

## TRAUMA WITHOUT CATHARSIS?

### *CIVIL SOCIETY IN SERBIA BETWEEN MODERNIZATION AND (RE)TRADITIONALISM*

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Modernization is a word often used in public discourse in Serbia. Almost all, present and future, political issues are „contained” within this term. Modernization is presented by political and intellectual elites and mass-media as a „savior” for Serbian society which will help Serbia to finally find its place among other modern societies. On the other hand, a strong traditionalist tendency having direct normative force prevails when returning to the „roots” ,insisting on the reintegration of cultural-ethnic and institutional-political identity of Serbian society. This tension between „modernizers” and traditionalists enhances aspirations on both sides, deepening the gap between them due to failed expectations. Through a structural and comparative analysis current paper aims to interpret different approaches to modernization and (re)traditionalism within Serbian political and intellectual elites, as well as society today, including its political consequences and civil society still *under construction*. The paper insists on that through the efforts of fostering democratic culture, in post-authoritarian countries such as Serbia, civil societies can change basic beliefs of citizens ipso facto relaxing the axiological confrontation between „modernizers” and (re)traditionalists.

#### Modernization

The word modernization comes from the ancient word *modernus*, which meant current reality versus *antiquus* (pagan past). According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, modernization, in sociology, stands for the transformation from a traditional, rural, agrarian society to a secular, urban, industrial society.<sup>1</sup>

Communists called an idea of rapid development and economic catching up with the West – industrialization. In the 1960s and 70s communists started to use the word modernization not only understood as industrialization but also covering wider social reforms – economic, institutional, educational and health reforms, in order to make their countries more developed. Communist modernization in this regard – failed. Interestingly, they understood modernization as a process in which less developed societies take on characteristics of Western societies in the fields of technology, science, public administration, education, medical care, etc. but not market economy, separation of powers, civil society, human rights or freedom.

However, is it relevant to take only a few elements that benefit us and avoid those that do not benefit us in order to finalize the process of modernization? According to one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology, *functionalism*, it was not possible. It treats modern society as a whole being much more than just a sum of its parts. It is not possible to develop certain parts of society neglecting others if the goal is a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/topic/modernization> (accessed: June 21, 2015)



developed and stable society. If one part of the society is dysfunctional it affects all other parts and creates social problems. Functionalist notions of modernization were based on the ideal-type distinction between traditional and modern societies. A modern society is not only more technologically advanced than the traditional but it is a completely different, regimented society. So, it was not merely the question of different technological levels of production but there were different institutions, human relations and other significant social values.<sup>2</sup> It was not far away from there that modernization was understood as a total social process of development. While Neil Smelser,<sup>3</sup> Marion Levy,<sup>4</sup> Shmuel Eisenstadt<sup>5</sup> have made modernization one of the fundamental theoretical issues, Martin Weiner<sup>6</sup> has precisely defined it as a harmonized development of crucial parts of a social system – economy, politics, management and culture. Smelser further develops this idea of modernization and turns it into the „modernization in the six fields”: The first field is where economic modernization involves scientific knowledge in production, the transition from small to a market economy, urbanization. The second one is a political field, which means construction of the national state, efficient administration and democratic institutions. The third one is education, which means the expansion of literacy and general education in the population. The fourth one is religious which sees secularization as its main process. The fifth one is family life, implying the suppression of kinship at the cost of increasing specialization of roles. The sixth is stratification, with the supremacy of „acquired” instead of „ascribed” status.<sup>7</sup> Today, these functionalist notions viewing modernity as the totality of social process of development have deep roots in social sciences. Therefore, it is considered that causes of Communist modernization failure lie exactly in its partiality.

If we apply the above elements in the case of Serbia as a former communist state (a republic within the former Yugoslav federation), we come to the following conclusions: Serbia *de facto* came out of Communism as an industrialized country where a change in the social structure was made – peasantry was no longer a major social layer.<sup>8</sup> During Communist rules wide urbanization was carried out, as well as modern transportation network and state administration was established. Health and education were also improved. On the other hand, Serbia's economy in the Communist era served ideological (political), rather than productive purposes, there were work ethos, no division of power, no rule of law, state administration was unsuccessful and expensive, collectivism surpassed individuality by far. Such modernization is described by Piotr Sztompka as „fake modernization”.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Sztompka Piotr: *The Sociology of Social Change*. Blackwell, Oxford/Cambridge 1993 pp. 72-73

<sup>3</sup> Smelser, Neil: *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1959

<sup>4</sup> Levy, Marion Jr.: *Modernization and the Structure of Societies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1966

<sup>5</sup> Eisenstadt, Shmuel, N.: *Modernization and Conditions of Sustained Growth*, World Politics No. 16 (July) (1964) pp. 576-594

<sup>6</sup> Weiner, Martin: *Modernization*, Basic Books, London/New York 1966

<sup>7</sup> Smelser, Neil: *Social Structure and Mobility in Economic Development*, Aldine Co., Chicago 1966; Process of social change, in: Smelser Neil (ed.), *Sociology: An Introduction*, Wiley, New York, 709-762

<sup>8</sup> This is important as since the 19th century Serbian society had been an agrarian society (almost without its civil component) with a strong social and national ideology as its integrative factor. The creator of the State was the Nation which in social terms meant peasantry in Serbia. The State was people's, ruled by the people through people's party in people's democracy. This was a sort of *Volksgemeinschaft*, *people's community* where an authoritarian type of government was legitimate.

<sup>9</sup> Sztompka, Piotr, op. cit. p.137

It seems that in Serbia problems of modernization are also related to its political elites. There is a general consensus that modernization and the European Union accession remain the main tasks of Serbian politics. All relevant political parties<sup>10</sup> in Serbia advocate this strategy. „Modernization will be the key word in the next 10 years in Serbia” said Serbia's Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić in his inaugural address in 2014.<sup>11</sup> However, there are serious problems with the Serbian political elite converting these declarative statements into reality. Their ideological and political fixations produce endless quarrels. There is irreconcilable hostility between the ruling parties and the opposition (regardless of who currently runs the country). If a democratic system is based on competition among political elites, then the current Serbian political elite's struggle for power has completely covered their perception of the others, and what is even more of concern, their political goals, as well. It seems as if it is more important that a hostile party does not control an institution than that this institution exists and functions successfully. A vast amount of social and political energy is being wasted on sterile rivalry and endless arguing.

Another problem with modernization in Serbia is related to the understanding of its meaning, as well as on its ideological acceptance. That part of the political elite that seems to be the most interested in modernization understands it merely through privatization and other partial reforms in economy. Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić claims in the same inaugural speech that „the first and most important goal is to transform our economy, as it is the only way to achieve a better standard over a longer period. The three key tasks of the new government will be economic reforms conducted through the set of law reform, strengthening our private sector and budget consolidation”.<sup>12</sup> Pointless to say, two-thirds of his exposé was concerned with questions on the economy. As stated earlier, modernization cannot be reduced to mere improvements in the economy. Political, social and cultural elements of modernization are equally important. Even worse, these same „pro-modernization” political elites tend to establish ideological monopoly over the idea of modernization by which any criticism of their role in the political life is a subject of accusations for being in opposition towards modernization.<sup>13</sup> This unfortunately applies to all ruling elites in Serbia after 2000, as well as to the fall of Slobodan Milošević's regime.

<sup>10</sup> In his „Typology of Party Systems” Sartori provides two specific rules for determining the relevance of a particular party: 1. a minor party can be discounted as irrelevant whenever it remains over time superfluous, in the sense that it is never needed or put to use for any feasible coalition majority; 2. a party qualifies for relevance whenever its existence, or appearance, affects the tactics of party competition and particularly when it alters the direction of the competition. In his view, a party only needs to exhibit one of these qualities to be considered relevant. (Sartori, Giovanni, *Typology of Party Systems* (1976), in: Peter, Mair (ed.), *The West European Party System*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990 pp. 316-349. Opposed to this were authors such as Blondel (Blondel, Jean, *Types of Party Systems* [1968], *ibidem* pp. 302-310) or Rokkan (Rokkan, Stein, *The Electoral Balance* [1970], *ibidem* pp. 311-315) who based their analysis on the number of seats obtained in the series of Lower House elections or on electoral thresholds. For the purpose of this paper I include both approaches when consider relevant parties in Serbia.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.e-novine.com/srbija/vesti/102566-Ekspozice-premijera-Srbije.html> (accessed: June 20, 2015)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> Obviously, this problem is strictly related to the issue of responsibility in politics. Andrew Heywood explains in his *Politics* (Palgrave MacMillan, Hamshire/New York 2002 (second ed.) that the concept of responsibility can be understood in two ways. It can mean behavior of a reasonable,

### Traditionalism

Unlike tradition understood as a historical and cultural heritage by which beliefs, customs, ideas construct identity of a society, traditionalism unilaterally overemphasized traditional values and patriarchy. It is a non-critical awareness of the tradition which glorifies the past and restores historical myths. Traditionalism confronts the idea and the process of modernization in terms of closing the society in itself, introduces the idea of autarchy as opposed to the open society. It proposes homogenization versus self-differentiation; the dominance of one (in this case) political subsystem above other subsystems. It also promotes very strong resistance to social change. In other words, it emphasizes affectivity contrary to affective neutrality and universalism contrary to particularism.<sup>14</sup> Traditional society therefore directs people towards collectivist axiology and requires subordination to the supreme goals of the collectivity at the expense of the needs and interests of individuals. Paying respect to the authority of the head of state is perceived as a fair *pater familias*.

Yet, this cannot be exclusively linked to political actors because there is one factor called overdetermination. It can be found in political cultures. In the focus of not only Serbian but, let's call it the „Balkan culture” as a whole, it is a holistic view of the world with the Nation at the top level. The roots of Serbian culture are deeply immersed in the oral literature of the Middle Ages and the Orthodox faith.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, each project of individualization of life must be prepared to face these obstacles. Holism<sup>16</sup> in the political life used to have a form of class interests and later national interests. Though, it

prudent and morally justifiable way in the case when a person is under pressure to behave differently. But, it also implies the responsibility to be open to other people's criticism. Responsibility requires strictly defined duties, powers and functions of appropriate bodies so that the work of subordinates can be successfully monitored and evaluated. Therefore, the responsibility can function only within the framework of constitutionalism and respect for the rules. Being responsible does not mean to be a subject to arbitrary power or unpredictable penalties. In other words, various circumstances and pressures cannot exempt anyone from responsibility for imprudent, unreasonable and immoral behavior in setting up political and ideological goals and means for achieving those goals. Indeed, succumbing to pressure also represents a form of irresponsibility. But we should not forget either that global circumstances, increasingly resembling a system of *organized irresponsibility*, also encourage irresponsibility. There still is no firm global institutional framework that would dictate strict rules enabling to correctly evaluate activities. Needless to say, it is grist to the mill for local elites to behave as they do.

<sup>14</sup> Larrain, Jorge: *Traditionalism*, The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth Century Social Thought, Blackwell 1993 p. 393

<sup>15</sup> Аврамовић, Зоран: *Српска културна свест у сопственом огледалу*, Зборник књижевно филозофске школе, No. 1 Крушевац 1994

<sup>16</sup> Apparently first used by South African general and statesman Jan Christiaan Smuts in *Holism and Evolution* first published in 1926 where he explains that: „Holism as a process is not only creative but self-creative, and its final structures are far more holistic than its initial structures. Natural wholes are always composed by parts; in fact the whole is not some entity additional to the parts, but is just the parts in their synthesis, not static but dynamic, evolutionary, creative (...) Hence Evolution has an ever-deepening inward spiritual holistic character; and the wholes of Evolution and the evolutionary process itself can only be understood in reference to this fundamental character of wholeness. This is a world of whole-making”. Another words, Holism is the tendency in nature to form wholes that are greater than the sum of the parts through creative evolution. In: *Holism and Evolution*, MacMillan & Co. (third edition), London 1936 p. 86

was usually associated with aggression and intolerance towards differences. Civil individualism has always been a scarce commodity in the Balkans.

The existence of strong cultural and political archetypes rooted deeply in immediate and distant historical understanding of the world could be a useful tool when explaining why many Serbian intellectuals easily converted into a field of collectivist policies.<sup>17</sup> Power of traditionalism and failure of civic society was not merely a lack of political will of intellectuals in Serbia. Contemplations over the Citizen, the Nation and the State clearly expressed a century old fostered culture of a holistic type.

The influence of traditionalism in Serbia can be analyzed through inherited traditionalism of peasantry that included over 74% of the entire population<sup>18</sup> after the Second World War. This shows that there was a link between traditionalism and authoritarian communism in the period between 1945 and 1990. For example, low level of literacy and education easily explain why the Citizen was not able to constitute itself as the decisive player in the process of modernization and democratization. On the other hand, the very rapid industrialization in the first decades after World War II resulted in a great demand for labour which could be found only in peasantry. The outcome was an „exodus” from villages to cities and an unavoidable „ruralization” of urban areas. Along with the high level of illiteracy (although decreasing over the years),<sup>19</sup> it has also influenced a rather shallow perception of modernization understood as the industrialization of the Soviet type, without creating the necessary democratic institutions such as modern state, authentic parliamentary system rather than formal institutions of democratic decision-making, free public opinion, etc. It enabled the paternalistic state to claim protection of its subjects but, at the same time, entitled to restrict their freedom. It demands paying respect to the authority of the leader. Therefore, the half transformed peasantry and „rural” working class in Serbia not only accepted but also expressed solidarity rather with their own political leaders than with the working class „counterparts” in Croatia or Slovenia when Federal Yugoslavia collapsed in the early 1990s.

A process of re-traditionalisation can also be observed in the Serbian society in the context of nationalist ideology emergence and the creation of national states in the former Yugoslavia after 1990. In both cases, culture was among the most important causes of the phenomenon.

This situation, to a certain extent, resembles Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*,<sup>20</sup> in which he claims that individuals can best ensure their self-preservation by giving all power to a sovereign. In Hobbes' interpretation this can be a single person, an assembly, etc., but

<sup>17</sup> In this regard one may refer to the article: *Culture and Systems of Thought: Holistic Versus Analytic Cognition* by Richard E. Nisbett, Kaiping Peng, Incheol Choi, Ara Norenzayan in: *Psychological Review*, Vol. 108, No. 2 2001. The Authors find East Asians to be holistic compared to Westerners who are more analytic. They argue that the „considerable social differences that exist among different cultures affect not only their beliefs about specific aspects of the world but also (a) their naive metaphysical system at a deep level (b) their tacit epistemologies and (c) even the nature of their cognitive processes – the ways by which they know the world”. p. 291

<sup>18</sup> Djedović, Dajana, *Kulturna politika i ideologija vs. seoska kultura*, in: *Zbornik radova Fakulteta dramskih umetnosti* No. 13/14 (2008), Beograd p. 310

<sup>19</sup> From 22% in 1961 to 15% in 1981 and 3,5% in 2002. In: *Слика неписмености у Србији, Демографски преглед*, Vol. 4 (2003) No. 16 Београд, p. 1

<sup>20</sup> Hobbes, Thomas: *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, Shapiro Ian (ed.), Yale University Press 2010

regardless of its form all the powers have to be combined and concentrated in it. If not, then man will return to the state of nature where „there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently, not culture of the earth, no navigation, nor the use of commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”<sup>21</sup>

In this regard, there is an interesting connection between those two historical contexts of traditionalism in Serbian history. The process of re-traditionalization tries to establish a new mythological cult, a kind of metaphysics and pathos of the past in the place of the earlier Communist-type cult of revolution that had encouraged self-oblivion of its own tradition and culture. While being anti-communist, re-traditionalization gives support to various collectivist forms, indicating acceptance of ethnocentric limitations of human thought. It is not difficult to conclude that this new kind of tribalism must have also included an anti-Western discourse. Therefore, there is no compromise between the predestined special community rooted in Byzantine culture with the Western atomistic individualism that gives individual rights precedence over the common good and a common destiny.

From an anthropological point of view, it can be noticed that a traditional-patriarchal society and authoritarian political regimes favored the formation of an authoritarian mentality seen as uncritical acceptance of and obedience to the authority (first party leader and the party's state, later national leaders and the national state). Authoritarian mentality is characterized by a strong collective identification as a compensation for unrealized personal identity, therefore, anti-individualism is an essential feature of the dominant „social character” of the society. Adorno and colleagues<sup>22</sup> have already remarked „authoritarian personality” as the dominant type of stereotypical, biased mindset representing Manichaeian view of the world and people (we-they, weak-strong, etc.). On that basis it is difficult to build a civil society based on citizens developed as free personalities, on openness and freedom of communication and tolerance. It is important to notice that the very existence of democratic institutions can easily be abused by the ruling party if there are no citizens aware of their rights and freedoms who are able to use them in a democratic way.

### Civil Society in Serbia

Serbia's society today is pinched between modernization and (re)traditionalism processes, probably more than ever in its history. Therefore, I believe that it seems necessary to analyze two major factors that influence the condition and „quality” of civil society in Serbia – political parties and NGO. Their influence is decisive<sup>23</sup> for civil

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem XIII. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Adorno, Theodore, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, Nevit Sanford: *The Authoritarian Personality*, Harper & Row, New York 1950

<sup>23</sup> There are of course other factors such as civil society education within national educational system or syndicates as, inter alia, „schools” for gaining knowledge of transition processes – as equally

society's emergence in the post-authoritarian times and as a support for institutional reforms given by formed political consciousness of citizens. Democratic consolidation, as a *conditio sine qua non* for modernization, understood not only through its economic dimension but through citizens' attitude towards democratic values as well, remains a substantial indicator of consolidation.

In this context, it should be noted that something I would define as *fear of democracy* exists in the Serbian society. The belief that only a „firm hand” can solve accumulated social problems prevails in public opinion as well as in intellectual circles. The state of civil society is not encouraging, either. The enthusiasm for social change waned after the fall of Milošević's regime in 2000 and „constrained” civil society from the field of politics. Does democracy as such become the „unwanted” in the process of transition along with its axiology again? After the Millennium there were overall expectations that the level of citizens' trust in democratic institutions would be growing but it turned out to be its exact opposite. In a CeSID<sup>24</sup> study concerning the presidential elections of 2007/2008, 27% of respondents claimed complete disinterest for politics, while 17% claimed to have no time for politics.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the same study showed that a significant number of citizens took part in this election. Among those who claimed disinterest in politics, 53% participated in the elections; those who claimed that „do not understand much of politics”, took part in 73%. At the same time, 94% of citizens feel that their influence on the policy is negligible.<sup>26</sup> These seemingly controversial data indicate citizens' attitude towards politics and political institutions. On one hand, the attitude is highly emotional, while, at the same time, is marked by fatalism, lack of trust in political actors, as well as citizens' own power to influence political events. This state of affairs requires an answer to the question of whether civic consciousness expressed in the 1990s in Serbia was truly „civil”? Was it based on a real desire of citizens to achieve democratic society and build democratic institutions? It seems that the political consciousness of citizens at that time had been rather „anti-regime” than was based on a positive attitude towards democracy. After the fall of the hated authoritarian regime, an expected political abstinence replaced the earlier political engagement of citizens. Citizens were left on their own, confronting with the lack of individual capacities for further democratic endeavors. They have never lived in a democratic society and neither had opportunity to experience benefits of that kind of political order, or to build an appropriate level of democratic literacy. Democracy then was desired as a prosperous economic and political order but not as a society with the rule of law and accountability. It is indicative that all citizens' initiatives against the regime were labeled as „democratic”, but as a matter of fact, they were only civil unrests. Knowledge and a positive attitude towards democracy and its values were mostly absent. A logical consequence has been a prevailing cynicism towards democratic political institutions and lack of trust in democracy as a political order. It seems that citizens in Serbia, just

important. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this paper I decided to analyze the two mentioned above.

<sup>24</sup> CeSID (The Center for Free Elections and Democracy, Centar za slobodne izbore i demokratiju) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization established in 1997 in Serbia dealing, inter alia, with election monitoring in the country. Their official website at: [www.cesid.org](http://www.cesid.org)

<sup>25</sup> Hrnjaz, Miloš, *Izborna participacija i apstinencija*, in: Mihajlović, Srećko (ed.), *Oko izbora*, CeSID, Beograd 2007, p. 60

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

like in Plato's allegory of the cave, prefer to stay in the „shadow” of an authoritarian mentality fearing a dramatic exit from the cave to the „daylight” of the rule of law.

Similarly, a not very affirmative approach can be observed in regard to non-governmental organizations (NGO) operating in Serbia in the previous twenty five years. Interestingly, Serbia has had a long history of non-governmental organizations dating back to the XIX century, mostly backed by the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Royal Family. In the early XX century, social functioning of citizens was comprised of traditional forms of rural solidarity but also of various activities of the Serbian Orthodox Church and many other societies.<sup>27</sup> The fact that free associations of citizens<sup>28</sup> had been banned since 1945 by the Communists proved the potential danger they might have posed to the authoritarian communist system. Nevertheless, during Tito's era some forms of civic association were still manifested. For example, in the form of organization of the workers' strikes in 1958, student riots in Belgrade in 1954 and in Zagreb in 1959, the Yugoslav student protest in 1968, etc. Therefore, it seemed logical that the process of democratization that started in 1990 would have been accompanied by a revival of the third sector which was repressed during communist rule.

Since the 1990s, the perception of NGOs functioning has been loaded with controversies. The suspicion that is expressed towards NGOs is almost proverbial. Though it must be admitted that some partial skepticism might be justified. For example, Zoran Avramović argues that functions of the Belgrade Open School, the Soros Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and other NGOs operating in Serbia (and across the Balkans) are spreading faith in Western democratic values, where „the conceptual source of education for civil society is located in western societies and their theories (...) and their main role is Westernization of citizens in Serbia.”<sup>29</sup> Mihajlo Marković notices that functioning of civil society organizations in Serbia is essentially based on the paradigm of „colonization” by the global operations of the NGOs.<sup>30</sup> He gives examples such as the Tavistock Institute in London, Aspen Institute, Stanford Research Institute, George Soros' Open Society Fund. According to him, non-governmental organizations „(...) undermine democracy, undermine parliamentary systems and try to impose itself over them.”<sup>31</sup> Smilja Avramov also notices the „colonizing” assumptions when it comes to the nature of functioning of non-governmental organizations in Serbia. According to her, such organizations have entered the post-Communist Eastern countries with the task of changing the consciousness of the citizens.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Radojičić, Mirjana, *Istorija u krivom ogledalu*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd 2009 p. 9

<sup>28</sup> Others than those recognized by the official state ideology.

<sup>29</sup> Аврамовић, Зоран, *Образовање за грађанско друштво или демократија*, Зборник Института за педагошка истраживања 38 (2) December 2006 p. 449

<sup>30</sup> In fact, he points out that the emergence of a large number of NGOs after the Second World War was caused by Great Britain's desire to control its colonies.

<sup>31</sup> Marković, Mihajlo, *Nevladine organizacije u svetu i Srbiji*, in: Jovanović, Živadin, Brčin, Dragutin (eds.), *Nevladine organizacije u Srbiji i svetu*, Beogradski forum za svet ravnopravnih, Beograd 2006 p. 13

<sup>32</sup> Avramov, Smilja, *Kako su nastale nevladine organizacije u Srbiji*, in: Jovanović, Živadin, Brčin, Dragutin (eds.), *Nevladine organizacije u Srbiji i svetu*, Beogradski forum za svet ravnopravnih, Beograd 2006 pp. 10-11

Although the above mentioned statements are true to a certain extent, it should also be noticed that this set of attitudes towards NGOs is based on a limited interpretation of the nature and functions of NGOs. In addition to the advocacy for human rights, NGOs often take various political stances (which the above mentioned authors criticize them for), but the undeniable importance of these organizations also needs to be taken into account. The given critical thinking ignores the following most important function of non-governmental organizations that they have in establishing a civil society: they are institutionalized forms of expression of civic awareness of the important political issues. Or at least, they should be. It seems that these critical tones are primarily ideological: NGOs are presented as „Western” organizations, being „individualistic and devastating for the state”, as well as a „tool of globalization”, etc. None of these determinants are ontological, which means that they do not explain much of NGO's 'being' (its basic structure and function) neither explain NGOs internal structure or their position in relation to the state, society and citizens. The determinants fail to explain programs, statutes or set of beliefs which each individual NGO advocates. In other words, these critical determinations cannot be related to the civil society itself but to the mythic image of what these organizations have acquired since the 1990s in Serbia.

The perception of politics and political actors is also marked, to a significant extent, by negative connotations. Their roots can be found in history. Hostility and distrust has followed political parties in Serbia since the early stages of their formation in the XIX and early XX century. Ruling dynasties in Serbia perceived political parties as an usurpation of their sovereign power. Desimir Tošić noticed that „all three of our dynasties struggled against our political parties either in independent states such as Montenegro and Serbia after 1878 or later in Yugoslavia 1918-1941”.<sup>33</sup> Dynasties<sup>34</sup> were greatly supported by such institutions as the army and the church, naturally inclined to the monarchy. Perhaps the most important „contribution” to this already traditional mistrust towards political parties in Serbia was the period of the Communist regime between 1945 and 1991. The regime created hostility for free engagement in politics through indoctrination. In his paper entitled *Demokratija još ne stanuje ovde*<sup>35</sup> [Democracy still does not live here], Zoran Stojiljković finds the anti-party sentiments prevalent in Serbia in two causes. The first cause is a *reactive* anti-party sentiment caused by actual experiences that citizens gained after restoring multiparty system in Serbia in 1991. The second is a *cultural* anti-party sentiment conditioned by tradition and a system of values and beliefs. All of this produced a controversial attitude towards politics in Serbia: Politics is treated as an immoral activity, while politicians are the most popular personalities in the society! Politics is a privilege conducted by privileged social layers and a means to achieve social impact. At the same time, there is something „disgusting” from which *moral* citizens and *honest* intellectuals should keep away. The Communist era was marked by the inability of the political elite to solve accumulated economic and

<sup>33</sup> Tošić, Desimir, *Političke stranke i demokratija u Srbiji*, in: Lutovac, Zoran (ed.), *Demokratija u političkim strankama Srbije*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Institut društvenih nauka, Beograd, 2006 p.14

<sup>34</sup> The Obrenović's dynasty that ruled Serbia from 1817 to 1842 and again from 1858 to 1903; The Karadjordjević's dynasty 1804-1914, 1842-1858, 1903-1945; The Petrović-Njegoš dynasty that ruled in Montenegro 1696-1918.

<sup>35</sup> Stojiljković, Zoran, *Demokratija još ne stanuje ovde*, in: Lutovac, Zoran (ed.), *Demokratija u političkim strankama Srbije*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Institut društvenih nauka, Beograd, 2006 p.123

social problems and in the end, directly or indirectly, it resulted in the disintegration of the common state. Therefore, attitudes towards politics as an *activity that can never solve problems*, permanently stabilized.

The inner structure of a modern party (especially those in transitional societies) is often marked by authoritarianism. In other words, undemocratic behavior is justified for the purposes of political effectiveness. Robert Michels' thought that „the modern party is a fighting organization in the political sense of the term, and must as such conform to the laws of tactics”<sup>36</sup> complies a great deal with the Serbian post-authoritarian society. This kind of discourse suggests that a political party in Serbia which respects democratic dialogues and freedom of opinion within its own ranks would be incapable of sharp political competition. Therefore, there is lack of political pluralism within a party, a lack of responsibility towards the society, and finally, a belief that only a monolithic party is able to win and preserve power. In practice, after winning an election, their power crystallizes into an unchanging structure insensitive to any internal democratic dialogue or needs of the society. Serbian reality is that political parties not only ignore their function for a „formal” democratic education but their behavior results in indoctrination of citizens, political discouragement and apathy. Low turnout of citizen vote in most of the elections after 2000 favors party bureaucracies as it guarantees predictable results and preserves the current balance of power. Politics have become a „company” with a secure workplace for professional politicians. Often local branches of political parties in Serbia (even those with a democratic image) serve as „purgatory”, which effectively determines a selection between *the loyal* and *the competent*. The result is lack of motivation for citizens to participate in political process. Unfortunately, all possible pro-social, activist and democratic behavior learned at school, family and involvement in the local community make no sense when confronted with the monolithic political society, which, by its undemocratic behavior, excludes citizens from political participation.

## Conclusion

Obviously, there is an axiological confrontation between the process of modernization and (re)traditionalism within the Serbian political elite and a society as a whole. Neither one is understood in a comprehensive and holistic manner. Therefore it is a great challenge to build a civil society in Serbia between these two axiological platforms.

However, modernization in Serbia understood as the establishment of democratic institutions and an open market economy as an integral part of the European Union institutions seems to be an appropriate formula. Political and intellectual elites focusing on this goal and leaving all other general and particular objectives aside is the right path for the success of the modernization project in Serbia. Obviously, even with a clear consensus among the elites it is not an easy task. Successful modernization requires a lot of effort and prudence but primarily self-discipline among the elites. This includes resignation of personal benefits for the sake of the fulfillment of the overall objectives. The biggest challenge for the modernization project in Serbia is traditionalism prone to glorification of the nation and its conception of patriotism that insists on the cult of

<sup>36</sup> Michels, Robert, *Political Parties, A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, Batoche Books, Kitchener, Ontario 2001 p. 31

*blood and soil*, a common language, origin and maintenance of distinctive traditions as a closed universe. The insistence on the radical individuality and deeply-rooted difference compared to other cultures implies demands for homogenization of its own culture. At the political level it introduces an „us-them” (friend-enemy) dichotomy. This concept will prevail in Serbia leaving citizens to decide on free and democratic elections. There is a role of civil society with its fostering of democratic culture resulting in a change of basic political beliefs of citizens. This is especially important in post-authoritarian countries such as Serbia. In general, a successful democratic transition and consolidation is conditioned with two general changes. The first is institutional, which is often the subject of public discourse and policy focus of all governments, the other one is related to the establishment of a lasting and widely accepted political culture.

What seems to be the most important conclusion for Serbia's elites and society is that the political need for modernization and democratic identity is not negated by other identities such as national pride and patriotism, which are concepts of traditionalist' axiology. It determines them as the *second degree identities* with respect to the basic position of man in a democratic society which is a position of the Citizen. The fact that modern and contemporary democracies were in conjunction with the *national awakening* cannot be disputed. The preservation of national culture is also an important task of democratic endeavor. However, true democratic participation cannot exist when various collective identities dominate the rule of law. In developed democracies a civil society enables the transfer and implementation of numerous individual and group needs of citizens that the state is unable to process. The idea of civil society is not about controlling political order or serving citizens. It also provides a concrete base for the formation and preservation of democratic political awareness. Therefore, civil society is not only a *temporary installation* that would lose its function after the consolidation of democracy. It is a lasting, authentic part of a democratic political system and *condition sine qua non* for modernization projects understood not only through economic development.