

THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS IN CIVIL SOCIETY BUILDING: THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of external actors upon the development of civil society in Macedonia since 1990. The study analyzes the development of civil society as an integral element of democratization and argues that although external actors have facilitated the development of civil society in the case of Macedonia, their success has been conditioned upon contextual knowledge and local support. The analysis is structured around the impact of the external actors on the following elements: the financing of civil society organizations (CSOs), their origin and manner of establishment, the agenda setting process, the level of public trust CSOs enjoy, and their division upon ethnic lines. The study employs qualitative methodology and relies on empirical data from open-ended interviews with civil society activists, international organizations and intellectuals. This research primarily contributes to the contextual literature on development of civil society in Macedonia and provides useful findings for comparison with other transitional countries, especially multi-ethnic countries with deep ethnic cleavages.

1. Introduction

In the beginning of the 1990s, civil society building was considered part of a successful blueprint for democratization; nevertheless, the advancement of transition has shown that the establishment of effective civil society in the conditions of post-communism is a complex process of societal transformation.⁴²

⁴² See Ian Jeffries and Robert Bideleux, "Nationalism and the post-1989 transition to democracy and the market in the Balkans," in *Problems of Economic and Political Transformation in the Balkans*, ed. Ian Jeffries (London: Pinter Publishers, 1996); Andrew Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World* (US: Stanford

The key factor behind these developments is the progress of transition, which pointed out that there is no predetermined *modus operandi* for democratization, questioning previously established models. It has become clear that civil society as an element of democratization is a context specific process, which necessitates the examination of individual countries separately in relation to the factors which influence civil society building.⁴³ In the conditions of non-existent civil society in the beginning of the 1990s, external actors such as international organizations and foundations have exerted formative influence upon the rise of civil society organizations (hereinafter CSOs) in post-communist countries.

In relation, this research examines the impact of external actors such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on the development of civil society in Macedonia since independence. The study analyzes the development of civil society as an integral element of democratization. Since the 1990s, predominantly through the involvement of foreign donors and organizations, the Macedonian civil society has been marked by the creation of a dense network of civil society organizations (CSOs). The focus of this study is the impact of the external actors on the defining features of the Macedonian civil society sector: the financing of CSOs, their origin and manner of establishment, the manner in which CSOs set their agenda, the level of public trust they enjoy, and their division upon ethnic lines. The study employs qualitative methodology and relies on empirical data from open-ended interviews. On the basis of its findings, the study argues that external actors have facilitated the development of civil society in the case of Macedonia, but their success has been conditioned upon contextual knowledge and local support.

University Press, 2000); Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

43 See Thomas Carothers "The End of the Transition Paradigm" in *Journal of Democracy*. Vol.13. No.1. 2002. 5-2; John D. Nagle and Alison Mahr, *Democracy and Democratization* (London: Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999); Geoffrey Pridham, "Democratic Transitions in Theory and Practice" in *Democratization in Eastern Europe-domestic and international perspectives*, ed. Pridham Geoffrey and Tatu Vanhanen (US: Routledge Publishers, 1994)

2. Civil society, democratization and democratic consolidation

Despite the extensive research on the transition process in Latin America, Southeastern Europe and the USSR, a general compromise on the meaning of the term *civil society* is still lacking.⁴⁴ In post-communism, it has been associated with two definitions. The first one identifies civil society with the economic revolution and liberalization i.e. *Bürgerlichegesellschaft*.⁴⁵ The second term is completely divorced from the market economy and is largely identified with the so-called third sector—CSOs.⁴⁶ The latter view of civil society distinct from both the state and the market is used in this study. In relation to specific terminology, the research closely relates to Ernest Gellner's understanding of civil society, according to whom civil society denotes "a set of diverse non-governmental institutions strong enough to counterbalance the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society."⁴⁷ Thus, the main feature of civil society is its independence from the government, "wherever the distinction between civil society and government is marked, however, there must always exist a boundary between them, because each is defined in opposition to the other."⁴⁸

44 For different definitions of the term civil society see Schmidt, "Civil Society and Social Things: Setting the Boundaries of the Social Sciences," *Social Research*, Winter95, Vol. 62, Issue 4. See also, Sunil Khilhani, "The development of Civil Society" in Sidupta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilhani, ed. *Civil Society-History and Possibilities*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

45 We are aware of the lack of theoretical consensus as whether the economic sphere is in general a part of civil society. As we adopt the latter view of CSOs, the distinction made is the following: "Civil society is distinguished from the government because it is voluntary, and from the private activities of markets because it seeks common good [rather than business profit]." Taken from the dictionary of civic practices available at: Civil Society: Civic Practices Network: Dictionary: <<http://www.cpn.org/tools/dictionary/index.html>> (April 16,2004).

46 Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismaneanu eds. *Between past and future-the revolutions of 1989 and their aftermath*, (Budapest: CEU Press 2000), 18.

47 Ernest Gellner "The importance of being modular" in *Civil Society-theory, history and comparison*, ed. John Hall, (UK: Polity Press, 1995): 32. For further discussion on civil society definitions see Adam Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society*, (USA: Macmillan, 1992); Kaviraj and Khilhani, *Civil Society-History and Possibilities*.

48 Robert C. Post and Nancy L. Rosenblum, "Introduction" in Nancy L. Rosenblum and Robert C. Post ed. *Civil Society and Government*, (US: Princeton University Press, 2002): 11

Though abandoned through most of the twentieth century, the concept of civil society was rediscovered by the dissident writers in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1980s. Writers such as Havel and Michnik revived the concept by arguing that civil society is built in opposition to the government and depends on mutually reinforcing patterns of responsibility and interconnectedness.⁴⁹ In the dissident writings, civil society acquired not only the status of a panacea for crushing down the communist system and ideology, but also for the democratic problems of the post-communist countries. As a result, civil society has been a dominant concept in all post 1989 literature related to Eastern Europe, which considers it an essential element of democratization.⁵⁰ For Havel, civil society stands at the core of democratization, since without civic engagement there is no basis for a consolidated democratic order.⁵¹

Democratization as a term describes the overall process of regime change from the end of the previous authoritarian regime to the stabilization and rooting of new democracies.⁵² Though democratization is a comparatively new field of research in the academic world, the three waves of democratization in the second half of the twentieth century initiated a prolific debate signified by the appearance of different theories for explanation of this process. All academic approaches tend to divide the process of democratization into several phases. Though often subject to disagreement, the most common temporal division with respect to post-communist countries is between the processes of

49 Vaclav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless" in *The Power of the Powerless*, (New York: Palach Press 1985); For a discussion see N.J Rengger. "Towards a culture of democracy?" in *Building democracy? The international dimension of Democratization in Eastern Europe*, ed. Geoffrey Pridham, Eric Herring and George Sanford (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1994), 66.

50 Literature on CEE has placed the development of a functioning civil society at the heart of the transformation of SEE after communism. See Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*; Janos, *East Central Europe in the modern world*; Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*; Bideleux and Jeffries, *Problems of Economic and Political Transformation in the Balkans*; Pridham and Vanhanen ed., *Democratization in Eastern Europe-domestic and international perspectives*.

51 Havel quoted in Jon Elster, Claus Offe and Ulrich Preuss. *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at the Sea*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 281.

52 Geoffrey Pridham and Paul Lewis "Introduction" in Pridham and Lewis eds. *Stabilising fragile democracies: Comparing New Party Systems in Southern and Eastern Europe*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 2.

transition to a liberal democracy and its subsequent consolidation.⁵³

In many cases, the term democratic consolidation is used in several incompatible senses in the scholarly literature, reflecting diverse understandings of the nature of democracy itself.⁵⁴ Despite the specific definitional differences, the concept of democratic consolidation almost unavoidably entails a multitude of conditions, which Linz and Stepan in their commonly accepted analytical framework summarize in the following criteria: a free and lively civil society, a relatively autonomous political society, rule of law, a usable state bureaucracy and an institutionalized economic society.⁵⁵ Different definitions of consolidation emphasize "various processes, levels, dimensions, locations of areas of political change."⁵⁶ One of the core division lines in this area has been between the emphasis on *formal criteria* and a *substantive conception* of democracy. As defined by Kaldor and Vejvoda the formal aspect of democracy embodies "a set of rules, procedures and institutions [...] which represent an a priori safeguard against the abuses of power. Substantive democracy embodies the formal mechanisms is a "way of regulating power relations in such a way as to maximize the opportunities for individuals influence the [...] key decisions in society."⁵⁷ This study adopts a substantive view on democratic consolidation, which entails both the duration of a democratic regime with significant changes in the quality of its performance.⁵⁸

The substantive element of civil society requires the establishment of mechanisms by which the exercise of state power is open to universal contestation and becomes dependent

53 Pridham and Lewis, "Introduction" in Pridham and Lewis eds., op. cit., p.2.: For a discussion of approaches towards democratization in the postcommunist world see Petr Kopecký, Cas Mudde, "What has Eastern Europe taught us about the democratization literature (and vice versa)" *European Journal of Political Research*, (Vol. 37, 2000)

54 See Stephen E. Hanson "Defining Democratic Consolidation" in Richard D. Anderson Jr. et al, *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy*, (Princeton University Press, 2001).

55 Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, op. cit., 7.

56 See Fritz Plasser Peter A. Ulram and Harald Waldrauch, *Democratic Consolidation in East-Central Europe*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 11.

57 Vejvoda and Kaldor, op. cit., 62.

58 Don Chull Shin, "On the Third Wave of Democratization: A Synthesis and Evaluation of Recent Theory and Research", *World Politics*, Vol.47, No.1, (Oct 1994), 144.

upon societal forces within civil society.⁵⁹ The substantive aspects of democracy essentially rest upon use of the newly acquired right to participate in the policy making processes. However, "the disillusionment with democracy as it is perceived, exhaustion after the frenetic activity of the years 1989-91 and the tradition of apathy [...] resulted in low public activism in the civil sector. The absence of a public sphere, a space for true discussion in a sharply polarized situation, leads often to political cynicism and apathy."⁶⁰ Hence, the progress in democratization in the post-communist world, in many aspects has been purely formal and not accompanied by substantive developments. This problem is a result of both the idiosyncrasies of the post-communist space and the short period of transformation of these societies.

The nature of the emerging civil society is specific to each country and "depends largely on historical precedent, political culture (especially the propensity of society to organize and the relationship of social classes), particular forms of nationalism, and the social context of institutional development."⁶¹ Thus, an additional factor that requires examination in the Macedonian context is the effect of the diverse ethnic structure on civil society building. Literature on transition considers ethnic homogeneity as one of the decisive factors in the differences between democratization in Central and Eastern Europe. The ethnic element is a crucial factor when dealing with civil society in the Macedonian context, affecting the civil society building in two ways. On the one hand, the existing ethnic division of the population is reflected in the civil society sector. This division, subsequently, hinders the legitimacy of the claim of civil society organizations of representing the overall non-political sphere of society. This study examines the impact of the external actors upon civil society building, in correlation with the theoretical concept of civil society.

The conceptual background of civil society as an element of democratization in combination with the impact of ethnic diversity

59 Michael Bernhard, "Civil Society and Democratic Transition in East Central Europe", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 108, No. 2 (Summer, 1993): 326

60 Vejvoda and Kaldor, op. cit., 71.

61 Marcia Weigle and Jim Butterfield, "Civil Society in Reforming Communist Regimes: The Logic of Emergence," *Comparative Politics*, Vol.25, No1 (Oct.,1992), 2.

upon its development provides the framework in which this study operates. In order to set the basis for examination of the influence of external actors upon the development of civil society as an element of democratic consolidation, in the following chapter the study provides an assessment of the context of civil society development in the case of Macedonia.

3. Context

In order to assess civil society building in post-communist Macedonia, an overview of the forms of civic association during communism and the inherited relationships between the state and these organizations is necessary, due to its impact on the transitional period. As part of the Yugoslav Federation (1945-1990), Macedonia supported various kinds of citizens' associations (i.e. cultural, voluntary, sport, etc.) along the lines of the dominant communist ideology. The monopolistic position of the state party in the economy affected citizens' associations: the state distributed financial resources in accordance with "legitimate" interests and needs to ideologically reliable associations and organizations.⁶² As a result, the term civil society, as used in this study, is not representative for the organizations existent prior to 1990.⁶³ In contextual literature, these forms of organizing have been commonly referred to as social organizations, whose actual role was quasi-nongovernmental, since they promoted the state policy defined by the League of Communists.⁶⁴ Not surprisingly, the few state controlled citizens' organizations had large membership—such as the Union of Women, Union of Pensioners etc. The main aim of these organizations was primarily to promote and support the ruling party and ideology.⁶⁵ In the half century between 1940 and

62 "Civil society in transition" – National human development report. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Available at : <<http://www.undp.org.mk/nhdr/NHDR.PDF>> (April 10th, 2004)

63 Di Palma has argued that during communism civil society of sorts have survived in Eastern Europe, nevertheless, as the chapter analyzes the state-civil society relations, this is not subject to examination. For more on this see Guiseppe Di Palma, "Legitimation from the Top to Civil Society: Politico-Cultural Change in Eastern Europe", *World Politics*, Vol.44, No1, (Oct., 1991):49.

64 "Civil society in transition" – National human development report. See also see Gjorgje Ivanov and Dane Taleski, "Civil Society in South East Europe: The case of Macedonia", Institute for Democracy, Solidarity, and Civil Society, (September 2003).

65 Ivanov and Taleski, "Civil Society in South East Europe: The case of Macedonia".

1989, over two hundred such organizations were formed, a rate of less than five per year.⁶⁶ Fully dependent upon the state for financial support, they were subserviently positioned in relation to the state officials.

A closely related factor with the legacy of communism, which has affected civil society building in transitional Macedonia, was the elitist nature of the regime change in the 1990s. As the regime change occurred exclusively at the level of political elites, without major societal involvement, there was no pressure on the political elites for a swift institutional transformation. Analysts have concluded that no more than one percent of the Macedonian population was involved in the historical events in the beginning of the 1990s.⁶⁷ Correspondingly, Macedonia did not have its own 'school' of philosophy, nor did it have any genuine dissidents who could dispute the legitimacy of the political order.⁶⁸ Hence, when SFRY disintegrated, Macedonia had no strong social structures independent of the state – structures which are prerequisites for the creation and maintenance of stable, democratic, political institutions.⁶⁹ In post-communist countries, [such as Macedonia], which lack any historical practice and tradition of democracy, civic engagement in the public sphere is critical for the building of effective civil society.⁷⁰ However, instead of creating a culture of participation, there is a tendency of "disbelief in the efficacy of participating in public affairs."⁷¹

In addition to the specific legacy of communism and its' overturn, in the case of Macedonia, civil society building was further burdened with the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation.⁷²

66 Data base of the Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation, Available online at www.mcms.org.mk. Since MCIC data was put together in the late 1990s, it is probable that more organizations could have been created during the period. However, these would not have been sufficient in number to affect the overall number.

67 Slavko Milosavljević, *Istocna Evropa megu Egalitarizmot i Demokratijata*, (Skopje: Ljuboten, 1993), 144

68 Gjorgji Ivanov, "The Power of the Powerless: Democracy and Civil Society in Macedonia" in Margaret Blunden and Patrick Burke ed. *Democratic Reconstruction in the Balkans*, Centre for the Study of Democracy, 2001.

69 Ivanov, op. cit.

70 Daniel N. Nelson, "Civil Society Endangered," *Social Research*, 0037783X, Summer96, Vol. 63, Issue 2.

71 Nelson, "Civil Society Endangered."

72 Ivan Krastev, "The Inflexibility Trap-Frustrated Societies, Weak States and Democracy," Available at <www.ned.org/reports/balkansFeb2002.html>

Moreover, parallel with the economic, political, and social transition, Macedonia has been undergoing processes of state and nation building.⁷³ Though this study does not deal with these two major processes, a specific reference is necessary, as this complex situation has made the development of civil society marginal in comparison to state and nationhood.⁷⁴ Since in 1991 Macedonia gained independence for the first time in its history, it is not surprising that Macedonian political discourse centered on the creation of a state and a nation (contested in various manners from the neighboring countries).⁷⁵ After independence, feelings of insecurity regarding national identity and state building were reinforced. Area studies on Macedonia generally point that since independence Macedonia has not consolidated democracy (read civil society) due to the unresolved stateness issue.⁷⁶ Moreover, Hall argues that societies undergoing nation-building processes find themselves with politics of such novelty as almost to rule out the possibility of civil society.⁷⁷ Thus, during Macedonia's transition, the building of civil society in Macedonia was secondary to the state and nation building processes.

Nation building aspirations, resulting from Macedonia's first historic encounter with independence accompany the state building process and further complicate the building of indigenous civil society. Thus, the legacy and presence of strong ethnic [...] hostilities, renders it particularly difficult to agree on rules that become [...] effectively binding to all, or to institute well protected and demarcated spheres of autonomous action within civil

73 For more on state building in Macedonia see Zhidas Daskalovski, "Democratic Consolidation and the Stateness Problem: The Case of Macedonia," *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 3, no. 2, (January 2004); For nation building see also Zhidas Daskalovski, "Language and Identity: The Ohrid Framework Agreement and Liberal Notions of Citizenship and Nationality in Macedonia," *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, Vol.1, (2002). Available at: <<http://www.ecmi.de/jemie/download/Focus1-2002Daskalovski.pdf>>

74 For more on state and nation building and democratization see Karen Dawisha, "Research concepts and Methodologies" in *Politics, Power, and the Struggle for Democracy in Southeast Europe*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Dawisha and Parrot, ed. *Politics, Power, and the Struggle for Democracy in Southeast Europe*,

75 For a discussion see Andrew Rossos, 'The Macedonian Question and Instability in the Balkans,' in Norman N. Naimark and Holly Case, ed. *Yugoslavia and Its Historians*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). Also Loring M. Danforth, *The Macedonian conflict*, (Princeton University Press, 1995).

76 Daskalovski, "Democratic Consolidation and the 'Stateness' Problem: The Case of Macedonia."

77 Hall. John A. "In Search of Civil Society" in *Civil Society-theory, history and comparison*, 22.

society.⁷⁸ Each ethnic community developed their own metanarratives which are not only different but divergent and reflected in all spheres of social organization.

These developments have been in line with Linz and Stepan's conclusion that "the more the population of a state is composed of plurinational, lingual, religious, or cultural societies, [...] an agreement on the fundamentals of democracy will be more difficult."⁷⁹ An illustration of this is the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) in which the civil society concept of the state was further abolished at the expense of the ethnic concept of the state. This tendency was even more firmly indented with the Constitutional amendments stemming from the OFA and is presently to be identified in the activities for its implementation. While a general consensus exists on the necessity of the Agreement as a conflict prevention mechanism and a solid foundation for advancing democratization in Macedonia, recognition of its weaknesses in further institutionalizing differences also exists.⁸⁰

The Macedonian context during transition has affected civil society building in several interconnected ways: firstly, civil society building was inferior to the processes of nation and state building. This, in turn, strengthened the ethnic division of the society resulting in the creation of CSOs predominantly on ethnic lines. Lastly, the elitist regime change inhibited the development of independent social structures. Thus, contextual factors, both the legacy of communism and the specifics of the transitional Macedonian context largely constrain the civil society development in the country.

4. External actors and CSOs in the Republic of Macedonia

As explained in the previous chapter, the contextual specificities have largely complicated civil society building in the case of

78 Elster, Offe and Preuss. *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at the Sea*, 246.

79 Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, op. cit., 29

80 Ljubomir Frckovski, Snezana Klincharova, Kim Mehmeti, Ferid Muhic, Robert Alagjovovski, Zhidas Daskalovski, Gjuner Ismail, Interview with the authors, Spring, 2004 in Macedonia; See also Biljana Vankovska, "Current Perspectives on Macedonia," Heinrich Boll Foundation, (2002): 8-12.

Macedonia. Due to the various levels on which external actors have influenced the development of civil society, this study employs qualitative methodology. In order to obtain empirical data, the authors have conducted twenty semi-structured interviews in the period April 2004-September 2007. Open-ended interviews “provide access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provide a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior.”⁸¹ The interview guide for the study was structured around the external involvement in civil society building with respect to the establishment of CSOs in Macedonia, their financing and transparency, public trust in CSOs and the impact of the diverse ethnic composition of Macedonia on civil society building. The interview guide draws particular attention to contextual issues, “placing an interviewee’s attitudes and behavior in the context of their individual biography and the wider social setting.”⁸²

The interviewed sample consists of civil society activists, international organizations staff and intellectuals, maintaining ethnic representation. The structure of the sample is justified by the need for representativity. Each of the interviewed groups provides a different perspective on the issue increasing the possibility for generalization. In addition to civil society activists, the choice of intellectuals as interviewee group is justified by the role they play in transitional societies. While intellectuals think in terms of civil society, most other people adopt the national frame of reference.⁸³ The sampling process is a combination of intentional choice and snowballing technique. The intentionally chosen interviewees are active in the dominant CSOs and they have been selected according to their membership, contacts with external actors and previous work.⁸⁴ Considering the informal nature of the civil society sector, the combination of purposive and snowballing sampling is the most appropriate and allows for the identification of the most relevant CSOs.

81 Irving Seidman quoted in “Interviews and the Philosophy of Qualitative Research,” *Journal of Higher Education*, (Jan/Feb2004), Vol. 75, Issue1.

82 Fiona Devine “Qualitative Methods” in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, ed. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 199.

83 Karol Jakubowicz “Civil Society and Public sphere in Central and Eastern Europe—A Polish Case study,” Available at the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research:

<<http://www.nordicom.gu.se/reviewcontents/ncomreview/ncomreview296/JAKUBO.PDF>> (April 20th, 2004).

84 For a full list of CSOs in Macedonia see <www.mango.org.mk>.

It is of increasing importance to note that all interviewees highlighted that external actors influenced civil society development on various levels from the beginning of transition. Most of them also assessed positively the involvement of external actors in civil society in Macedonia. Hence, in general, CSOs in the Republic of Macedonia perceive external actors as major supporters of their work.⁸⁵ The most obvious and direct manner in which external actors influenced the development of civil society was the provision of direct financial assistance. Our interviewees in general highlighted the influence of external actors with respect to the following features of the civil society sector: financing of the CSOs, the manner of establishment and origin of CSOs in the country, the agenda setting of CSOs, the public trust and the division of CSOs on ethnic lines. Each of these elements is examined separately in the following five sections.

4.1 Financial support

The first and primary aspect in which external actors influenced civil society development was with the provision of financial assistance both for specific activities as well as organizational capacity building.⁸⁶ As Sampson highlights, whereas the original aim of western aid development programs in post-communist countries was on economic reconstruction, their focus was gradually transferred to the establishment of a healthy civil society as part of democratization. One of the main instruments for supporting civil society was to finance projects enabling CSOs to imitate western CSOs.⁸⁷ Despite existent criticisms to the financial strategy approach, nevertheless, financial assistance was much needed, since in the case of Macedonia, the domestic possibilities for financing of CSOs are minimal. The share of the state in financing the activities of the civil organizations is also minimal.⁸⁸ The most important sources of income are membership fees, gifts, and donations; totaling to forty-two

85 All of the interviewees highlighted this.

86 Silva Pesic, Interview with the authors, (September 2007).

87 Steven Sampson, "The Social Life of Projects-Importing Civil Society to Albania" in *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*, ed. Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn (London: Routledge, 1996);

88 Daniela Dimitroska-interview with the authors. See also "Civil society in transition" – National human development report, UNDP. Ivanov, Taleski, "Civil Society in South East Europe: The case of Macedonia."

percent of the incomes of civic associations.⁸⁹ The donations by the economic enterprises are not liable to taxation revenues and the most frequently used argument in favor of such policy is the fear of money laundering.⁹⁰ The data of this study and other studies on the financing of civil society highlights the pressing need of tax exemptions to increase incomes that originate from private donations in order to decrease the civil society dependence upon foreign funds.⁹¹ Despite the continuous emphasis of this problem, so far, there have been no major developments in this regard. Similarly, the 2007 Freedom House *Nations in Transit* report on Macedonia concludes that “few civil society groups are financially viable in the long term. Although a new law was enacted in April 2006 providing tax incentives for local or foreign donors, local philanthropy and volunteerism are almost nonexistent, while the participation of religious groups in charitable activities is minimal”.⁹²

In this setting, external involvement, especially in terms of financial support, has been crucial for the development of civil society. The strategy for financial assistance for democratization, however, did not always take into consideration the distinct features of the Macedonian civil society. The exclusive focus on financial involvement has up to a large extent resulted in a donor-driven civil society sector in the case of Macedonia. This has been, to a large extent, a result of the fact that domestic resources are very limited, thus the CSOs position themselves on what donors offer in their programmes.⁹³ It has been also commonly accepted that the strategy of financial assistance from

89 “Civil society in transition” – National human development report. See also Ivanov and Taleski, “Civil Society in South East Europe: The case of Macedonia”.

90 “Civil society in transition” – National human development report. See also Zaneta Trajkovska, “Green Ants, NGO and Media in Macedonia,” *Graganski Svet*, No.13, February 2002. (Authors’ translation) Available at: <<http://www.graganskisvet.org.mk/default-mk.asp?ItemID=E5D10A239B152E498A5D95E6C38B9EB3>> (March 21st, 2004).

91 Guner Ismail, Interviews with the authors. April 2004. For dependence of the NGO sector on foreign funds see also: Ivanov, Taleski, “Civil Society in South East Europe: The case of Macedonia”; For general analysis of Southeastern Europe see also Parrot, Bruce. “Perspectives on post-communist democratizations” in Dawisha and Parrot, ed. *Politics, Power, and the Struggle for Democracy in Southeast Europe*, 25.

92 Freedom House *Nations in Transit* Report on Macedonia, 2007 available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.hu/images/fdh_galleries/NIT2007final/nit-macedonia-web.pdf>

93 Zoran Stojkovski, Interview with the authors, April 2004

abroad coupled with the lack of domestic funding has created a largely donor-oriented society in the country.⁹⁴

On the other hand, we have not been witnessing any concerted efforts on the side of the external actors to influence the Government to increase support of the CSOs.⁹⁵ There has been no pressure from external actors to the Government for concerted action on improving domestic possibilities for financing of CSOs. Moreover, on the NGO sustainability index for 2006 the financial viability of the CSOs has the lowest grades from all other aspects with the study concluding that the NGOs continue to depend primarily upon grants from the international donor community.⁹⁶ CSOs, on the other hand, expect to see increasing pressure from abroad to the Government, especially in light of the decreasing external financial assistance.⁹⁷ Hence, the need of coupling domestic and external efforts for re-modeling the possibilities for CSO financing becomes increasingly evident.

4.2 Establishment and origin of CSOs

In addition to their primary role in terms of financing CSOs, external actors have also influenced the establishment and origin of CSOs. The 1998 data of the Ministry of Interior indicates that there were six thousand and five hundred registered CSOs in Macedonia.⁹⁸ A more recent publication from a domestic foundation "The Macedonian Center for International Cooperation" claims that in 2003 there were around 5769 CSOs.⁹⁹ The majority of the public in Macedonia believes that there are too many CSOs in the country, although seen in comparative terms there is no excessive number of CSOs per capita.¹⁰⁰ External actors have affected the rise in the number of CSOs from several aspects. On the one hand, the presence of external actors and predominantly their financial resources have undoubtedly influenced the rise in

94 Silva Pesic, Interview with the authors, September 2007

95 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007

96 NGO sustainability index for Macedonia, 2006, available at:

<http://www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/dem_gov/ngoindex/2006/macedonia.pdf>

97 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007

98 "Civil society in transition" – National human development report.

99 Detailed information available at <www.civicworld.org.mk>

100 Mirjana Najcevska, Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

the number of CSOs. In numerous instances in Macedonia, CSOs were developed to target a specific foundation or source of finances.¹⁰¹ Such has been the case with organizations working in the field of ethnic reconciliation, most of which did not have real roots in the civil society.¹⁰² These organizations, as practice indicates, have not been sustainable and most of them are no longer active. In this manner, a significant number of underdeveloped CSOs were established, and as explained in the previous section, most of them are fully dependent on foreign assistance.¹⁰³

Similarly as with the number of CSOs and their establishment, external actors have also influenced the origin of CSOs in the Republic of Macedonia. Unlike in the other countries of post-communist Europe where civil society has been commonly rooted in the anti-communist movements, in Macedonia the first CSOs were established and facilitated largely by left oriented political elites.¹⁰⁴ External actors have also influenced this development. A common example of this trend is that in the beginning of the 1990s the entire management structure of one of the major international Foundations in Macedonia consisted of members of the left-oriented ruling party at the time.¹⁰⁵ Having developed under the influence of the left-oriented political elites, it is not surprising that following the change in Government, the increasingly politicized state institutions at times were distrustful of the civil society sector. The 1999 UNDP National Report on Civil Society emphasizes that the state looks with suspicion on the civil sector activities.¹⁰⁶ In 1998, civil organizations were publicly portrayed as "traitors" and "foreign spies" by high-ranking political officials in power.¹⁰⁷ Though this animosity has decreased significantly over time, one can conclude that external actors had

101 Jasminka Friscik, Interview with the authors, April 2004.

102 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

103 Jasminka Friscik, Interview with the authors, April 2004.

104 See "15 years of transition – a country moving towards citizen participation" Civicus civil society index, Macedonian Center for international cooperation, Skopje 2006. Available at: <www.mcms.org.mk> (May 18, 2007)

105 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

106 "Civil society in transition" – National human development report.

107 Ivanov and Taleski, "Civil Society in South East Europe: The case of Macedonia",

formative influence over the origin and further direction of development of the Macedonian civil society.

4.3 Agenda setting

The aforementioned influence of external actors on the formative features of CSOs in Macedonia undoubtedly shaped the manner in which CSOs set their agenda. As the 2007 Freedom House Nations in Transit Report on Macedonia notes “various international donors supported the NGO sector, each with its own agenda often not coordinated with local needs and NGO demands. The donors have taken a top-down approach, offering funding to local organizations only if their programs and projects match the priorities established by the funders in Washington or Brussels, for example”.¹⁰⁸ This practice has led to a rather unusual process of agenda setting among CSOs. Instead of having an agenda modeled according to domestic pressure and concerns, priorities were on the basis of external influence and foreign policies of the countries of origin of the international organizations. In many cases, domestic priorities have been rather neglected at the expense of the donor’s regional and global priorities.¹⁰⁹ A prominent example of this form has been that CSOs in the Republic of Macedonia have weakly responded to the primary societal concerns – poverty and widespread corruption.¹¹⁰ Despite these two concerns standing at the top of the list of public concerns in the country, they have been very weakly addressed by CSOs, raising concerns over the manner of agenda setting of the civil society sector in the country. On the other hand, issues which were rather low on the domestic agenda have sometimes appeared to be on the agenda of external actors, thereby creating organizations that respond to the external, rather than domestic needs.¹¹¹ Such an example is the legislative amendment for religious organization, which was not an immediate concern of the general public, but an externally induced priority.¹¹²

108 Freedom House Nations in Transit Report Macedonia 2006.

109 Silva Pesic, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

110 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

111 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

112 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

External and inadequate agenda setting has been conditioned by the extent in which external actors' use of local experts and staff. In the beginning of transition, most of the external actors lacked contextual knowledge.¹¹³ Most of the international organizations usually grouped Macedonia with the countries of Eastern Europe, despite the evident peculiarities.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, this tendency with the advancement of transition has been slowly changing.¹¹⁵ Today, the least contextual knowledge and most inappropriate agenda setting is to be found among the international organizations which have the highest staff turnover.¹¹⁶ These organizations, in which the staff rotates on a short period of time, have had the most problems in understanding the domestic peculiarities and in most cases have proven to be the least effective in the setting of priorities.¹¹⁷

Quite opposite to the external agenda setting, there have been several best case practices in terms of external actors' influence on civil society building. By using local staff, international organizations can compensate for their lack of contextual knowledge.¹¹⁸ The combination, namely, of domestic social capital and external technical and financial assistance have had extremely significant impact on the development of civil society.¹¹⁹ Such an example in the case of Macedonia has been the environmental movement, which was gradually transferred into a politics of the state, with the establishment of the Ministry of Environment.¹²⁰ Another example is the establishment of the Unit for Cooperation with the CSOs in the Government and the adoption of the Government Strategy for cooperation with the civil society. These two instruments significantly improve the communication and involvement of CSOs in the democratization processes by institutionalizing the dialogue between the state and civil society. Building partnerships and broad-based coalitions between external actors, the civil sector and the government

113 Silva Pesic, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

114 Mirjana Najcevska, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

115 Silva Pesic, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

116 Mirjana Najcevska, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

117 Mirjana Najcevska, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

118 Ivica Vasev, Interview with the authors, June 2007.

119 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

120 Ivica Vasev, Sasho Klekovski Interview with the authors, September 2007.

through joint activities and coordinated policies help to develop pluralism and stimulate democratic initiatives [...].¹²¹ Through this channel CSOs are assessed as having reached the level of lobbyists to the government that affect even legislative changes.¹²²

These examples highlight the need for a shift in the priority setting and its modeling according to the domestic needs. They also show that the international involvement is not sufficient to foster civil society building and democratization, indicating the need for domestic support for the effectiveness of external interventions. Hence, when working in partnership with well established domestic structures, international organizations have managed to make a significant impact on civil society building.

4.4 Public trust in CSOs

The rise in the number of CSOs coupled with the dominance of foreign finances has had significant impact on their development and positioning with regard to the public. On one of the last surveys of public opinion, 55.1% of the citizens declared that CSOs serve foreign interests.¹²³ Although CSOs enjoy a much more positive image today than in the beginning of the 90s, the public still has a predominantly negative perception of the civil sector.¹²⁴ As assessed by CSO members and activists, despite the constant quantitative increase of CSOs, the trust of the population in the civil sector seems to be one of the weakest elements of the civil society building in Macedonia.¹²⁵ The increase in numbers of CSOs acts as an impediment in public activism as well, because the public in some cases associates the

121 Nevenka Rosomanova, Interview with the authors, June 2007.

122 Valbona Morina Maksut, Interview with the authors, June 2007.

123 Trust, Responsibility about social issues and charity in Macedonia, (Authors' translation), Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation, 2006. Available at: <www.mcms.org.mk>

124 Daniela Dimitroska, Guner Ismail, Interview with the authors, April 2004.

125 Ilo Trajkovski, "Civil Society in Macedonia: Current State and Perspectives". *Graganski Svet*, December 2002. Available at: <<http://www.graganskisvet.org.mk/default-mk.asp?ItemID=6F624BCB318CC743B22A587F76C07A71>> (March 21st, 2004) . See also: Vesna Velik-Stefanovska, Interview in *Graganski Svet*, No.5, June 2001. (Authors' translation) Available at: <<http://www.graganskisvet.org.mk/default-mk.asp?ItemID=>>(March 21st, 2004) .

appearance of CSOs with the problems of transition.¹²⁶ As a result, the number of people willing to join a CSO is noticeably low.¹²⁷

This distrust, on the one hand, is founded in the overall suspicion of public organization inherited from communism, but is also a result of the general lack of understanding of the role of civil society in the country and the blurred role of external actors. An average Macedonian perceives CSOs as a way to travel internationally and as a means of having more contacts with internationals within the country.¹²⁸ The civil society concept is still largely alien to the general population and activism is not common. Limited participation is occurring only in the case of a financially supported and secured project, with rare cases of continuous civil society involvement.¹²⁹ Instead, CSOs have been substituting for the weak economic situation in the country and have in many cases provided for employment opportunities rather than organizations for realization of certain goals.¹³⁰ This image is supported by the general understanding of civil society activism as an easy and well-paid engagement providing access to foreign funds in the country. As a result, a large segment of the public holds a negative image of CSOs and associates them exclusively with money laundering, due to the constant inflow and outflow of foreign funds.¹³¹ This phenomenon is visible as a certain number of civil society entities behave in conformity with the principles of the so-called NGO-business and fishing in troubled waters.¹³²

In order to tackle this problem, in the last couple of years external actors have pushed for increased transparency of CSOs, especially with regard to their financial operations. Since the end of the 1990s, organizations have started publishing their financial audit reports in the media so as to increase the transparency in their work. Still, these efforts have been minimal and have only

126 Guner Ismail, Interview with the authors, March 2004.

127 Project "Southeastern Europe: New Means for Regional Analysis", International Institute for Democracy and Elections Assistance. Available at: <www.idea.int/balkans> (April 10th, 2004).

128 "Civil society in transition" – National human development report.

129 Daniela Dimitrovska, Interview with the authors, March 2004.

130 Mirjana Najcevska, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

131 Martin Martinovski, Interview with the authors, March 2004.

132 "Civil society in transition" – National human development report.

slightly improved the image of the civil society, which is remains generally perceived as a non-transparent sector.¹³³ Most of the interviewees linked this problem with the financial dependence on foreign funds. Due to their foreign financial support, CSOs are accountable to their external donors, rather than the public in their domestic setting.¹³⁴ One can expect that this tendency will decrease with the increased domestic financial support for the work of CSOs. Nevertheless, further efforts are needed in this direction in order improve significantly the image of the civil society sector with respect to its transparency.

4.5 Division on ethnic lines

In the case of Macedonia, ethnic division is an important contextual factor operating simultaneously with the transitional problems of civil society building. Macedonia is a country with deep ethnic cleavages, especially between the majority of ethnic Macedonians and Albanians. CSOs reflect the general societal division, i.e., the majority of them are divided upon ethnic lines. On the ground, most of the organizations in Skopje, the capital, are multiethnic; however, the organizations in most other cities are clustered around specific communities.¹³⁵ A clear example of the division along ethnic lines is the existence of two Macedonian, one Albanian and one Turkish umbrella organization of women's organizations.

In this setting, external actors have not had a consistent approach to the direction of development of CSOs with respect to the multi-ethnic character of the Macedonian society. Their policy has been one of wandering around, without a clear direction.¹³⁶ The activities of external actors have also been weakly coordinated in this respect, undermining the effectiveness of their work.¹³⁷ In most cases, external actors have attempted to bring about multi-ethnic organizations and projects benefiting all ethnic groups. The basic requirements in the international guidelines for funding commonly are multi-ethnic composition of the CSOs.

133 Silva Pesic, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

134 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

135 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

136 Mirjana Najcevska, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

137 Mirjana Najcevska, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

Thus, formally, CSOs need to be multi-ethnic in order to obtain funding. However, several interviewees have raised concerns over the trend of a purely declaratively presentation of CSOs as multi-ethnic in order to obtain foreign funding.¹³⁸ The multi-ethnic composition of the CSOs is a precondition for funding, thus, the CSOs are forced to represent themselves as multi-ethnic, forging their real membership data.¹³⁹ These requirements have also led to the founding of CSOs working on inter-ethnic reconciliation, most of which have lasted for a very short period.¹⁴⁰ In this manner, the requirement for multi-ethnic CSOs is formally bypassed. Thus, while Macedonia has a substantial number of CSOs working on interethnic relations, their work is impeded by their mono-ethnic structure.¹⁴¹ The 1999 UNDP National Report on civil society in relation to the ethnic composition of CSOs denotes that despite significant positive changes in terms of its growing number, the civil society has not yet developed its own identity. It is internally fragmented, uncoordinated and ethno-centric.¹⁴²

Quite opposite to this dominant direction towards multi-ethnic CSOs, there have been instances when external actors have targeted funds for certain communities.¹⁴³ A clear example of this tendency was the distribution of humanitarian aid during the both the Kosovo crisis and the internal conflict in Macedonia in 2001. Our interviewees emphasized that the foreign humanitarian aid was distributed in accordance with the ethnic division of society. UN agencies distributed information in Albanian and Macedonian to two different organizations, strengthening the ethnic perception of the respective organizations.¹⁴⁴ These activities of external actors in most cases were perceived as conflicting with

138 Martin Martinoski, Dusko Hristov, Interview with the authors.

139 Martin Martinoski, Jasmina Friscik, Daniela Dimitroska, Interview with the authors, March 2004

140 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

141 Nicolet, Claude. "The Interrelationship between the Evolution of Civil Society and Progress in Regional Security: The Balkans", Columbia International Affairs Online available at <www.ciaonet.org>

142 Civil society in transition" – National human development report, UNDP, 12.

143 Zoran Stojkovski, Daniela Dimitroska. Interviews with the authors, March 2004.

144 Sasho Klekovski,. "The role of the NGOs during the crisis in Macedonia", Graganski Svet, No.13, February 2002. (Authors' translation) Available at: <<http://www.graganskisvet.org.mk/default-mk.asp?ItemID=03FEA24D87BAAB41A99D384BE1122C93>> (April 5th, 2004) .

their attempts to bring about the creation and support of CSOs representing all communities.

It is commonly accepted that the international involvement in this segment of civil society has largely failed because most of the initiatives were not supported by corresponding domestic structures.¹⁴⁵ The lack of coordination and contextual knowledge among external actors has been decisive for the failure of some of the international efforts in this area.¹⁴⁶ An illustrative example is the campaign for support of the OFA in 2001, implemented directly by external actors without domestic partnership. The TV campaign, among other things, displayed a woman hanging clothes in a backyard with a pool in the background, depicting the conflict ridden city of Gostivar. Unfortunately, the population could not relate with this picture, since there were hardly any houses with swimming pools in the conflict ridden cities.¹⁴⁷ This example is just one of many indicating external actors' common lack of contextual knowledge, thereby highlighting the need for employing and working with local staff in order to increase the possibility of successful external interventions.

5. Conclusions

This study has examined the impact of external actors on the development of civil society in the Republic of Macedonia since independence. The study operated within the framework of civil society as an element of democratic consolidation and is based on qualitative methodology. The presented analysis of the external intervention in civil society building in Macedonia indicates that external actors have had significant influence on the establishment of CSOs in the country. Examining the influence of external actors on the financing of CSOs, their origin, agenda setting, public trust and the ethnic division of CSOs, the study puts forward conclusions on the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies of external actors in civil society building.

With respect to the financing of CSOs, as the first element under examination, the analysis shows that due to the minimal domestic

145 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

146 Mirjana Najcevska, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

147 Sasho Klekovski, Interview with the authors, September 2007.

financial support, external funds were indispensable for the development of civil society in Macedonia. The financial support has, on the one hand, facilitated the development of CSOs, but has, at the same time, contributed to the establishment of an excessively donor-oriented civil society sector. Indirectly, the reliance on external funds has impeded the development of domestic instruments of CSOs support. In turn, the dependence of CSOs on foreign support has had a negative impact on the development of a genuine civil society as an element of democratic consolidation.

Financial support from external actors has significantly influenced the second element of the study – the establishment of the CSOs. In this sense, external actors have undoubtedly initiated the establishment of numerous CSOs, which on the long run have not proven sustainable. The external actors have had significant influence over the establishment of CSOs predominantly working in the area of ethnic reconciliation, most of which were established from the top, without any rooting in the public.

Examination of CSOs' agenda setting process points to a set of mixed conclusions. First, agenda setting has been predominantly a top-down process which has not always corresponded to the immediate public concerns. The lack of CSOs working on social inclusion and poverty reduction, primary concerns of the population, is a clear indicator of this tendency. On the other hand, the practice of coupling domestic and international staff has resulted in positive outcomes and programs tailored to the needs of the local context. Still, most external actors did not internalize this approach and hence the impact of external actors on agenda setting has not always been positive.

The reliance on external actors' funding and the link between CSOs and external actors has significantly influenced public trust in CSOs and is an element under consideration in this study. In turn, the analysis shows that the public, during the course of transition, has perceived CSOs as predominantly serving foreign interests. In addition, the lack of transparency in distributing aid and the low value associated with self organization in society have reinforced public distrust of civil society.

The analysis of the impact of external actors on the ethnic division of CSOs, as the last element of this paper, points to a set of contradictory conclusions. The data indicates that although fostering multi-ethnicity was high on the agenda of external actors, no consistent policy on this issue is found in the external actors' programmes. In this respect, the external actors have followed formal guidelines which were not enforced in practice. External actors in most cases accommodated the existent ethnic segregation in CSOs, and in some cases they facilitated it.

Overall, the findings indicate a significant disparity between the formal and substantive indicators of external actors' influence on civil society building and ultimately democratic consolidation. The analysis of the impact of external actors on the development of civil society in the Republic of Macedonia shows that focusing on the formal aspects of civil society building is not sufficient. The external actors' approach has not always responded to the contextual peculiarities of Macedonia, as a multi-ethnic country with an extremely low level of public activism and no tradition of voluntary organizing. This study therefore highlights the importance of contextual knowledge for the success of external actors' programmes and substantive impact on the democratic consolidation of post-communist countries.

This research primarily contributes to the contextual literature on development of civil society in Macedonia and provides useful findings for comparison with other transitional countries. At the same time, its findings are beneficial to transitional literature with specific relevance for civil society building in multi-ethnic countries with deep ethnic cleavages.

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