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It can be argued that contemporary social sciences in Poland tend to subscribe to a rather simplistic, "sentimental" vision of society. It is based on an assumption that pivotal social mechanisms can be adequately grasped by investigating formal institutions, manifest interests and open declarations of the visible social actors. In contradiction to this view, our claim is that social research which limits itself to these easily accessible, overt aspects of social life misses a vital part of reality – the part that lies beneath the surface. A body of ideas that has led to the launch of the book series of "Behind the Scenes: Studies of Hidden Social Realities" subscribes to an alternative, "non-sentimental" vision of society. This approach entails concern with what is intentionally kept hidden, such as unofficial institutions, covert networks and interest groups as well as systemic violence and manipulation in social life.

Our focus is predominately on those phenomena that can result in systemic weakness of the state. They include corruption, fraud, illicit client relationships, warped loyalties and the use of violence as a regulatory mechanism in political and economic life. These aspects of social reality are as a rule very difficult to investigate. By developing concepts and research methods designed specifically to tackle this type of research questions we want to encourage scholars in various disciplines to look behind-the-scenes. It is our hope that that these new inquiries bring a more accurate picture of social reality and by the same token contribute to a more fruitful search for effective policy recommendations.

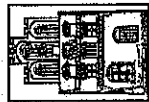
Scholars interested in publishing their works in our series are welcome to contact us at: [obrotysferspolecznych@gmail.com](mailto:obrotysferspolecznych@gmail.com)

The logo of our series features the house, in which Nicolaus Copernicus was born in 1473 in Toruń. We share his belief that the world – in this case the social world – moves according to other principles than it is commonly assumed.

# Conflict of Interest in Central and Eastern Europe

Edited

by STANISŁAW BURDZIEJ  
and JOANNA SZALACHA

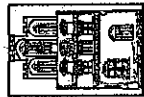


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Peer review

Professor Paweł Ruskowski, UKSW (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw)

Publication financed from funds allocated to research in 2007-2010 as commissioned research project by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, project "Identyfikacja, monitoring i przeciwdziałanie zagrożeniom bezpieczeństwa obywateli" no. PBZ-MNiSW-DBO-01/1/2007



## Acknowledgements

This publication is financed as part of a larger research project ("Monitoring, identyfikacja i przeciwdziałanie zagrożeniom bezpieczeństwa obywateli" nr PBZ-MNiSW-DBO-01/1/2007) sponsored by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education conducted as a part of Polish Platform for Homeland Security (Polska Platforma Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego).

The project has been coordinated by Professor Emil Pływaczewski of University of Białystok in Poland. As editors of this volume we would like to express our special gratitude to Professor Pływaczewski for his support for this volume as well as for the idea of studying conflict of interest.

First edition

ISBN 978-83-7506-827-6

Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo  
ul. Wielka 10, 61-774 Poznań  
tel. 61 853 27 51, 61 853 27 67, fax 61 852 63 26  
dział handlowy, tel./fax 61 855 06 90  
sklep@zysk.com.pl

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# From Conflicting Interests to Conflict of Interest. A Sociological Perspective on an Anti-Development Phenomenon

STANISŁAW BURDZIEJ AND JOANNA SZALACHA

## Introduction

Conflict of interest has traditionally been studied by legal scholars rather than sociologists<sup>1</sup>. These scholars define it rather narrowly, focusing on those cases where illegality is involved. Therefore they do not try to take into account reasons that motivate actors whose interests collide while breaking the law. Studies in the present volume share a broader, sociological understanding of the conflict of interest (Col). They share a conviction that Col is more complex than legal scholars seem to suggest and share the belief that Col has a significant harmful impact on society. Therefore the perspective presented by scholars in this volume stands also in contrast to the popular perception of this phenomenon, where Col is viewed as a situation where two individuals or entities have diverging interests (a situation which is immanent to the free market economy and essentially healthy).

The aim of this volume is not only to share this perspective with a wider audience, but also to help different people and institutions realize how deep and serious a negative impact Col has on the development of societies in Central and Eastern Europe. While carrying out their own research scholars and scholar-practitioners realized that the fields they work in (media, local politics, local economy etc.) are *infected* by mechanisms that make social development slower and make the institutional activity of many social actors less effective. They share the belief that Col lies at the core of many anti-development mechanisms.

## The concept of conflict of interest (Col)

For the purpose of the present study we adopt a succinct definition offered by Noble Prize laureate in economics, George J. Stigler, who wrote that Col

<sup>1</sup> Stanisław Burdzziej acknowledges financial support from the Foundation for