
Between Authoritarianism and Democracy. Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia. Civil Society and Political Culture. Vol. II.

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A comparative analysis of Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin political scene and expectations and temptations of their transitional societies are the main subject of the "Between authoritarianism and democracy" project. This project is a multidisciplinary research of the process of transformation of the political culture in Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro since the early 1990s. The experts participating in this project are renowned scientists from Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and the issues dealt with in this book can be divided into several thematic parts: authoritarianism, dissolution and war, political culture, civil society, church and law.

While reading this book you can notice two dimensions. The first one is of course comparativeness; a parallel research process in both countries or, better said, all three societies, because we can reflect on Montenegro as a specific society even though it makes one country with Serbia. The other dimension encompasses the specific circumstances and characteristics of each of these countries. One can see from this research that these processes that took place and are still happening are complementary and identical in their struc-

ture. The differences can be explained by certain modifications and specific characteristics of each environment. But one should be careful to conclude that the historical processes are identical to such an extent.

It is evident that there are very few historians among the authors of this book. This may have led to somewhat partial observance of some of the phenomena without the historical perspective. When we look back on the genesis of relations in the former Yugoslavia, we can see huge differences in the evolution of its parts. What is missing is a closer analysis of these starting-point differences. The first difference can be found in the reaction to the fall of socialism both in Eastern and South-eastern Europe and the choosing of the strategy to deal with it. Why some of the former republics (i.e. Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia) decided to choose a strategy of returning to national and political communities of the past as a goal, is not easy to explain without the historical analysis of these societies in the process of modernization during the 19th and 20th century.

Apart from the lack of these historical explanations, what we learn from

this book is that these societies share the same basic identity. This basic pattern remains the same even though significant social or economic differences as well as differences in the ethnic structure and the structure of political elites are apparent.

The point is that the legitimacy of the former state order was transformed by the leading elites of these two countries into new legitimacy based on nationalism, which led to conflict. The result was war, establishment of authoritarian regimes and a distorted genesis of the civil society. The authoritarian regimes were defeated at about the same time in both countries.

In Croatia the democratic changes took place in 2000, the same year as in Serbia and Montenegro. Today their positions are entirely different. Croatia is on the road to European integration and on its way to building a stable democracy, although there are still interethnic issues to be dealt with. As prof. Lino Veljak states in his paper *Civil Society and Politics in Croatia*, a research has shown that 57% of the liberal youth in Croatia was opposed to the abolishment of entry visas for the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro (p. 333). The period of two years that passed since the publication of this book in March 2004, actually proves the authors' prediction of the democratic development in Croatia. Croatia did intensify its cooperation with the International Tribunal in the Hague and in light of its candidature for the EU accession it started working on solving minority

rights issues and ethnical and refugee problems. However, what concerns the authors is that the level of political culture has not improved any more than in Serbia and Montenegro. The structure of the political elites and the structure of the voting body are still very similar and the elites are still immature. What is different is the international context, the position of Croatia in relation to the EU and the responsibility this fact puts on its elites.

In Serbia and Montenegro the situation is much more concerning. The good illustration of the condition of political culture and political elites can be found in Nenad Dimitrijević's reflection on the work of Zoran Djindjić "Yugoslavia as an unfinished state" in this book under the title of *Serbia as an unfinished state*. It is a precise analysis of the latest period of Serbian history, a period of conflict between "legalists" and "reformists" embodied in Vojislav Koštunica and Zoran Djindjić. This controversy is what makes the case of Serbia and Montenegro specific. This book clearly demonstrates that the main generator of dissolution of former Yugoslavia and war in its territory is the political program of creating an ethnic state and transferring the goals of the 19th century into the 20th. Serbia still cannot find a solution to this historical problem. It is still divided between two ways of dealing with the past regime and its program. Firstly, it is the legalist way representing a legal continuity with the former regime and former political state and, secondly, it

is the strategy of confronting and dealing with the past. In the second case, a new order is not possible without discontinuity with the old system. Today, Serbia and Montenegro are still in the middle of this controversy, and it is for this reason that the question of statehood cannot be defined. This issue needs to be resolved so that both Serbia and Montenegro, whether as a state union or separate states, can concentrate on development and modernization of the society. What they lack is a political party that could absorb the authoritarian syndrome of the part (still significant) of voters and transform it into a more acceptable option.

The next issue analyzed in this book is the role that religion has played in this period. During the socialist period, the Church, both Catholic and Orthodox as well as the Islamic community and their influence, has been put aside and an entirely secular state has been created. With the downfall of this system, a religious revival took place but led representatives of each religion to a serious and very bad role in the conflicts of the nineties. The specific mixture of religions in a very small territory revived the old conflicts again. The conflicts that have roots in the period of the Ottoman Empire were transferred to the late 20th century. Without dealing much with the reasons which led religious leaders to such behavior, this book starts from the bad role religion played in the conflicts in the nineties, treating it as a fact. Both in Serbia and in Montenegro the Orthodox

Church was backing up the program of building an ethnic state. This made the Church a generator for intolerance and conflict deepening and put a big part of responsibility on it. Many examples were given to back up this claim, but it was mostly the Serbian Orthodox Church which was criticized and only minor analysis was given of the roles of the Catholic Church and the Islamic Community.

What one should bear in mind when reflecting on the role of the Church in Serbia and Montenegro is that it was a period when the society was completely devastated, where a strong identity crisis existed alongside a vacuum for spiritual values. It was the consequence of the great changes both on the international and in regional levels. The cease of existence of the bipolar world, the crash of socialism, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the war in the nineties, the dictator regime - all this left room for great influence of the Church, a space to promote its values. These are mostly anti - Western, xenophobic and archaic values.

However, one must never forget that it was religion that kept the national identity of Serbs and Montenegrins in the past and the church will always be a strong part of the civil society in Serbia and Montenegro. The problem again in this issue is how to build a modern and strong civil society and how to find an appropriate role for the Church in it. Denying religion for a very long period has already caused grave consequences that were manifested in the aggressive

role of the Church in the conflicts in the nineties. Many modern democratic states, though secular in nature, have found a good balance with the ever-present religion, and this is the role the Serbian Orthodox Church must find.

As for the relation of the law and the civil society, the authors agree that in neither of the states, none of the elementary postulates of the rule of law has been achieved. These postulates comprise the hierarchy of law, respect of the law and independent judiciary system. That is the position that authors of this book take as a starting point. The issue that is a common problem of both civil society and the law is of course the question of human rights and, connected with it, the question of corruption.

The period of war and conflict left serious problems in this area, as well. A high level of sensibility was shown for the security of the state in contrast to the security of an individual. Due to that the sensibility for the human rights corpus was very low. Another reason for this in both states was the authoritarian regime. In authoritarian regimes, the interpretation of law is arbitrary and creative. Another fact is that these were ideological regimes and that was the reason why there was no judicial reaction to war crimes and to organized crime, either. Since the states involved in the conflict did not put up a trial for war criminals, the international community reacted by creating the Tribunal in The Hague. The reaction of all two (or three) states was

mostly against the establishment of this institution.

The state of human rights in Serbia and Montenegro became somewhat better as the Government of the new regime adopted some of the ideas that the institutions of civil society insisted on. But with the following conflict between the streams of legalists and reformists and the unfortunate assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic made the government quite indifferent to these ideas and left the civil society to search for new ways of promoting these ideas and pressuring the decision-makers. The situation in Croatia is similar in a way. Good institutional and legislative preconditions for the protection of human rights exist, but what is missing is the political will and general conditions to secure their implementation. The situation is even worse in the issue of ethnic minorities. But since the legal preconditions exist, it is only a matter of time and the maturing of the leading elites.

Altogether, this book gives an accurate analysis of the position and development of the civil society in Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. The multidiscipline approach helps the reader better to understand the processes and turmoil these societies have been dealing with on their way from authoritarianism to democracy. Comparativeness is the other significant element that gives a better insight. There were, however, some difficulties concerning this element due to the undefined nature of the State union of Serbia and Montene-

gro because sometimes the State union was compared to Croatia as a whole and sometimes Serbia and Montenegro were analyzed separately.

Between Authoritarianism and Democracy is a constructive project that gathered a number of renowned experts

and is a very helpful tool for self-understanding and dealing with the past and present conditions of the state, political culture and civil society.

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