ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY INTREGRATION
ROLI I SHOQERISE CIVILE NE INTEGRIMIN E VENDIT

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The role of civil society is indispensable in a democratic society. There have been long debates and different views on the scientific meaning of the term "civil society". Among the first scholars to offer a general understanding on civil society was the Scottish philosopher Adam Ferguson (1776). In his view, civil society, along with state and market economy, is the third element of society. Alexis de Tocqueville (2002) considered civil society as a school of democracy, which functions through associations and social organizations. Later, Antonio Gramsci offered a somewhat different perspective, attributing to civil society the opportunity for hegemony in society and the symbolic structure of the human world.

Years later, Jurgen Habermas (1992) formulated a new critical concept to the understanding of civil society. According to him, "civil society is the third sphere in addition to state and market, and it is characterized by the public articulation of societal problems". According to David Easton (1992), the role of civil society in the context of the governance system of liberal democracy appears as an organizational link in the chain of this system.

Following this logic, John Rawls (1996), one of the best known figures of American philosophy of the second half of the 20th century, argues that the entirety of civil society, not just the liberal state, is more than a neutral zone, where the various virtues might compete. According to him, the classical criteria of "good society" such as peace, prosperity, freedom and justice, are shaped and function within the framework of the democratic institutions. These institutions need to be changed, reformed and improved continuously, meaning not only their legal status, but also their informal customs and practices.

Prominent American sociologist, Amitai Etzioni (2000), goes even further in his analysis on civil society, by proposing the concept of "good society"; this term was first used by Walter Lippman (1944) in his book "The Good Society". The concept of "good society" assumes not merely a pluralistic society, but a moral understanding, meaning a society in which "good" wants to reach the private sphere, the sphere of the individual, when the society itself conveys confidence, not only to its members and the government, but especially to what is "best".

Role of civil society in Albania
In Albania, there were no conditions for the emergence of a civil society according to western liberal model. Undeveloped tradition for the establishment of civil society before the era of communist regime was followed by its complete remission under the totalitarian regime. The individual, in this period, especially under the

totalitarian regime, had no possibility to enjoy the status of an independent social actor. Each structure which was set up was part of the regime in power.

Political changes after 1990 sparked increased interest of international organizations to contribute to the foundation and the consolidation of civil society. They began efforts to establish a civil society without first introducing in it democratic ways of thinking. This strategy was considered effective, as more time was needed to form a democratic culture in a country that had just emerged from a totalitarian regime. In this logic, "it was claimed the use models from developed countries to be imported into developing countries, avoiding the context or more essential needs of the country in which they were implemented" (Sampson, 1996:123).

Based on such mentality, as long as in Albania lacked suitable environment for social and economic development enabling the establishment of civil society, it was necessary that democratic theories and practices could be imposed by models borrowed from countries having a rich tradition in this field. However, this philosophy has been criticized by many researchers, because the effect of these available models in the political and cultural environment is not properly assessed beforehand (Mai, 1999). For example, donors, especially European Union, United Nations Development Programme, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, claim that in a country like Albania, it can be imported a model of developed countries and implemented in the country. However, a large number of these transferred models do not fit the country's socio-cultural context. Consequently, this pattern of development of civil society "brings along the risk of the reinforcement of a already existing dynamism and simplification and uncritical idealism of concepts and systems of thought, which can not be flourish in all their aspects, if they are not counterbalanced by a financial and cultural autonomy." (Mai, 1999:218).

Let's just look at the financial aspect of these organizations in order to illustrate the problems arising from these available models.

Based on the scarce experience of the organization of civil society in Albania, international institutions came to the conclusion that, due to the absence of partnership with businesses or insufficiency of funds allocated by central and local government, consolidation of civil society can be accomplished only through funding from various donors. This approach made it possible that, within a relatively short time, the fate of the country's NGOs was depended only on the willingness of foreign donors. The Albanian experience was in contrast with the reality of western countries. If we refer to the experience of some countries with tradition in this field, we see that the civil society sector in France provides 47% of revenue from charity, in Germany and Finland 35%, in England 29%, in Netherlands 24%, in Austria 23%, etc. (Krasniqi, 2003)

This approach certainly defined the strategy of funding NGOs. Therefore, the fate of these strategies would be depended on the support and priorities defined by the donors for themselves. Most of these donors were international organizations and institutions that had funds available for various regions of developing countries, but they did not have sufficient knowledge of reality and needs of these countries. In this way, the distribution of funds was based on applications made by NGOs, seeking to benefit financially, regardless of the effectiveness of projects and their impact on field. All this influenced on the lack of formulation of their priorities based on the needs of citizens, as the foreign donors themselves were defining such priorities.

However, on the other hand, changing donor policies and priorities led to NGOs bankruptcy and their closure. As a result, projects were being implementing as long as donors were providing funds and the entire work fades away after the donor leaves. As pointed out by many civil society leaders, by the end of the projects, the main concern for many organizations is not always impact assessment, but funding for further projects. Moreover, being fully dependent on financing the project, whose average duration is usually less than a year, it is difficult to direct a

civil society towards an impact-and-outcome-oriented approach.

Another important aspect of transferring the western models due to lack of tradition in Albania is related to the training of a specific number of people. By doing so, knowledge is concentrated in a particular group of privileged individuals. As a result, only a segment of people have the privilege to have the necessary knowledge about the functionality of NGOs, and such know-how is not distributed to the rest of society. Thus, many organizations able to handle civil society problems remain isolated from their beneficiaries. "Therefore, instead of having a uniform distribution of knowledge and practices, we witness a few 'oases' operating in isolation from the rest of society." (Picari 2007:79)

Another problematic component that accompanies the functionality of civil society is the manifestation of the cult of individual. Leaders of NGOs, associations, foundations, trade unions and other civil society organizations do not allow recycling of elites. Moreover, unlike the political forces, which formally vote leading structures every two or three years, most NGOs and other segments of civil society do not hold elections within the organization. So, such NGOs function more as formal structures and consist of persons who have no direct interest in the orientation and objectives of the NGO they represent. The circle of their operations and functions is closed to competing ideas and skilled people.

Furthermore, representatives of NGOs having a defined sphere of activities, such as economic problems, environment, health etc, act as experts in other fields, which are not directly related to their expertise. Such phenomena have considerably reduced the reliability and effectiveness of NGOs and other institutions of civil society in the eyes of public and interested parties.

Such a significant issue can be addressed to the low civil participation. Lack of commitment at all recognized levels still remains an unknown concept for the citizens. The paradox is that citizens are critical towards the work of

government or their employer, but their dissatisfactions are not addressed through public organizations, institutions, stands or platforms. Lack of necessary mechanisms and right culture to make those ideas present in terms of government work and its decision making makes them unarticulated and not taken into consideration by the authorities.

All this has had an impact on the low participation of the civil society in correcting and preparing decision making processes and policies. Very few NGOs have explicitly declared their standpoints towards the realization of government's plans. "Rarely have problems gone beyond articles of newspapers and protests of a limited number of people. This is due to the fact that associating to one or another political wing devaluates the debate in question." (Picari, 2008)

However, in the recent years, the government has made efforts to prepare strategies and action plans, including also representatives of civil society. For instance, many individual strategies included in "The National Strategy for Development and Integration". Tens of meetings have been organized with civil society actors to "involve" them in the process of drafting these action plans and strategies. Nevertheless, the process of those meetings has become just a formality in order to justify the received funds, meanwhile the implementation of the strategies poses question marks.

Referring to these developments, many foreign organizations and institutions have thought it more suitable to canalize their funds through Albanian government to better manage and improve the concept of sustainability of the civil society. In other words, it has been decided that if funds are managed by a common agent who controls the mechanisms of decision making and the implementation, then these funds may be better used and the results may be satisfying for donors' Head Quarters. Firstly, this sounds as a reasonable undertaking as long as it aims at avoiding the repetition of projects by different actors. But, based on actual functioning of the Albanian administration, according to the study conducted by Picari, this strategy has its own

difficulties to be implemented, not mentioning the fact that this grants to the government a greater power to allocate funds for the civil society. This kind of strategy also reflects the risks of monopolizing those funds given to those organizations and associations serving the government's interests and opposing those who criticize or pressurize the government.

However, on the other side, it is vitally necessary for the Albanian society its liberation from the extreme politicization and building in the near future a representative, effective and sustainable civil society. The factor "civil society" is connected to all other reforms, transformation, development strategies, strengthening the rule of law and integration process. International experience and theories on society determine that the establishment and strengthening of civil society is primarily achieved through close cooperation of three key components of society (state - market - individual). But, to function properly, this trinomial needs a certain time. Sundhaussen rightly points out: "Historically, there isn't a single case showing that in a complex society, democracy has been successfully achieved overnight." (EU Commission, 2003)

That is why some researchers view such problem not just from the way of functioning of civil society, but wider than that. According to them, it is important that the process of consolidating civil society is not considered as an isolated process within the overall development of society. In this context, American scholar Christopher Corpora proposes: "The democratic process in Albania should start from the bottom upwards and not the opposite." He defends the view that before achieving the rule of law and the consolidation of civil society, the process of democratization must developed in Albania.

Sundhaussem (2001) warns that civil society is not isolated from the social context, but it is a project, a strategy for the future. The author asserts that it is very difficult to achieve its objectives, but there are many ways to move forward. Based on the model suggested by Merkel and Lauth (1998), Albanian civil society is going through the end of the first stage (collective image of goals) and is still at the beginning of the second stage (constructive civil society). More time is required to leave behind the second stage and thus reaching the third stage – reflective civil society, which is necessary for the progress towards democracy in Albania. One of the reasons of positioning civil society at this stage relates to the level of democracy in the country. The latter somewhat defines the stage of development and its role.

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