

# SOCIAL CONFLICTS AND INTEGRATION OF THE SOCIETY UNDER TRANSFORMATION

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**Abstract:** The article gives insight into one of the most dynamic segments of social life – how social conflict is interconnected with the integration of the society. The processes have been observed in Lithuania during the post-socialist transition and many-sided transformations. The main questions we are going to discuss are – how did the approach to conflict in the society change during the process of radical transformation, and how management adopted new strategies in dealing with conflicts. The article consists of a theoretical overview and case study. Three links have been marked in the chain of approaching and dealing with conflicts along post-socialist transition. The terms that have been adopted are manifestation of conflict, conflict institutionalisation, and conflict management [1]. This outlines the different stages of dealing with conflicts in a transitional society and indicates what actions were effective in preserving social integrity and maintaining dialogue.

**Key words:** transformations, social conflict, conflict approach, management, Lithuania

The nature of conflicts in the global world and their influence on social relationship is a subject of many significant modern studies [2–8]. They have created a framework for specialized research in many social fields, and among others – formed an analysis of interconnections between post-socialist transformation, the democratization processes and conflict resolution. The scope of common studies has given rise to locally specified research of the conflict culture and its transformations [1, 9, 10]. The next area of investigation, which is based on the same methodological background, is the area of organizational conflict. It is represented by a plethora of theoretical publications [11–14], and studies of empirical content [15, 16].

## The Method

A modern approach of conflict is expressed using different terms. Firstly, the situation of sides' contraposition creates not only their mutual dependence but also a common space for their activities, and a common dimension of their interests.

Further, it is extremely important to note Shelling's idea „that most conflict situations are essentially bargaining situation” in which „the ability of one participant to gain his ends is dependant to an important degree on the choices or decisions that the other participant will make” [3]. Thus, the main sense of dealing with conflict is to search for the possibilities of its solution or to transform it into another state by enhancing its socially positive power, or by neutralizing its socially negative properties.

The ways, methods and styles of dealing with conflicts depend primarily on the cultural traditions and the legal

environment in the society [5–7, 17, 18]. M. K. Kozan [19] described three conflict management models – harmony, confrontational, and regulative. The cultural and social background of each country create an environment in which one or another model becomes dominant. This scheme offers a perspective for the conceptual reconstruction of the continuity of changes by managing conflict in the society.

According to Kozan, the regulative model envisages that the priority is given to bureaucratic means to minimize the emerging conflict or to aid the avoidance. The roles of the third party in managing conflicts are formalized. The confrontational model is based on conflict conceptualization by dividing it into sub issues. „A sense of reasonable compromise aids resolution despite a confrontational style” [19]. This model means governing conflicts by norms of mutual concessions and compromises and an increased role of using preventive instruments of dispute resolution, such as effectively functioning communication, strong ethical norms of collaboration, and negotiating the cases of dispute.

The maturing culture of collaboration and cooperation is one of the remarkable aspects of social interactions in the process of post-socialist transition. This indicates a radical change of attitudes and behaviours of social actors in situations of possible or real conflicts.

The centralized socialist administration tried to keep a strict control over every kind of conflict; the bureaucratic means were used extensively to suppress or to avoid publicly resonant conflicts. Such a sociocultural environment demotivated people to solve their problems on their own by mobilizing their energy, experience and knowledge. People were used to addressing their conflicting problems to the authorities. A problem solving, decision making, dispute resolution

culture as a key segment of human capital was underdeveloped [9, 20, 21]. A lack of such important skills restricted individual and group capacities, and created a deformed substance and sense of social integrity. Social integration is a result of a social dialogue and negotiation [22]. In a case when interactions of social actors are deprived of liability, they are not able to keep a proper balance of cooperation and competition. This enable us to note that societies of socialist past inherited some sort of experience of social unity which was held by authoritarian power.

Conflict management can be defined as an activity of solving problems, which are or may become conflict provocative. It may be seen as one of the important purposes of strategic management to strengthen society's social integrity and preserve it against conflict destruction and counter-productiveness.

The basic objectives of conflict management are as follows:

- to counteract and prevent violence;
- to transform conflict energy into a power of problem solving;
- to encourage conflict participants to use reconciliation procedures;
- to neutralize and eliminate negative effects of fighting.

In the broader social context conflicts are managed:

- by creating laws which legalize counselling, negotiation, mediation, other activities and procedures for neutralizing adversaries disputes;
- by establishing and supporting institutions, other organisational entities, non-state organizations whose mission is to solve or prevent conflicts (e.g. institutions for minorities rights or consumer rights defence etc.);
- by teaching and training individuals and groups in peaceful practice;
- by supporting social dialogue and cooperation.

Cooperation predicts agreed and coordinated activities of social actors when they strive to achieve their sometimes contradictory goals, and to reach the most favourable result for each party. Cooperative relations between interested parties are reliant on their positive communication, consultancy practice, negotiations, and dialogue.

The culture of cooperation is an integral part of the culture of human interactions. It is based on the positive attitude of the individuals or the communities towards others and different ones, their determination to solve existing problems and misunderstandings by mutual efforts, using legal and moral means. Cooperation refers to such characteristics of social life as trust, mutuality, complementarities, that make up social capital and create a reasonable balance between collaboration and competition [5, 23–25].

Let us apply the above presented statements to society's democratisation path.

### **From Regulative to Confrontational Model of Conflict Management**

Eastern and Central European „societies have to deal with problems of First and Second Modernity in the unique conditions of post-socialism” [26]. They mark an increase in social dissatisfaction, the misfit between „new” institutions and „old” every day cultures. These lead sometimes to social cataclysms like in former Yugoslavia or modern day Ukraine.

It is reasonable to suggest, that living in a totally shifting environment makes social actors more prone to conflict (or at least to certain forms of it). Secondly, the transition from socialism to parliamentary democracy involves a significant change in the way in which social conflicts are experienced and understood within the society (along the vector fight-competition-collaboration). Thirdly, transition provokes innumerable previously unknown conflicts in social life. „The more change we experience, the more conflict we will have” [27].

The post-socialist transition may be seen as society's disintegration and later reintegration according the renewing institutional order and market liberalization. It is one of the most visible trends in social life. Along with these changes some individuals and groups are not able to cope with emerging problems. They lose their social status, and migrate off the grid. Society becomes splintered, suspicious, and dismembered. Governing and self-governing structures experience a lack of competence to manage the outcomes of political and social transformation and to neutralise the social conflicts [28].

An approach to conflict as a common problem, which has to mobilize interested parties for coordinated actions, has been underdeveloped during the transition period [1, 9, 29]. These circumstances brought on the list of priorities a need to nurture the modern approach to conflict and its resolution „as a means of establishing viable intergroup and multicultural relations in which the fundamental needs of individuals and groups are effectively addressed” [30].

The post-socialist transition of a society is seen as progressive transformation of regulative dealing with conflicts into a confrontational model which is based on dynamically balanced competition and cooperation in social as well as in business interactions. This change is tightly interconnected with other transformations, such as modernizing national law according to the needs of democratization, reforming educational and public administration systems.

### **The Case Study: Conflicts in the Shifting Environment of Lithuania – Coping with the Heritage, Culture, and Human Nature.**

The political leadership and administration of the transitional countries were lacking conflict management skills under a radically changing environment. At the beginning of the transition process the political leaders worked for the preparation of strategic guidelines and plans but not for long-lasting social outcomes of the political and economic reforms. They were striving for a goal; while subsequent social changes have been weakly reflected on the list of priorities for that period. At the same time, the perspective of accessing the European Union inspired administration to adopt national legal and administrative systems to commonly accepted rules, procedures and principles of the EU.

#### **Social Contradictions.**

The acceleration of transition is associated with the emerging new social disparities.

The society of Lithuania suffers from inequality of income – more than 7 times between two upper decimials (20%) and two lower decimials of population [31]. The at-risk-of poverty rate stays very high: one fifth of population has been identified as belonging to this group. A significant number of low income population de-facto belongs to the deprived [32]. For example, the at-risk-of poverty rate for households: indicator of those consisting of three adults without children is 9.2%, and those of one adult and at least with one child 42.8% in 2013 (At-risk-of poverty rate, osp.stat.gov.lt). Low incomes and insufficient support have single persons – 33,7%, households with three and more children – 45,1% (At-risk-of poverty rate, 2013, osp.stat.gov.lt).

The differences between regions are evident and not positive for society's integration. The ability to make ends meet with difficulty or great difficulty note 23 per cent of households of one county and 49 per cent of another (The distribution of households by ability to make ends meet 2013, osp.stat.gov.lt/print-servlet). According to this indicator, deviation from medium makes plus 1.56 for wealthy people, and minus 1.36 for disadvantages (ibid.)

The difference between the most and the least developed counties by GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita was 3.1 times by 2006. The ratio of investment in the most dynamic and the less dynamic counties made 3.95 times (Gross Domestic Product, 2007). Inequality became many folded; it was significant in consumption, health care, leisure, and education. A strata of impoverished groups emerged. They were alienated from civil participation and were weakly re-

presented in political life. Certain professional and social groups have been eviscerated or even disappeared.

The authorities did not have a certain strategy to cope with the appearance of marginal groups and inequalities. The programme of poverty reduction had been approved 10 years after the beginning of the social transformation. At that time experts recorded that the anti-poverty policy was ineffective focused on distribution of financial resources rather than on creating conditions, enabling, and encouraging people to social activity. After such a long period of political malaise a phenomenon of alienation became an obstacle to a path to social stabilization.

Similarly, disparities between the regions must be mentioned. The national plan of social economic development of the regions was announced with a marked slippage.

In the first decade after regaining independence the social policy of the Lithuanian authorities cannot be characterized as pro-active, based on predicting the effects of changes and counteracting the effects of undesired factors but as reactive, reacting to ensuing disproportions.

The Lithuanian case is remarkable in some sense. In comparison to other countries, conflicts between big social groups caused by the processes of changing stratification were ephemeral and nonviolent. Massive outbreaks of violence were prevented.

Although the tensions were not always expressed openly, it had, however, affected a lot of the processes in society. A weak underdeveloped culture of self-expression and self-defence of social partners produced such forms of destruction as alcohol abuse (one of the highest indicators of alcohol consuming in Europe), suicides (one of the highest indicators in Europe for some years), intensity of publicly expressed pessimism and unhappiness, as well as suspiciousness and hostility in mutual relationships [21, 33].

The number of suicides increased several times (30.4 per 100,000 population in 2007), mortality caused by alcohol abuse (14.3 per 100,000 population in 2007), and the number of murderesses increased more than 2.4 times [34]. A public poll shows that delinquency, drug consumption and alcoholism were acknowledged as the most significant dangers to Lithuanian society [35].

The most painful aftereffect of Lithuania transition is the continuing emigration of youth and professionals to the farthest Western countries. Because of negative migration Lithuania has lost more than one half of million, in other words near one fifth of the population [36]. It is hardly to find, what sources could compensate for such a demographic decline.

Social distances and disparities obstruct the process of social integration and distort the optimal balance of competition and cooperation at all levels of social life. A tense so-

cial situation required the search for a means to strengthen the culture of cooperation, social dialogue and partnership.

### ADR Germination in Socio-cultural Environment of Lithuania.

Today, Alternative Dispute Resolution has a type of practices which harmonise social relationships by using non judicial and, in a broader sense, non-enforcing instruments of social regulation. ADR is based on negotiation, conciliation, mutual exchange of information, and coordination the activities of the social entities. The adoption of ADR predisposes the change of the ways in which individuals, groups, and systems react to disparities, complicated problems or any other controversies and how they behave in a conflict situation.

Ohanyan [1] has described the progress of conflict resolution culture in one of the former Soviet Republics, – Armenia. The author discerns three stages of that process. The scheme she proposed seems to be acceptable for analysing the similar process in other post-Soviet States.

Three links have been defined in the chain of conflict solving culture in the process of post-socialist transition – manifestation of conflict, conflict institutionalization, and conflict management. These links outline the progress of conflict solution and management and suggest positive changes in the quality of social interactions. Conflict manifestation is the first achievement in the post-socialist democratization process: people learn how to express their disagreements with words and civilized actions in an open and peaceful way. After a long period of bureaucratic regulation and oppression of any disturbance, conflicts emerge as a subject of public discussions, manifestations, and negotiations.

Lithuania was the first Soviet Republics to become independent and initiated by this the downfall of the whole super state. The achievement of the desired independence was possible in the only one way – by peaceful manifestation of a disagreement with the existing status quo. Numerous and crowded meetings and demonstrations took place in almost all cities and small settlements. The Baltic Road manifestation culminated with millions of participants of the three Baltic countries. It has already become a historical milestone in educating people on how to peacefully perform their intention.

The experience gained may be seen as a starting point in nurturing conflict manifestation culture. People became free to declare their problems or to demonstrate their troubles. According to Ross the way one reacts and responds to a provocative situation indicates his cultural maturity [6]. With respect to the unique nature of post-socialist transition we have to answer some questions, which indicate the conflict manifestation culture:

- How do social actors react to countless challenges in an environment of turbulent changes?
- Do they try to get an insight into a provocative problem or do they focus on the others who represent different interests/desires?
- Do they react aggressively or do they use a language of negotiations?

At the first stage of structural reforms in Lithuania both left-wing and right-wing parties did not treat social dialogue as a way to integrate the society. They undervalued the needs of those deprived social groups, which were mostly affected by the changes, and which had little potential for self-expression in order to be heard. The ruling political powers were oriented towards the strongest business players. The process of privatisation and the legal reforms were in correlation with expectations of the richest groups consisting mostly of former communist figures.

All of these created an atmosphere of distrust, aggressiveness and polarization to „winners and losers”. The cult of power became evident in conflict manifestations. The complexity and the uncharted character of transformation [26] made strengthening the culture of conflict resolution extremely complicated.

In Lithuania, like in other countries with a communist past, there were no effectively functioning democratic mechanisms for citizen’s self-expression, problem solving and negotiation of their problems. For some years during the first stage of transition (until a process of privatization was accomplished) conflicting interests of social actors were expressed predominantly in provoking ways. Each challenge was usually met by an individual like a signal for a fight. The disapproved parties approached their conflict on the scale of a win/lose continuum. As stated an eminent German politician and social activist, Johannes Rau, much less effort was devoted to mutual co-existence than to elbow exercises [37].

Some conclusions may be formulated.

Firstly, the governing mentality of those times was based on the expectations and beliefs that the democratic reforms and emerging market economy would steer social interactions in the right way and give them an optimal balance between cooperation and competition.

Secondly, the new political and social institutions were insufficiently sensitive towards social controversies and lacked competence for social analysis and diagnoses.

And finally, given that conflict prevention as a part of strategic management presupposes proactive, complex peace-making strategy, so it is reasonable to generalize from the above presented case: *in the times of transition authorities have very limited power to control the social outcomes of political and economic changes as well as the quality of social interactions.*

The next two stages – conflict institutionalization and conflict management – take much more time and have a meaning as a set of judicial, organizational, and educational efforts to legitimate conflict expression and to create juridical environment for constructive conflict resolution by using negotiation, mediation and other ways of problem solving [1, 38].

The process of accession of the new democratic countries to the European Union remarkably changed the approach to social conflict. Speaking in the terms of strategic management the notion of social conflict has been viewed from the negative context of disaster into the context of human rights, social capital, and social dialogue. Following the politics and practices of the European Union and striving for an improvement of the quality of social interactions, newly accessed countries have developed national laws in respect to social partnership, negotiation and mediation [28].

The main dimension of conflict policy in the societies of emerging democracies was the adoption of western patterns of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). The potential of ADR methods is based on some experiences. Practicing one of the conciliation procedures – arbitration, negotiation, or mediation – presupposes that social actors retreat from formerly preferable passive statement towards conflicts by avoiding them or addressing them to administration or somebody else, which has the decision-making power. A new social and cultural environment required from every person and every public body positive thinking, positive behaviour, and constructive activities. The disputes instead of being directed to overworked courts or other institutions of social justice have to be dealt with by interested parties directly.

Scholars engaged in post-socialist development studies note a deficit of the above mentioned attributes [20, 26, 29]. Hence, the implementation of ADR methods needs complex and coordinated efforts and long-term political and administrative incentives as well as citizen initiatives [1, 7, 38].

Differing from Western countries implementation of alternative methods of dispute resolution and integrating them into social and cultural context of Central and Eastern Europe depended on political support. As Marsh speaks about mediation: while the United Kingdom has had an essentially „free-market” approach to mediation, in Western Europe it is „viewed primarily as an issue of **legal** reform, and Ministries of Justice play the central role” [38]. Indeed, the creation of a legal environment for negotiation and mediation is the most evident vector of ADR implementation. For example, in Lithuania some experimental projects have been conducted at first by NGOs which probed mediation as a way of conciliation. Some initial training did not push the new methods of ADR into practice until one of the regional court offices initiated the mediation program.

The initiative had been supported by the influential Council of Courts. The code of judicial mediation had been approved. Later the Lithuanian Parliament adopted the European Directive on Certain Aspects of Mediation in Civil and Commercial Matters. The provisions of domestic law determine the principles of voluntary participation, cooperation, equality, confidentiality, mediator’s neutrality, and honesty. A peace treaty as a positive outcome of the process of mediation becomes enforceable after being approved by a judge.

After two decades of reforms the legal system of Lithuania consisted of three packages of laws regulating conflict resolution: those creating common rules of action of adversaries, those ordaining their rights and those providing obligations in different areas of social activities (labour, public sector, family, workplace). The law regulating the use of negotiation, consultation, other pacifying procedures, and the ways in which they have to be executed belong to the second group. A separate package contains the provisions obliging the participants of the conciliatory process to keep confidentiality, to ensure voluntary participation and to support the legal status of final agreement.

Today, numerous non-governmental organizations, many secondary and high schools, and universities include into their programs courses and training on communication, negotiation and mediation. It means a de-facto high level of interest to conflict management and appears as the introduction of a special service to the labour market. Education and the teaching of society motivate people to look in-depth and to behaviour rationally when a conflict occurs, so it is a powerful factor of ADR application and development. Moreover, using the methods of ADR brings people such skills as rational behaviour in controversial situations, a proper expression of interests and a respect for the interests and opinions of the others.

The integration of the ADR into the socio-cultural context of the post-totalitarian societies appears not to be simple nor easy. Such a society is still divided into „winners” and „losers”. Fighting, using dirty tricks in an attempt to win at any cost is an evident attribute of dealing with complicated problems. These limitations and traps do not disappear easily.

Thus, new models of interactions are not that „material” which can simply be transported from one to another particular environment. As Dürschmidt and Taylor pointed out „developments in East-Central Europe highlight the extent to which mentalities, attitudes and habits have their own cultural logic and persistence”. Shortly speaking, „the cook book” style transfer has serious limitations [26].

Lithuania like other post-socialist countries has achieved some progress in developing a conflict resolution culture. However, over two and a half decades of restored indepen-

dence and democratization there are still notable tendencies to use power, to make one-sided decisions, and to use coercion in social interactions. Some other problems emerge in the way of developing ADR tools: the lack of competence of public administration and management in general as well as the stonewalling of some professional groups and politicians in keeping things unchanged.

### Conclusion

The process of post-socialist and in fact post-totalitarian transition and many-sided transformations appeared to be far from rebuilding one of the existing capitalism models. Looking from the perspective of the Central and Eastern Europe the states located behind the former iron curtain have their own afflictions which do not necessarily have to be a sample of success. The frame of conflict management and resolution system acquires here quite different patterns than those in the United Kingdom or in the USA.

The activities of conciliation and conflict transformation in the EU's newest member states have become a matter of justice and public administration, and they are viewed much less as a commercial service. Some peculiarities in dealing with conflicts may be dependent on community traditions which are strong in many regions of that part of Europe.

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