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*Class, civil society and liberal values in Serbia*  
- Presentation draft -

The paper is based on my recent (2003/04) survey of social stratification, value change and civil society in Serbia. I will try to find out if there is any empirical relationship between class position, activities in the civil society (indicated by membership in different forms of NGO), and acceptance of liberal (pro-market, democratic) or anti-liberal (egalitarian, statist, etc.) values.

*A. General approach:*

I am starting from the minimal consensual definition of civil society (CS), agreed upon by participants at the CiSoNet Project, according to which CS may be understood: “first, as a type of social action; second, as an area or sphere connected to but separate from economy, state, and the private sphere; and third, as the core of a draft or project that still has some utopian features”. (Kocka, J. 2004. *CiSoNet, Project dossier*, Berlin: WZB) The concept also includes principles of voluntary self-organization of individuals into networks, organizations and social movements, and the absence of force or any other heteronomous power as the principle of regulation. Internal relations among its members are supposed to be regulated by consensus, based upon equality and solidarity (basic values inside the civic sector of society). Being the product of historical development of bourgeois society, CS shares with it glorious ideas of liberty, fraternity and equality, interpreted as democratic regulation of political sphere and market regulation of economic sphere, which guarantee rule of majority and right of private property, respectively. In this sense, principles of CS regulations are considered to be supplementary, in the following way: they function *outside* the two principal spheres of the reproduction of dominant social relations, and *overcome* limitations embedded in market economy (exclusions based upon property rights) and democratic politics (limitations of individual and minority rights). However, this extension also means *partial inclusion*: basic bourgeois values which follow from market and democratic regulation principles (market self-regulation, majority rule, etc.) *are* complementary to

values of solidarity, tolerance, autonomy, characteristic for CS; however, a unify value system made up by these two groups of values is burdened by *internal tensions*.

*B. Hypotheses:*

Since this is a paper based upon empirical research, I will not enter here a general debate about value tensions characteristic for civil society actors in a developed stable bourgeois society. Namely, Serbia has been only entering the process of making capitalist economy and democratic polity, so that the value system in the country has been burdened by conflicts of a different kind.

Very late modernization left capitalism underdeveloped in Serbia by the beginning of the Second World War (agricultural production of small farmers and rural population prevailed), and democracy appeared only sporadically. Patriarchal traditional values (egalitarianism, authoritarianism, closeness toward the outer world) were dominant in the society. Industrialization, urbanization, expansion of educational system did characterize socialist period in the country, but the “modernization without modernity” (preconditions for neither market nor democracy were being developed) resulted in a mixture of values: fusion was built of traditional and socialist egalitarianism, of patriarchal authoritarianism and Stalinist leadership principle, of peasant closeness and a mixture of internationalism and “iron curtain” politics (soon to be replaced in Serbia/Yugoslavia by openness toward the West).

Collapse of socialism in Serbia was followed by “blocked transformation”, which meant postponement of democratic and market change. This was the result of keeping the power by members of former nomenklatura, who were successfully trying to convert their position power into economic capital (civil war on ethnic basis and international isolation represented favourable conditions for this achievement). Socialist ideology – especially its stress on redistributive role of the state – fitted well economic collapse of the country and massive pauperisation of population. Civil war and isolation helped chauvinism, authoritarianism and closeness toward the world not only to survive, but to spread widely among different social strata, leaving only minority open to new (new for Serbia!) democratic and liberal values. The regime change in the year 2000 came too late for massive acceptance of liberalism (characteristic for early phase of post-socialist

transformation in other countries), since “transformation losers” came into existence here even before the real transformation arrived. Therefore, once more contradictory value mixture has been formed in Serbia, consisting of mingled traditional and socialist values, and elements of liberalism. The mixture is characteristic of all social strata. However, liberal elements prevail among higher and middle strata (“winners of transformation”), while traditional/socialist elements are dominant among lower strata (majority of population).

The specific history of capitalist development (and spread of liberal values) has influenced civic sector actors in Serbia. Since they belong mostly to middle and educated strata, we expect them to share bourgeois values (coming from new market and democratic relations in the country) and specific CS values (solidarity, tolerance, autonomy). Elements of both value orientations will probably be much more widespread among them than among general population. However, because of the “weak genealogy” of democracy and market in Serbia, and prolonged post-socialist transformation, we also expect mixture of traditional and socialist values to be relatively strongly present among these actors too.

### *C. Survey:*

Our data have been collected in the survey of stratification and value change in Serbia. The survey took place in the period November, 2003 – January, 2004. It was carried out on national sample of adults, and was multistage PPS, 2997 large.

Participants in the civic sector were operationalized by membership in non-governmental organizations (including professional, humanitarian, “environmental” etc., but excluding sport and religious organizations, as well as labour unions). Active members and members who declared not to be active are merged in the analysis, because of relatively small number of respondents in the first group.

I will try to demonstrate in the paper the spread of five value orientations: economic liberalism, political liberalism, tolerance, traditionalism and nationalism. Homogeneity of each value orientation is analyzed by PCA (applied to four or five items for each value orientation, used in the form of standardized Likert scale; for details see next section). For each value orientation distribution of average factor scores for

participants and non-participants in the civic sector – that make basic analytical unit of the paper – is analyzed.

*D. Findings:*

1. General characteristics of civic sector actors

*Gender.* Men and women are almost equally represented among members of the NGOs in Serbia (53.5% of men, 46.5% of women). In a (separate) research of the most important non-governmental organizations (according to number of activities, financial funds, etc.; see M. Lazic, Making civil society during the process of post-socialist transformation: Case of Serbia – unpublished manuscript) I found more women among professional employees, and equal number of men and women among top executives. It seems that NGO sector (according to our expectations) works in the direction of reducing gender inequalities.

*Age.* Members are distributed among the three age cohorts in the following way: up to 30 years of age: 27.5%; 31-50 years: 38.0%; and over 50 years of age: 34.5%. It might seem that the participation of younger people is smaller than expected. However, if compared with non-members, where the oldest group comprises 46% of the sample, it may be concluded that middle aged and younger people are more often included into the NGO sector.

*Education.* In the (previously mentioned) research of “elite NGOs”, exceptionally high average level of education of leaders in the sector was discovered. This time much higher educational level of members (in all kinds of organizations, and at all hierarchical levels!) has been registered. Namely, 31.6% of them have university diploma, in comparison with 10.2% of respondents who are not NGO members. This finding should be interpreted in connection with the following one, about the stratification position of members.

*Objective class position.* Class position has been measured on the basis of respondents’ place of work (which includes hierarchical level in the firm and size of ownership), education, material position. Aggregating these data, a seven-class model of Serbian society has been constructed. According to the data, even 44.5% of NGO members belong to middle and top social classes (in comparison with 16% among the

people who are not members). This is in accordance with our general conclusion, from previous research of leading NGOs, that civic sector in Serbia has been an arena for middle class social reproduction.

Other findings, briefly, show the following characteristics of NGO members: their material position (measured by long list of items, including household income, market value of apartments, household equipment, cars etc.) is significantly higher in comparison to the rest of respondents; however, self-evaluation of their class position does not differ too much from the others (expectedly, since they tend slightly to decrease their status, while the others tend to increase it – to the medium level); they are more often members of political parties, and they slightly more often tend to define their political orientations as leftist (of course, the “center” orientation is the dominant one for all – members and non-members of NGOs).

## 2. *Value orientations*

The summary of our results will be presented here, in table 1, in the form of average factor scores (Principal Component Analysis, Varimax rotation) for the following value orientations, of members and non-members of NGOs:

- a. Economic liberalism (operationalized by 5 statements, like: It is the responsibility of government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes; The government should guarantee everyone a minimum standard of living, etc.; the principal component explains 53.9% of the variance).
- b. Political liberalism (operationalized by 4 statements, like: Total freedom of speech today leads to total disorganization of society; The media should be more understanding of the state, etc.; the principal component explains 51.2% of the variance).
- c. Tolerance (operationalized by 5 statements, like: Homosexuals are no better than criminals and should be punished in the extreme; It is wrong for couples to live together without being married, etc.; the principal component explains 50.3% of the variance).

- d. Nationalism (operationalized by 4 statements, like: Among nations it is possible to create cooperation, but not full trust; Men can feel completely safe only when the majority belong to his nationality, etc.; the principal component explains 49.4% of the variance).
- e. Traditionalism (operationalized by 5 statements, like: The most important thing for children to learn is to obey their parents; It is more natural for men to work outside the home, and women to work at home, etc.: the principal component explains 57.2% of the variance).

Table 1

Average standardized factor scores for value orientations, members and non-members of NGOs

NGO	Economic liberalism	Nationalism	Tolerance	Political liberalism	Traditionalism
Non-members Mean	.023	.047	.060	.044	.055
Members Mean	-.17	-.35	-.45	-.33	-.41

The difference in value orientations between members and non-members exists in all five cases, with different directions in all cases (negative value means that majority of respondents do not accept the statements; and vice versa). Majority of NGO members do not accept involvement of state in the economy and limitation of political freedoms; they do not share traditional and nationalistic values; and they are more ready to recognize specific individual rights (rights to different views, and different way of life). However, differences between the two groups are not always of the same size, and sometimes these are very small! One of the reasons for this is that values of majority of population in all five cases are very close to the borderline dividing “positive” and “negative” orientations. This is particularly the case with economic liberalism, where NGO members, at the same time, are very close to the borderline themselves!

How such “closeness” of attitudes might be explained? If we look again into the questions asked in our questionnaire, we will see that factor analysis extracted attitudes

concerning governmental protection of poor and unemployed people (other attitudes, about the governmental interference into private businesses, were not extracted; therefore they do not make the same “ideology” with “protective” attitudes). It is clear, on one hand, that for majority of population – whose economic position deteriorated tremendously during the last fifteen years, and who experienced protectionist role of the state in socialism (and also during Milosevics’ regime) – the state care for poor people might seem very natural. Therefore, readiness by which such big part of general population was ready to accept liberal statements, about market (non-state) regulation of the economy in present economic conditions, seems much more strange to me!

On the other hand, we could also notice that solidaristic contents were very obvious in the statements about state role in the economy, so that – having in mind again the deep economic and social crisis in Serbia – we may in this light understand reluctance of many NGO members to refute interventionist role of the state.

If we look now at our survey results as a whole, we may conclude the following. NGO members (people who are active, or at least are present, inside the newly emerging civic sector in Serbia) are in general prone to share some basic bourgeois values, like political liberalism (freedom of speech, separation of government and judicial system etc.) and economic liberalism (basic separation of state and the economy). Majority of them also accept values which we consider to be specific for civil society arena. Namely, we may interpret attitudes against nationalism to be a part of more general inclination towards non-violence and tolerance (especially in view of recent ethnic civil war in these parts!). In the same manner we may interpret disagreement with traditionalist attitudes (which in our case denied gender equality, individual rights etc.) to mean acceptance of equality, individual freedom. Finally, we also see that tolerance itself has got the highest score among NGO members at our table, and the tolerance is one among the most important value orientations according to our understanding of civil society.

Of course, it may also be seen that these values have been shared by majority but not by all respondents who are members of a NGO, and that not a negligible number of them have chosen opposite statements. Explanation of this fact is obvious. First, there has been (here, as in all other cases) tension between the concept of civil society (defined as an “ideal type”) and empirical reality (concrete participants in civic sector). Secondly, our

operationalization of the concept has been (necessarily) very imprecise (especially since we had to put together members and activists inside the NGOs). Thirdly, the civil society in Serbia has been in the process of making for only 15 years, as explained in my previous study, so that crystallization of the sector (including membership-activists, organizations/movements, area of work, values etc.) has been far from completed. Further on, this lag has been only a consequence of the fact that, fourthly, bourgeois society/market economy/democratic polity (whose value system represents a basis for development of civil society, with its specific characteristics) have had very limited “prehistory” in these parts.

If we move, now, into opposite direction, asking the question: how can we, then, explain the dominant presence of values, characteristic for civil society, among members of NGOs, if circumstances for the development of this sector have been so unfavorable in Serbia? – we may (very briefly!) offer following explanation. The composition of the members probably plays here the most important role. We saw that, first, large part of them is highly educated, and, second, many of them belong to middle and higher social classes. University education – especially in socialist Serbia/Yugoslavia – was pretty open toward influences from the West, so that many elements of Western (bourgeois) value orientations were present here long before the economic and political systems have started to change. Secondly, higher classes (entrepreneurs, managers, politicians) have been included at the very beginning, and very fast, into the development of bourgeois relations (in politics and economy) in Serbia, so that attitudes we offered them in our questionnaire were just expressing their (newly acquired) interests. With further development of bourgeois relations and of civil society in Serbia, the differences between general population and people included into civic sector will probably be larger than at present.

ADDENDUM: TABLES

Table 2 Education

			Education				Total
			less than elementary	elementary	secondary	university	
NGO	not member	Count	674	561	1171	273	2679
		% within NGO	25.2%	20.9%	43.7%	10.2%	100.0%
		% within education	95.1%	92.7%	87.6%	70.7%	88.2%
	member	Count	35	44	166	113	358
		% within NGO	9.8%	12.3%	46.4%	31.6%	100.0%
		% within education	4.9%	7.3%	12.4%	29.3%	11.8%
Total	Count	709	605	1337	386	3037	
	% within NGO	23.3%	19.9%	44.0%	12.7%	100.0%	
	% within education	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 3 Class position

			Classes*							Total
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
NGO	not member	Count	364	465	667	644	253	76	78	2547
		% within NGO	14.3%	18.3%	26.2%	25.3%	9.9%	3.0%	3.1%	100.0%
		% within classes	95.5%	93.6%	91.5%	89.1%	74.0%	77.6%	65.0%	88.1%
	member	Count	17	32	62	79	89	22	42	343
		% within NGO	5.0%	9.3%	18.1%	23.0%	25.9%	6.4%	12.2%	100.0%
		% within classes	4.5%	6.4%	8.5%	10.9%	26.0%	22.4%	35.0%	11.9%
Total	Count	381	497	729	723	342	98	120	2890	
	% within NGO	13.2%	17.2%	25.2%	25.0%	11.8%	3.4%	4.2%	100.0%	
	% within classes	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

\*Classes: 1. small farmers; 2. unskilled non/manual employees; 3. skilled manual workers; 4. non-manual employees (with secondary education), self employed (with secondary education); 5. professionals, self employed (with university degree – attorneys, medical doctors etc.); 6. small entrepreneurs, lower managers; 7. medium and big entrepreneurs, medium and higher managers, politicians