political élite in valuing the expert discussion and refusal of populism as established by the Proclamation, can be interpreted as shared unwillingness to listen to and represent public views on the reform work that would come from the "bottom". This unwillingness is, however, not criticized by social scientists.

The second example refers to the standardized pre-structured questionnaire introduced under the headline "An invitation to take part in the discussion about the social insurance reform" on the internet web side of the Ministry of Social Affairs in the autumn 1999 (more in Kusá, 1999). This surprising encounter with a questionnaire in place of the expected and promised public discussion can have two dangerous consequences: the naturalization of the substitution of discussion with disciplining practices and premature reduction of public space on the Internet.[19] It is embarrassing that this interchange has been done under the auspices of the sociologists from the Ministry of Social Affairs who – ten years ago – belonged to the advocates of T. G. Masaryk's definition of democracy as identical with (public) discussion.

These two examples suggest problematic development of citizens' confidence in the organizational forms which should (or could) represent their interests in Slovakia. Undoubtedly, there are more painfully experienced problems in the country: the dramatically high unemployment rate, decline of living standards... However, I see the most treacherous aspect of social development in the *chronically limited public discussion*. By public discussion I do not mean the discussion in the radio or television broadcasting in which social scientists present their views. Of

[18] I include and analyse the full text of Proclamation of the experts of parliamentary political parties and movements on social insurance reform in Kusá, 1999. The text is originally published in Vyhlásenie... 1999.

[19] At present, the majority of Slovak households are without access to the internet. However, the new legislation, for instance, the Act on Free Access to information passed on 17 May 2000, defines the placing of information on the internet as sufficient for defining it as publicly accessible.

course, there have been many discussions of experts held in front of the public (divided from the public by the TV set glass wall). By public discussion I mean the missing discussion in which social scientists would rather secure and protect the presence of various voices, views and experiences.[20]

Social scientists do not call for public discussions of this kind. Some are, perhaps, afraid of mobilization of the public and a threat to social peace. Others identify with their expert role and consider the public involvement of ordinary people as useless and retarding. Social scientists could also be convinced that only the experts are entitled to discuss about public issues.

Conclusions

My story about the confidence in political and public institutions in Slovakia has focused on the mass media and the state of media discourse as the main (negative) hero. Of course, it is an oversimplification and there are also other factors that contribute to the narrowed neck of the "glass hour society". It is impossible to do justice to all of them in one article. However, my main objective was to show that the negative integration or even negative atomisation of society (Rose et al, 1997) can be sustained not only by a repressive state but also by the media that nourish and disseminate sceptical views[21] on the possibility of improving the legal standards of social life, beliefs in fragility and insufficiency of the present legal order and the feeling of civic helplessness.

I tried to suggest how media discourse could contribute to discreet and peaceful withdrawal of the citizens from their November 1989 hopes. The world of the media significantly frames our lives. We can escape from their collective representations, vocabularies, and schemes of reasoning but with enormous difficulties. If the media describe the social world as "a complex and chaotic jungle" where even the most informed social actors are unable to orient themselves, it is only natural that

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[20] One student has formed the hypothesis (during analysis of the Proclamation of experts) that the Proclamation contributes to the shift of the meaning of public discussion: the representation of the discussion that *various groups of the public take part in* and discuss the issues that concern them is substituted by the representation of the experts who discuss the issues of public life *in front of the eyes of the public,* but beyond their reach. The emphasis on the professionality ("expertness") establishes the preconditions for entering the public discourse. "Citizenship" does not seem to be the sufficient precondition anymore... (Bunčák, M., 1999).

[21] As a sort of practical testing the citizens' belief in the positive effect of political participation we can take the Referendum on the Act on giving evidence of the origin of capital used in privatization, held in October 1994. The Referendum was the first general voting in the Slovak Republic. For only 19.96 per cent of authorized voters took part in it, according to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, that establishes as the precondition of Referendum validity the participation of absolute majority of voters, the outcomes of Referendum were invalid. I tried to reconstruct the unique (discouraging) rhetoric of Referendum campaign in Kusá, Z: 1996b. *In spite of prevailing opinion of Slovak population, that emerging rich strata acquire the sources of property mostly by "dishonest" way, people showed a minimum interest in participation in the plebiscite.*

individuals conscious of their isolation and distance from organizational forms (Rose et al, 1997) give up any public criticism.

I have suggested that the way the economic privatization process was described in the public discourse, has deepened the mistrust in its legal purity and people's expectations of élite arbitrariness in dealing with law. Further, the collective representations of social rules based on the metaphor of the law of the jungle stimulate people to see the only resolution in moral politicians and (later, when the legal system became more transparent but still too complex for lay persons) in experts. Party electoral programmes (1994 campaign) counted on this demand. I have also argued that the mid-1990s media discourse legitimized the practice of releasing general self-evident truths (or, recycling common sense, as Gerard Duveen put it in the discussion of this paper*) instead of factual evidence*; it has turned them into a competent entry and valid discourse contribution. The practice has turned into a habit that vague and sloppily supported or groundless claims were taken as granted (and by that legitimized). I have pointed out that in the period of the study, the left -wing press did not publish texts that supported the idea of civil participation, improving public informedness and legal and structural arrangements that would secure the public accountability of the political and economic élite.

I have also suggested that in the present period, we can observe the tendency to renounce the claims to "supervise" public issues and to free the public space for the rule of (enlightened) experts. This tendency, that has got the quiet agreement of political scientists, seems to be rational resolution empowering Slovakia in the tough competition between the post-communist countries to meet the European Union pre-entrance requirements. Preferring expert views to lengthy and tedious discussions with people will clearly enable the government and Parliament to pass new acts and provisions quickly and economically. I think, however, that the subordination to "speed and efficiency" criteria can also be dangerous. In a long-term perspective, leaving the public discourse means to leave the basic space where people's competence[22] to organize and perform the supervision (control of) public issues could be developed. Though common for the decades, it is still embarrassing to observe social scientists helping to expropriate the public from the public space and consign this space to the experts.

In the exciting periods like winter 1989, nobody worried about how passing civil confidence and trust could be. Only a few suspected there was not any boat. Yes, it was not. We did not miss the boat. We, in fact, missed the opportunity to start constructing it. To construct warrants, underpinnings, pillars of the confidence in organizing intermediate forms of social life. To acquire confidence is not a single one-off event. To acquire confidence requires permanent efforts of many kinds. It means that its building should be started in several places, including mass media discourse. The

[22] The declining civil courage and self-confidence is clear from the increase of the confused ("I do not know") answers in EVS 1999 survey (see table 1, 3, 4).

efforts of institutionalization of structural arrangements that could secure more transparency and accountability in public life, might be, however, slowed down, if not prevented, by people's belief in incorrigible characteristics of social life.

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