

Restarting from scratch

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

Julia J.R. Doets

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Introduction

Inclusion and exclusion are direct results of how the concepts of human dignity, equality and justice are valued. This holds true for the present European Union (EU) but is even more topical now that ten new countries will join the Union in May 2004 and another four countries in 2007. Therefore at the moment, a major process of reorientation on the question how to construct stable - and for most citizens as comfortable - societies is going on, in both 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 is essential for the future of Europe that it is carefully considered 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 organised to contribute to a strong 'civil society'.

In this thinking of how to organize societies, of course the way states are organized on a governmental level, is a main point of focus. This is where most of the subsidies from the European Union go to at the moment. But a part from that, there is the other non-governmental part of a society. This now is a subject coming more and more into prominence, because the non-governmental level e.g. the civil society, turns out to be almost as important as the official governmental level. Definitely if looked upon from the point of view of the individual perception of one's freedom and possibilities to make actively use of one's citizenship. Especially the rebuilding of civil societies in Central and Eastern Europe that had been practically absent till 1989 for decades, will need attention.

Of course all kind of ideas from different disciplines could help to orientate oneself on the question of how to strengthen civil society. This essay is in that sense written from a normative perspective, because it explicitly looks into the possibilities that humanism (a shared cultural-historical phenomenon in both Western and Central and Eastern Europe) could offer on this subject.

In this essay 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 out the conviction that the existence of civil society is a must for inclusion of the Central and Eastern European new member states into the European Union.

Structure wise, in Chapter One, the research question will be introduced. The term 'civil society' will be explained. Likewise it will be made clear, why the connection between the need for the existence of civil society on the one hand, and the integration of Europe on the other hand, is made.

Chapter Two investigates the reasons why humanism might or might not be an option in civil society rebuilding. It will discuss core elements of humanism that might be relevant to strengthening civil society. Both theoretical and practical humanism are examined for this.

In Chapter Three, an answer is given to the question on how these selected topics from humanist philosophy of life could be relevant in strengthening civil society when put into practise. As an empirical example, humanism in Poland is taken as a case study.

Finally - in the conclusion - the balance will be drawn up, to see to which extent humanism can function as source of inspiration to rebuild and strengthen civil society.

Chapter one

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

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 essay - which is part of a bigger project on the theme of in- and exclusion in Europe - consequently is: **In what way humanism as a philosophy of life in theory, and humanist initiatives in practise, can play a part in strengthening civil society in the future new member states of the European Union?**

Now first of all we have to look into the term 'civil society'. What does it mean and why is it important for a future 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? From here on to indicate the new member states, the usual abbreviation CEE (standing for Central and Eastern Europe, which also includes the Baltic states) will be used.¹

Of course one must realize that the current situation in all new member states is different. As it was also very different during the communist era.² Only when there is dealt with common problems this term CEE will be used. For the rest specific countries will be indicated when talking about situations on the national level.

1.2. What is meant by 'civil society'?

Originally the precursor of the term 'civil society' under the name of what he called a 'koinonia politike' was invented by Aristotle. He introduced the idea of a 'community' as: 'a collection 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

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.

call the civil society.³ Later in classical antiquity Cicero invented the term 'societas civilis'. Hereby was meant: 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 a ecclesiastical society.⁵

Also John Locke (1632-1704), who can be seen as the inventor of the literal, English term '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 themselves were in perpetual fear of their rivals. So man had come together and formed political societies. They had entrusted sovereigns or civil rulers with power over them. It is important to stress the word entrusted, for Locke did not believe that the authority of the civil ruler was ever absolute, it was a trust and therefore revocable.⁶ For him the political and civil society were taken to be the same thing and this contrasted with paternal authority and the state of nature. A state of nature which according to the political scientist John Dunn can come back, whenever civil society is absent. According to him this is what happened for example during the wars in the former Yugoslavia.⁷

Where Locke has brought in the term itself, Hegel brings in the contemporary notion of the term. He is seen as a pivotal figure in the discussion about how do define the 'civil society' by introducing 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 The civil society is by him seen as a new space that had existed in Europe already since the year 1200, especially in the guild mentality, but that had even opened up more with the nineteenth-century traditions of civil associations. This was the sphere in which could flourish subjective freedom, higher spheres of art, religion and philosophy, who by nature transcend the

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.

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

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

boundaries of the state.⁹ This might seem a bit of an elaborate introduction to the term, but it is of importance for one's ability to trace back different aspects of the currently used term.

So back 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 movements such as *Solidarity* in Poland, *Civic Forum* in Czechoslovakia, and *Charta '77*.¹¹ The term civil society was used to indicate every oppositional power to the state. And became thereby the name for a lot of different concepts that had to do with initiatives to transform the former Eastern bloc into democracies. So where do we stand today in the debate on how to define the 'civil society'?

Civil society is by its popularity nowadays almost become what one would call philosophically a 'family concept'. That means that a concept has a lot of different aspects, who all refer to same term, and who are unmistakably interrelated, but are not necessarily similar. This means it has become impossible to formulate a definition that covers all aspects of all theories that are currently busy describing this theme. Because of this impossibility, I tried instead of being inclusive, to find the common factor in all these discussions. This leads to defining civil society as: the conceptual space distinct from, and between, the state, the individual and the market. This means it can be everything from a football club, to a political party to a debating club, to an organization of housewives.

At the moment the most relevant visions on civil society in philosophy and sociology come from the communitarian, the liberal, and the radical-democratic think-tanks in the Western world. Leading figures formulating ideas on civil society, that are typical representatives of those movements, are respectively: Michael Walzer, Ralf Dahrendorf, and Jürgen Habermas.¹² Apart from the overall definition given earlier, ideas from each of these currents of thought on civil society will be mentioned. Of course in a way that indicates which concepts or ideas comes from whom.

This sometimes selective approach is legitimised by the fact that - as mentioned in the introduction - this is an normative essay, 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 also infiltrates the descriptive part of the research, let it be clear that the selection of ideas from the above mentioned authors, is

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

sometimes intrinsically normative. Now let's look in a more detailed way into what an (intrinsically a bit normative described) civil society looks like.

1.3. Three poles: state, individual, and market

Although civil society is defined above as the space between and apart from either the state, the individual, or the market, one can imagine that these three poles play an important role in facilitating civil society.¹³

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.¹⁴ We here recognize the classical idea of a state of law as crucial for civil society. The democratic state is most favourable for civil society. Which does not mean it's the only possible state-form in which civil society can flourish. The reason for this is that in a democracy, state and civil society are mutually dependent. Therefore a certain trust from the state in the capacities of its citizens, is necessary.

Communist regimes in contrary have as a characteristic, that they monopolize a lot of spheres. Which makes them very inapt of facilitating civil society, because that ruins all kind of potential in people to start up things themselves, this potential being the very characteristic of civil society. In the next paragraph 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.¹⁵ Former Eastern bloc countries lacked this base, since of course private property was very limited, and economic initiative only came 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.¹⁶

The third pole is that of the individual. The way in which the individual contributes to the civil society is largely dependent of his notion of what is called 'citizenship'. This word has different meanings of which several will be discussed when looking at humanist thoughts

¹³ Charles W. Kegley jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, World politics. Trends and transformation (sixth edition; New York 1997) 11.

¹⁴ Dekker, ed., Civil society, 13.

¹⁵ Kaviraj, ed., Civil society, 15.

¹⁶ Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe, 290.

on civil society in the next chapter. The most important aspect for a civil society can here be described as what Alexis de Tocqueville remarked about it: 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.¹⁷

So how should the civil society relate ideally to these above mentioned three poles? For Dahrendorf, the most important characteristic of a healthy civil society, is that in that space, none of the three poles that serve as preconditions, exert whatever monopoly. Therefore for example the army with its violence monopoly, or universities (except when they are privately funded) do not count as part of the civil society. What does count are the numerous private projects people organize among themselves. Autonomy is therefore one of the main characteristics of civil society projects that are started up by citizens.¹⁸ By which is meant the possibility for people to develop themselves optimally, within the state of law of course.¹⁹

Further more relations in-between 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, the notion of solidarity (of belonging to a community), which in its turn can lead to responsibility for the well-being of the whole community and not only of that of oneself.²⁰ 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. A lot of discussion is going on at the moment in both Western and CE Europe about this topic. For all Western European countries at the moment, the system is putting too much of a financial burden on the economies, because the population is aging. For CEE the question is how to reform the former communist systems in a financially realistic way into welfare states.

Both are tremendous problems, that come even more to the foreground with the expansion of the EU, since then ideally the systems should be able to be combined. Since this is too broad a discussion for this essay, here the term responsibility will be used to indicate

¹⁷ Patrick Stouthuysen, ed., Alexis de Tocqueville: over de democratie in Amerika; tweede boek (Leuven 1993) 48-51.

¹⁸ Ralf Dahrendorf quoted in: Dekker, ed., Civil society, 15.

¹⁹ Ralf Dahrendorf, The modern social conflict, (New York 1988) 14.

²⁰ Dahrendorf in: Dekker, ed., Civil society, 15.

responsibility (for example in the form of voluntary welfare work) in that areas where the state is absent for whatever which reason. ²¹

So now we have seen the form and the key notes of civil society, but what actually is 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 is from the outer attacks of the system with it's everywhere penetrating imperatives. Civil society has - since it is not institutionalised - a limited political en public role, which at the same time is it's power. For when it would become really political it would automatically become institutionalised, and hence part of the system. ²² 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 border clearly in mind is essential to keep civil society from being infiltrated by the system. This is necessary to keep civil society as much as possible a place where communication can take place without all different kinds of power aspects - whether between people or between people and other actors, like the state - playing a role, according to Habermas. ²³

Civil society's main value therefore is, that it is the only place in society as a whole, where people can acquire political competence, can learn to win and loose, can learn to compromise, make friends and allies, and explore oppositionist ideas. 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. ²⁴

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

Looking at the situation in CEE in 1989 after the fall of the Iron Curtain, in the field of civil society major problems existed on all above mentioned aspects. The state under communism had been omnipresent, therefore exerting monopolies over practically all spheres of life. Communist regimes for example sought to encompass all spheres of social activity. ²⁵ Not the optimal conditions for the substantial amount of individual autonomy that is needed for civil

²¹ 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.

²² J. Habermas, De nieuwe overzichtelijkheid en andere opstellen (Meppel/Amsterdam 1989) 52.

²³ J. Habermas quoted in: Dekker, ed., Civil society, 82.

²⁴ Walzer, ed., Toward a global civil society, 81.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 31.

society to exist. On the contrary: communist regimes paralysed all private initiatives, and destroyed all coping abilities of its citizens through over regulation and legal insecurity, that led to exclusion of everybody who did not adjust to the system.²⁶ Autonomy within people was highly discouraged.²⁷ Social homogeneity on the other side was promoted in everyway possible.²⁸

Concerning the economy in communist states, the absence of private property and any form of market mechanism, is all too known. This is a big problem in rebuilding civil society since the know-how to organize associations financially lacked completely.²⁹ People who had not been part of the nomenclature, were for example not trained in administrative jobs.³⁰

Key notes of civil society as autonomy, solidarity and responsibility were there fore 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. Which in it's turn led to the loss of responsibility.³¹

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 how to express themselves and organize themselves in organizations coming of their own inspiration.³²

Of course one has to understand there were big differences between the countries of CEE, concerning the state in which civil society found itself after decennia of communist rule. Therefore only common features were mentioned above.³³ The paradox in *all* CEE countries however is that the state in first instance - although explicitly not being part of it - will have to play an active role in rebuilding 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 upon tax exemptions. Labour unions need legal recognition and professional associations need state support for their licensing procedures. And it needs to be stressed again: across the entire range of

²⁶ Holmes and Murray, ed., Citizenship and identity in Europe, 129-135.

²⁷ Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe, 288.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 269.

²⁹ Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe. European Humanist Federation. Secretariat for Central and Eastern Europe (Berlin 1996) 17 and further.

³⁰ Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe, 286.

³¹ J. Habermas quoted in: Dekker, ed., Civil society, 40-42.

³² Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe, 298.

³³ For more information about these differences see: Kennedy, Preparing for the twenty-first century, 216 and 251.

association, individual men and women need to be protected against the power of officials, employers, experts, party bosses, factory foremen, directors, priests and parents, by a state of law. Small and weak groups need to be protected against large and powerful ones.³⁴ For civil society left to itself, generates radically unequal power relationships, as already concluded by John Locke.

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

First something about the term 'inclusion'. An as quick and complete integration as possible 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. There fore, from here on, integration and inclusion will be used as synonyms when discussing the beneficial effects of strengthening civil society as means of inclusion *casu quo* integration. The question is why would this strengthening of civil society be constructive in the process of integration in the first part?

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

When the Wall came down, the question there fore was not *whether* the integration of Eastern and Western Europe should take place, but rather *how* it should take place?³⁵ Geographically it might not be that clear where Europe begins or ends, but all European countries are so interwoven historically that that bond can not be denied.³⁶

Further more all present and future member states agree on the fact that the future of Europe lies in a *democratic* Europe. Which by the way doesn't mean that at the moment the present EU member states are not confronted with problems of democratic deficits and threats

³⁴ Dekker, ed., Civil society, 35-38.

³⁵ Derek W. Urwin, The community of Europe. A history of European integration since 1945 (New York 1993; seventh edition) 229-246.

³⁶ 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 the concept of a 'Europe of the regions'. For more information on this subject see: Kennedy, Preparing for the twenty-first century, 256-289.

to the existence of civil society. Also in the present EU member states, the by Habermas reckoned colonisation of civil society by the system, is at hand.

Since this overall agreement on the necessity to come to a form of integration of the Western and Eastern half of Europe, research started on which already existing structures could be used to promote this integration. It hence was simple to conclude that the European Economic Community (the present EU), was the most promising game in town.³⁷ 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 (which was by that time still the European Economic Community) would be the development of: 1) democratic institutions and the rule of law, 2) a market economy, 3) a civil society.³⁸

First of all the focus of CEE countries themselves and that of the EU as well, was on the economical and political transition. A lot of money was pumped into starting up market economies, and to try and organize democratic elections. And as we have seen those are very important preconditions for the existence of civil society. But as Milan Kundera already in the beginning of the 90s remarked: Europe is not just a 'common market', it also rests on a values and cultural identity.³⁹ And this is where the importance of civil society comes into view.

Civil society is indispensable in the transition to democracy of CEE and its integration into the EU.⁴⁰ That is because 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.⁴¹ Trust can be both the initiator and the catalyst for cooperation in the international arena. This was the way the EU started initially as well, 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 reason why it could be set up, was an existing feeling of connectedness, of trust.⁴² In the same way civil society could help fortify the notion of Europeanism between citizens of Europe, I would argue.

An important factor for people to trust each other, is to know each others way of life, and 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 aspects in it as compared to their own lives.

³⁷ J. Rubnik, e.a., ed., Challenges in the East (The Hague 1995) 11.

³⁸ R. Dahrendorf quoted in: Rubnik, ed., Challenges in the East, 14.

³⁹ Milan Kundera quoted in: Rubnik, ed., Challenges in the East, 19.

⁴⁰ J.L. Cohen and A. Arato, Civil society and political theory (Cambridge 1992) 2.

⁴¹ Francis Fukuyama, Trust. The social virtues and the creation of prosperity, (New York 1995).

⁴² Urwin, The community of Europe, 43-47.

This mechanism works twofold. 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.

On the other hand 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 the next chapter we'll look into one of the (f)actors that might play a part in strengthening civil society in the future new member states of the European Union.

Chapter Two

Humanist ideas on strengthening civil society

2.1. Introduction

From the previous chapter we could deduct that when rebuilding - and when succeeded strengthening - of civil society will be unsuccessful in CEE, this could lead to exclusion of numerous citizens from the new member countries.⁴³

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

2.2. Common roots and common grounds

The reason why humanism is chosen as subject of research in this paper, is the idea that for several reasons it might be fruitful in this whole discussing on to how organise (civil) society, that is currently held on a European level related to the expansion of the EU, to look into this tradition of thought and practise.

One of those reasons is that when looking at the question: "What are common grounds onto which we want to build society?", already existing common roots, might play a stimulating role as point of departure, or as point of orientation. Humanism is such a tradition that already for centuries plays an important role in European scholarship, when it comes to critical thinking about social structures.⁴⁴

Humanism in it's meaning of Renaissance Humanism, is a culture historical movement, that started of in fifteenth century Italy, and spread over both Eastern (as in Eastern half of) and Western Europe. So that is the first reason to go and see whether this movement could be an option in thinking about rebuilding civil society. Since it - although

⁴³ Marc Morjé Howard, The weakness of civil society in post-communist Europe (Cambridge 2003) 162.

⁴⁴ 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.

started in Italy - soon had not only important representatives in Western and Northern Europe, but also in the Ottoman Empire, Poland and the Balkans. The territories that now form Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltics.⁴⁵

This Humanist movement rediscovered texts from the classical times, and started rethinking the role of man in the world, opposing therewith against fundamental ideas and traditions from the Middle Ages. Those first Renaissance humanists were still men from that medieval era in certain ways though, many of them still being profoundly religious for example. The new thing was that they restarted the discussion about the responsibility of man for his own fate.⁴⁶ Already this sounds of course as a familiar theme, having discussed the conditions for civil society in the previous chapter. Indeed this is the second reason to go and look at humanism as an option for rebuilding civil society. From the beginning onwards humanism has been occupied with themes as autonomy, responsibility, self-realization, abilities to cope, and self-determination of man. 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.

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

Then secondly, research is done about, in what way humanism in the form of practical initiatives, could function as an actor in civil society. Therewith strengthening civil society from within. Although we're here reaching into the practical aspect of humanism, it'll still be the theoretical part of the practical aspects of humanism as an option for strengthening civil society. Description of a real case study, about humanism in Poland, will happen in Chapter Three.

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

Civil society as deduced from the research of the previous chapter, is the conceptual space distinct from, and between the state, the individual and the market. This means civil society

⁴⁵ Eugene F. Rice, jr., and Anthony Grafton, The foundations of early modern Europe, 1460-1559 (second edition; New York 1994) 7, 17, 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).

⁴⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, Over opvoeding en vrije wil (Baarn 1992) 32-26, and 57-76.

covers all associations, private initiatives and clubs, founded by people on their own initiative. These associations might need subsidizing by the state sometimes (although favourably they don't) as we saw, 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'll now look into the humanist ideas on those three key-notes.

Before this is done however, we have to explain a certain term that is often used by humanist scholars when discussing social problems, also when - as in this case - related to civil society. When looking at those three poles: state, individual, and market, all three play an important role in facilitating civil society. But since humanism is a philosophy of life that is mainly concerned with individual responsibility, not surprisingly, 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 which attitude of the individual could be beneficial towards civil society. This typical attitude is accordingly defined as 'European citizenship'.⁴⁷ Now this term citizenship is not the same as the term civil society. Citizenship meant as such by humanists, merely forms the *condition* on the intra-personal level for a flourishing civil society on the inter-personal level. However this notion of citizenship is as it were, preliminary for the functioning of civil society.⁴⁸ 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.

To begin with the key-note of autonomy. Here there is a clear similarity between civil society and humanism. For humanism and humanistics have all to do with an ongoing striving for making society more humane by creating the greatest possible freedom for the individual.⁴⁹ That is to say: to create a society in which human dignity, freedom for human beings, and solidarity are realized.⁵⁰ To humanists human beings are endowed with moral and mental capacities, and therewith try to realize their goals. Also humanism affirms the importance of literature, music, and the visual and performing arts for personal development and fulfilment.

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⁴⁷ 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.

Universiteit voor Humanistiek (Utrecht 1994).

⁴⁸ Dekker, ed., Civil society, 138.

⁴⁹ Website International Humanist and Ethical Union: [Http://www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org).

⁵⁰ Van Houten in: Cliteur and Van Houten, ed., Humanisme, 150.

⁵¹ Website International Humanist and Ethical Union: [Http://www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org).

Humans need freedom, in other words they need to be enabled to live their lives as they see fit.⁵² 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.⁵³ Of course this freedom for self-realization and self-determination as it is also sometimes called, has to be compatible with the freedom of others.⁵⁴ In this way humanism tries to be an alternative or a supplement to religion, where it concerns its effort to give meaning to life.

As we see, there is a clear humanist view on the attitude of the citizen, that ideally would contribute most to the establishment of civil society.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶

These humanist values have over time, since the Renaissance, played an important role in the construction of civil society in Europe. Exactly because it provided an answer to the since then ongoing longing of the European to create one's own world and take one's fate in one's own hands.⁵⁷ And own (authentic) initiative forms the basis for civil society, by which the circle is closed.⁵⁸

In the former Eastern bloc humanism was, by several of the communist regimes, sometimes misused as ideology to legitimize measures taken by the state. Often in those cases the adjective 'humanist' was used as a synonym to humane, as in 'to the best of all people'.⁵⁹ In reality humanism as described here in this paper, in the meaning of the philosophy of life, always has been opposed to communism. To call certain unpopular governmental measures humanist is completely contradictory. Since humanism *in particular* refuses to force changes in behaviour patterns onto people by explicit disciplining them, or by use of force or threat. Things that under communist regimes often happened.⁶⁰

Now the relation between autonomy as a necessary ingredient for civil society and as a fundamental element of humanist thought, is clear, one could ask how humanism is related to

⁵² Rob Buitenweg in: Annemie Halsema and Douwe van Houten, ed., Empowering humanity. State of the art in Humanistics (Enschede 2002)165-166.

⁵³ Goed gezelschap. Gesprekken over burgerschap, levensbeschouwing en criminaliteit. Directie criminaliteitspreventie, Ministry of Justice (The Hague 1994) 48.

⁵⁴ [Http://www.ihcu.org](http://www.ihcu.org).

⁵⁵ Piet Thoennes in: Dies natalis 1994. University for Humanistics, 8.

⁵⁶ Website of the European Humanist Federation: [Http://www.humanism.be/english/01_who-ehf.htm](http://www.humanism.be/english/01_who-ehf.htm).

⁵⁷ Thoennes in: Dies natalis 1994. Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 5.

⁵⁸ Walzer, ed., Toward a global civil society, 25.

⁵⁹ Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe. European Humanist Federation, 10.

⁶⁰ 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.

the second key-note, that of solidarity. Humanism here has a clear point of view. 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.⁶¹

With these ideas about solidarity and connectedness with others, humanism could offer an alternative to tendencies toward regionalism and nationalism, nowadays present in the whole of Europe.⁶² Since identity and citizenship are closely linked, as the sociologist Engin 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.⁶³ Both of which will lead to exclusion of people not belonging to either that particular nation or region. In that sense humanism promotes a far more inclusive identity concept, in the form of the notion of a European- or even a world citizenship.⁶⁴ All together one could say, that in respect of 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.⁶⁵

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 meaning to and shape his own life.⁶⁶ This means that one should not only be offered the space to develop himself, or have a notion of connectedness with humanity, but that one is also obliged to actively try and realize a society in which this all is possible. Civil society is, as we have seen, the indispensable playground where people can practise this responsibility.⁶⁷ 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 or the working class, or the mass of consumers, or the nation. It takes places in the world of family, friends, and colleagues, where people are connected to one another and made responsible for one another.

These were ideas coming from humanism that correspond with the concepts of strengthening civil society. The next step is to see how these ideas could be realized.

⁶¹ Peter Derkx, and Bert Gasenbeek, ed., J.P. van Praag. Vader van het Nederlandse humanisme (Utrecht 1997) 157.

⁶² Douwe van Houten in: Dies natalis 1994, Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 18.

⁶³ Engin F. Isin and Patricia K. Wood, Citizenship and identity (London 1999) 123-126.

⁶⁴ Martha Nussbaum, Cultivating humanity. A classical defense of reform in liberal education, (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1997) 56-57.

⁶⁵ Goed gezelschap. Gesprekken over burgerschap, Ministry of Justice, 48-51.

⁶⁶ [Http://www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org).

⁶⁷ See Chapter One, paragraph 1.3., Three poles: state, individual, and market.

2.4. Humanism in the form of practical initiative as an option for strengthening civil society

Of course to many people in Europe, things as the precondition of a certain amount of individual autonomy, and key-notes as solidarity and responsibility, are self-evident. The question occurs whether one actually needs humanist organizations to explicitly point those things out. At the moment, this is for example in the Netherlands also a subject of debate.

At least in the Netherlands, but to my idea they could have this function as well in CEE, humanist organizations are legitimised by the fact that, although there are a lot of people who are aware of these values, a lot of them don't know how to put them into practise.⁶⁸ This is where practical humanist initiatives, that promote certain key-notes of civil society, come in. They provide a way for those people interested in those key-notes, to transform their ideas into practical projects. The way in which this happens is twofold.

In the first place humanist movements are - since they are set up out of private non-profit initiative - themselves part of the civil society. After 1989 new humanist associations were formed in the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic (then together still Czechoslovakia), Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria.⁶⁹ By the fact that they are communities where citizens come together to think sociological problems over, and actively participate in society, they intrinsically strengthen civil society. In post-communist Europe, one sees that one way in which some individuals and groups seek to enhance their own identity - to which there is a need as Isin pointed out above - is through more exclusive conceptions of citizenship. On the other hand some individuals and groups, seek to enhance their own identity through more inclusive concepts of citizenship.⁷⁰ 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'll take an in depth look at the situation in one particular country: Poland. At this point we want to go and see whether some similarities in the way these associations operate in practise can be discovered.

⁶⁸ Els Meijers, 'De stem van het humanisme', Van mens tot mens, February 2004, 17.

⁶⁹ Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe. European Humanist Federation.

⁷⁰ Holmes and Murray, ed., Citizenship and identity in Europe, 8.

If one looks at publications on this subject, and one takes a look at the material provided by these organizations like brochures and websites, it turns out that when it comes to strengthening civil society three topics are overlapping.

It is remarkable that all of the associations in those five countries are very active in stimulating the public debate. Because freedom of opinion was not something for granted under communism, the area of public debate has to be rediscovered again. This is amongst others done by supporting 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.⁷¹ The Humanist Associations are helped in this by EU programmes such as PHARE and TACIS, who are also well disposed towards strengthening civil society, and donate to programmes for free media for that reason.⁷²

Another topic these Humanist Associations have in common is their fight in the educational sphere. They want children to be educated with certain ethical values and virtues necessary to become democratic citizens. But they want no interference in the development of the child's world view or life stance.⁷³ Although humanism is itself a philosophy of life, for humanists it is crucial that everybody is able to believe freely in whatever he wants.⁷⁴

The last common topic, is that of 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 very busy guarding this space of civil society from becoming dominated by one of those poles. This is necessary because on the one hand the state is still used to interfere very strongly in peoples personal lives in CEE. Also if we look at the pole of the market, the big problem is that because only recently CEE countries adopted capitalist market principles, people tend to get too focussed on earning money. Thereby losing out of site all other things. Sometimes it then seems as if democracy is not seen as a goal, but rather just as a means to provide a market economy. Humanist Associations try to counterbalance this attitude, by organizing voluntary work that explicitly takes place outside that market economy. This voluntary work mostly consists of helping people who are in need there where the welfare state is absent, or people that are socially in need in the sphere of their private lives. Also here support is given by international aid programmes like the International Humanist and Ethical

⁷¹ 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>.

⁷² 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.

⁷³ Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe. European Humanist Federation, 27.

⁷⁴ Jim Herrick, Humanism: an introduction (Oldham 2003) 28.

Union (IHEU), the European Humanist Federation (EHF), and Hivos the Dutch humanist foreign aid organization.⁷⁵

The individual level we already extensively discussed. Since civil society has for so long been absent in CEE, it is difficult to restart now from scratch.⁷⁶

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

Apart from this, in CEE, there is also another actor that tends to dominate the space of civil society. This is the actor of the church. Of course churches can - in the same way as humanist associations do - play a role in strengthening civil society, exactly because of their intrinsically being a part of that space in society. Also churches are, historically seen, typically places where voluntary work was promoted (in the form of charity) and where people were being reminded of their responsibility for each other in the community as a whole.

The problem in CEE⁷⁷ is, that the Catholic church tries to expand 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.⁷⁸ Since the existence of civil society is embedded in the vital condition, that all actions that take place in it might possibly influence one of the three poles, but they may not be structurally intended to gain actual power over one of these poles.

In the next chapter it will be investigated whether this role of the Catholic church poses a problem in Poland as well. For Chapter Three will be a more in depth case study of the possible links between humanism and civil society in one of the CEE countries: Poland.

⁷⁵ Hivos jaarverslag 2002. Hivos (The Hague 2003).

⁷⁶ Howard, The weakness of civil society in post-communist Europe, 121.

⁷⁷ Although it is least in Hungary, see: Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe. European Humanist Federation, 29.

⁷⁸ See Chapter One, paragraph 1.3. Three poles, state, individual and market.

Chapter Three

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

3.1. Introduction

For this case study Poland is taken because it has an active humanist movement. Even so have Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The reason to look at only one country is the limited length of this paper.

Choosing Poland out of the CEE countries with an active humanist movement, was motivated by the fact, that the Polish Humanist Association has a very broad range of practical initiatives. Of course one can say that it then might not be representative for humanist movements in general in CEE. This might be true, but the aim of this essay is 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 don't have the opportunity to discuss all humanist initiatives, I have chosen one that covers a lot of different aspects.

3.2. The Polish Humanist Association

During the time Poland was a communist state, there was no room for such a thing as 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. Another characteristic was the political strategy to destroy all voluntary social relations and networks.⁷⁹

However already in the 70s and 80s some people resisted to this, which - after the Helsinki treaties were made in 1975 and people felt a bit less afraid of a Russian invasion - led to 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, that finally led to

⁷⁹ Kazimierz Dziubka in: Dekker, ed., Civil society, 89.

the fall of the regime.⁸⁰ Still *Solidarity* acted within the communist system, along the lines of communist organisational principles. So when the first chosen government of Mazowiecki came to 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 compress into decades or years what in the West took centuries, and tried to do so intentionally what in the West came about largely as the unintended result of decentralized decisions.⁸¹ One of these attempts, the attempt to get back civil society, was made by the Polish Humanist Association, which was set up in 1991.⁸² Also in Poland they met with distrust - by the fact that people were prejudiced about humanism - due to the misuse of communist regimes of the word 'humanist'.⁸³

This association is now part of a bigger Humanist Federation in which all kinds of humanist oriented organizations, such as some political parties and former dissident movements are bundled. The original Humanist Association started all that, after having been the first humanist organization to be founded. Its founders were mainly young intellectuals: writers, philosophers, historians and artists. Whose main themes of focus were politics, social issues, arts and philosophy.^{84, 85}

From the beginning onward there has been a close cooperation with German humanist organizations. Later on alliances were formed with the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IU), and the European Humanist Federation (EHF). In that sense the Polish Humanist Association has become a means for transnational integration in itself. By the fact that it is continually busy setting up new contacts with other European humanist- and other kinds of non-governmental organizations.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Dziubka in: *ibidem*, 93.

⁸¹ John Elster, 'The necessity and impossibility of simultaneous economic and political reform', in: P. Ploszajski, ed., *Philosophy of social choice* (Warsaw 1990) 314-315.

⁸² Website Polish Humanist Association: <http://free.ngo.pl/humizm/introeng.htm>.

⁸³ James H. Satterwhite, *Varieties of Marxist humanism. Philosophical revision in postwar Eastern Europe* (London 1992) 13-14.

⁸⁴ <http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/introeng.htm>.

⁸⁵ 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 them, but said still to be members of a church? The Polish Humanist Association solved this problem by making the statement that religious people can join, as long as they don't believe in hell. Reason for this is that a belief can be united with humanist ideas according to the Polish humanists, but the concept of hell as an idea of eternal condemnation and suffering which the people on top of that would have deserved, is incompatible with humanist values.

<http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/introeng.htm>.

⁸⁶ *Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe*. European Humanist Federation, 14.

3.3. Practical humanist initiatives strengthening civil society in Poland

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

One of the most important efforts for 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.⁸⁷ Freedom of conscience and belief, respects for human rights and freedoms, equality of all citizens before law, and the separation of state and church are issues that members of the Humanist Association have given their view on, when being part of this committee.⁸⁸

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.

Especially the relation between the state and the Catholic church is closely watched by humanists, since the Catholic church tries to get legislative power in spheres that actually belong to the state.⁸⁹ In this way the Humanist Association fought for legislation securing freedom of press, and freedom of education meaning the right to non-religious based education. Also they fiercely opposed against the law the church tried to get passed on the prohibition of abortion.⁹⁰ In the first version of the new constitution abortion was not a penal offence. However the Catholic church in the end managed to get that changed. At that point humanists were not successful.

As we see the Polish Humanist Association is sometimes opposed to the Catholic church for instance where 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 during incidents where it came to defend the existence of free press. For example in the case when the church put an official ban of the film "The Priest". Here the Humanist Association successfully objected to such a ban.⁹¹

It must be said however, that this struggle with the clergy is not representative for all humanist movements in CEE.⁹²

⁸⁷ Ibidem, 13.

⁸⁸ [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/letter.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/letter.htm)

⁸⁹ Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe, European Humanist Federation, 13-15.

⁹⁰ 'Constitutional complaints', [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/complaint.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/complaint.htm).

⁹¹ [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/pseudohumanism.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/pseudohumanism.htm).

⁹² Perspectives for secular humanism in Central and Eastern Europe, European Humanist Federation, 29.

3.3.2. Education in the humanities

Earlier the paradox was mentioned 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.⁹³ To 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 worldview, that 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 (for example by the Catholic church) and who want to be independent in their life stance. Therefore the Humanist Association lobbies for the introduction of ethical classes in stead of religious classes in schools.⁹⁴

At the moment a major education programme is running. It is aimed at young people and concerns educating them 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.⁹⁵ The idea is that by encouraging children to appreciate masterpieces of literature and art, gives them a feeling of need to participate in one's culture and enlarging it with one's 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. This could create a bond between 'world citizens'; living in various countries but still forming a community. This idea of stimulating people to gather around reading classical literature, goes back to Renaissance humanists like Pico della Mirandola. To humanists this will stimulate people to use their capacities optimally in their own creative way, which often will mean an active involvement in civil society.⁹⁶

⁹³ Howard, *The weakness of civil society in post-communist Europe*, 38-39.

⁹⁴ [Http:// free.ngo.pl/humanizm/youth.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/youth.htm).

⁹⁵ Jan Wolenski, 'Humanism and rationalism', [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/wolenskiang.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/wolenskiang.htm).

⁹⁶ 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*.

3.3.3. Human rights for children

Also for young people, the Polish Humanist Association, started the project of the 'Charter of Youth's Rights'.⁹⁷ Reason to start this project was that the quality of health care system for children is very bad. The rights of young people in hospitals and clinics are not well respected. When under 18 the patient has nothing to say over 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. That is why the Humanist Association has developed the 'Charter of Youth's Rights'. To give people over 15 years of age, the right to decide about the treatment they are subjected to. This proposal is mainly aimed at raising social awareness about the quality of paediatric service in the country. A quote from the Charter is: "Young people are although they are obviously less experienced, aware enough of their own selves, and for sure would feel much more secure, if they were provided with information of their treatment, given in the language comprehensible for 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 giving teenagers more freedom and more rights. We try to encourage social debate and make society and authorities more sensitive to young people's rights in regard to respect and equality. Therefore such an initiative as The Charter of Youth's Rights is developed and put into life".⁹⁸

3.3.4. Stimulating public debate

As already mentioned, humanists try to establish a surrounding 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 this is tried by the Humanist Association by launching two magazines which function as platforms for a variety of opinions with regard to all kind of political, social and cultural issues. The names of these magazines are: *Bez Dogmatu*⁹⁹ and *Res Humana*.¹⁰⁰ Also they take part in a magazine called *Nie*.

A bit more here about *Res Humana*. This is a bi-monthly popular scientific publication devoted to world outlooks and philosophical issues. The journal's motto and main perspective (according to the editorial) is 'secular humanism', which it most often expressed in the form of moral issues, and the dilemmas facing contemporary humanity. *Res Humana* opens its pages

⁹⁷ '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).

⁹⁸ 'The rights of young people in Poland'.

⁹⁹ Website of 'Bez Dogmatu': [Http://www.iwkip.org/bezdogmaty](http://www.iwkip.org/bezdogmaty).

¹⁰⁰ Website of 'Res Humana': [Http://katalog.czasopism.pl/pismo_en.php?id_pisma=433](http://katalog.czasopism.pl/pismo_en.php?id_pisma=433).

to philosophy historians, specialists in religion, and cultural theoreticians representing these and related disciplines. 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.¹⁰¹

3.3.5. 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.¹⁰²

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

The above study also suggests however that it is very difficult (if not impossible) to say, what amount of impact a movement as humanism eventually will have. Since the challenge it faces is enormous. However that was not the subject of research here. The research question was *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.

¹⁰¹ [Http://katalog.czasopism.pl/pismo_en.php?id_pisma=433](http://katalog.czasopism.pl/pismo_en.php?id_pisma=433).

¹⁰² [Http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/introeng.htm](http://free.ngo.pl/humanizm/introeng.htm).

Conclusion

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

All together 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 is crucial.

Humanism seems to be able to attribute to that, by the fact that some core values of this philosophy of life, of this movement that started in the Renaissance and goes back to the 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.

Another explanation for the fact that humanism seems to successfully function as a source of inspiration for the development of common European ideas how to organize society, is because of the common history Western, Northern, Middle and Eastern Europe share in this tradition. It reaffirms the common roots all those parts of Europe share as part of their cultural and historical background.

Apart from the aspect of similarities in attitude and goals that are present in humanism, and that are necessary to rebuild and strengthen civil society, how can humanism in a practical way be an option for strengthening civil society?

It turns out that in CEE there is a new humanist movement since 1989 that contributes in an active way in rebuilding civil society. This process of humanist initiatives strengthening civil society, works threefold.

First of all the above mentioned key-notes are by humanists promoted on an individual level, so that awareness of the importance of civil society and citizenship are promoted. Also it can be stated 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 (then together still Czechoslovakia),

Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria. By the fact that those are communities where citizens come together to think sociological problems over, and actively participate in society, they intrinsically strengthen civil society.

Secondly the humanist movements are in practical ways active in civil society. They attribute to the debate on how society should be organized. And they promote the founding of all kind of 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 CEE are: education, free media, public debate, and voluntary work of all kind.

During the more in depth case study of the Humanist Association in Poland, more detailed investigation was done into the practical way in which humanism can be helpful in re-establishing civil society. A civil society that also in Poland has been absent for decades. Examples of such humanist initiatives found were: guarding the free space a civil society needs to flourish in between the state, the market and the individual, 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.

Thirdly inclusion into one European society is augmented by these CEE humanist movements, as it is by humanist organizations in the rest of Europe, by the fact that a lot of inter-European contacts and initiatives have been developed since 1989. The establishment of those transnational contacts will automatically improve mutual integration of the Eastern and Western half of Europe in due time.

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