The Balkan Political Culture – The Problem of Democratization

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ABSTRACT. The Balkan political culture is the biggest problem in the democratization of South Eastern Europe. The basic characteristics of this culture, such as hostility, distrust, alienation and lack of consensus, are the main obstacles to democratization in this part of the world. The Balkan political culture was created as an expression of a specific development of the region through the history. High level of poverty also slows the internalization of democratic values and norms. However, these two main characteristics are not the only problem in the process of democratization of the Balkans. According to Lucian Pye political leaders also have an impact on the democratization in transitional countries. The most important question is: Are political leaders oriented to private interests or national development? The answer to this question is important for the development of democracy, Pye believes. Unfortunately, a number of corruption scandals in the Balkan states confirms that the private interest is above the general one. For these reasons Southeastern Europe can hardly achieve the development of the countries in Central Europe that were also communist states.

Key words: Balkan, political culture, political orientations, historical context, democracy

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Introduction

The publishing of the famous book *Civic culture* (1963) by Sidney Verba and Gabriel A. Almond was very important for the development of the cultural approach to politics.

Although the book has caused controversy within the scientific community, *Civic culture* has undoubtedly paved the way for a broad affirmation of the subjective approach to the study of politics. The great influence of this book can be best seen in the fact that the book *A New Handbook of Political Science* by R.E. Goodin and H. Klingeman, which is considered to be an overview of the development of political science, lists book *Civic culture* as the most frequently cited book.2 The eminent university professors at prestigious American universities, Almond (*Stanford, Yale*), Sidney (*Harvard*) have considered that institutional approach and the approach of the rational choice cannot give the answer to the question why the same political system does not have the same results in different countries. This question emerged in Europe in the fifties after the development of the fascism and communism. In the same way the appearance of the totalitarian ideologies initiated doubts about the necessity of development of the democracy as the only system in Europe. Almond and Verba have found answers to open questions in the cultural approach to policy and methodology of the survey borrowed from the behavioral approach. Almond and Verba have defined the political culture as the political orientations - attitudes toward the political system as well as attitudes towards the role of the individual in the system.3 However, the book *Civic culture* was under heavy criticism. The most serious criticism disputed the possibility of using the political culture in explaining the relationship between the type of political culture and democracy. The publication of book *Civic Culture* in the modern concept of political science formally established cultural approach and defined the phenomenon of political culture. The book subsequently became a theoretical framework on which were build up the cultural approach and the concept of the political culture. Sidney Verba in the part of his stand-alone book *Political Culture*

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2 GOODIN, R. E., KLINGEMANN, H. D.: *A New Handbook of Political Science,* Published to Oxford Scholarship Online, 2003, pp. 41.

3 ALMOND, G. A. VERBA, S.: *Civilna kultura*, edition in Croatian language, Politička kultura, Zagreb, 2000., pp. 13.

and Political Development (1965.) expanded the definition. Political culture, says Verba, consists of a system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols and values that define the situation in which political behavior occurs and provides a subjective orientation to the politics. According to Verba the earliest definitions of the political culture were emphasized that the political system was established in the significance and meaning of the symbols, myths, beliefs and values of the political culture.[4] This definition of the political culture absorbed the political orientation and attitudes and the role of symbols like the national flag, coat of arms, etc. The symbol is the starting fact that their culture has no real meaning in appearance but in a figurative sense. Another important researcher of political culture Lucian Pye started from the Almond and Verba concept in the study of political culture in the Asian part of the world. In defining the notion of political culture, Pye included beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning of the political process and which provide underlying assumptions and rules that govern the behavior in the political system. In his most important book *The Key Part of the Asian Power and Politics: The Culture Dimensions of Authority* (1985.) Pye connects three key arguments in the study of political culture. The first argument relates to the notion of government, which according to Pye cannot be observed universally. Second, different paths in the political development of Asian states are based on the differences in attitudes about power and authority which are again rooted in different cultural traditions. Third, the development of attitudes about power and authority is closely related to family socialization. Pye concludes: "cultural variations are crucial in the determining course of the political development."[5] Analyzing Asian culture, Pye says that the key element is the relationship superior – inferior, where superior means power and glory. In such a relationship the superior are very sensitive to anybody's effort to undermine their status. The political effect of this relationship is strengthening the authoritarian norms in the Asian part of the world. Democratization in Asia is complicated because the relationship superior-inferior

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[4] VERBA, S.: *Comparative Political Culture*, in: Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba, *Political Culture and Political Development,* Princeton University Press, 1965., pp. 513.

[5] MEI, Z.: Lucian Pye's Contributions to and Flaws in the Study of Chinese Political Culture, u: International Journal of ChinaL Studies, Vol. 4., No.1, 2013., pp. 113.

excludes opposition, which is the essence of democracy. Similar theoretical premises like in Almond's, Verba's and Pye's research on political culture can be found in the work of Ronald Inglehart, Christian Welzel, Harry Eckstein, Robert Putnam, Henry Milner and others. According to Almond and Verba political culture refers to the attitudes and values, for R. Inglehart political culture means post-materialist values and orientations, and for R. Putnam, primarily the mutual trust.

Cultural and Historical Context of the Balkans

The concept of the Balkans in the political sense has a very negative connotation because of its turbulent history. This is an area of extremely turbulent history that has survived five world empires. The consequences of that were flourishing international intrigues, wars, deep divisions and hostilities that have experienced a culmination in the recent war on the territory of ex Yugoslavia. For these reasons, in European politics Balkan is an index of the most unstable region. In international relations after the war in ex Yugoslavia a new term was coined for this region - the Southeastern Europe, in order to avoid the burden of heritage associated with the term Balkans. In the Balkans there is a dominant influence of the Christianity, Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Islam. Such a combination of religious influences is unique in Europe. The fact that a society is historically shaped as Protestant, as Confucian and for example as Islamic leaves lasting effects. According to Inglehart this fact is very important for the society because the religious influence will continue to influence the further development - even if the influence of religious institutions is today modest.[6] According to Huntington, Western culture (liberalism, Protestantism), Latin American (Catholicism) and Japanese culture are entirely compatible with the forms of Western democracy. The Slavic-Orthodox, Hindu and African cultures are not considered especially stimulating for democracy, but they are not in principle hostile to democracy. Confucian and Islamic cultures, according to Huntington, are often considered incompatible with liberal democracy.

The consequences of the cultural, religious influences and historical heritage in Southeastern Europe are evident in

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[6] INGLEHART, R., WELZEL, CH.: *Modernizacija, kulturna promjena i demokracija Slijed ljudskog razvitka*, the edition of the Croatian language, Politička kultura, Zagreb, 2007., pp.36.

the special mentality of the people. Many authors, such as Gustave Le Bon, claim that the mentality of the people in the Balkans has remained a mystery. Probably because it did not understand the historical context that shaped the lives of the people in the Balkans. The history of this area is characterized by a conflict of three civilizations: Western European, Russian Orthodox and Muslim. Furthermore three great monotheistic religions, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim, as well as three different cultures and value systems are in a clash. The Great Schism between Eastern and Western churches in 1054 established not only the division between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox believers but also the geographical distribution of territory among the denominations, precisely in the Balkan Peninsula. The penetration of the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century and Islamization in the region rooted the Islamic faith and Oriental culture. Bearing in mind the civilizational and cultural divide, the importance of the geopolitical position of the region and the interest of the great powers,that had supported the conflicts and hostilities among the Balkan peoples, we can conclude that the history was not inclined towards the Balkans. Nowhere on the continent of Europe can we find in such a small space so many cultural differences as in the Balkan Peninsula. The development in the economic and in political terms was slow and always in an apparent delay in comparison to other parts of Europe. The underdeveloped political culture has facilitated the penetration of the socialist system and control of the company and personal life.

The Characteristics of the Balkan Political Culture

Skepticism and distance between people and the state, as well as distrust towards the state institutions have been present in the countries of the Balkans throughout recent history. Such relationship was established during the Ottoman rule, the authoritarian regimes and in the period of communism. The very same kind of relationship remained during the recent transitional period. The authoritarian political culture of the Balkans was formed under the influence of harsh conditions people lived in and struggled for life. It was shaped through different techniques of domination inherited from the Byzantine, Tartar-Mongol, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and local despotic ways of governance on the one hand and opportunism on the other hand. There are a number of proverbs from this area that

speak for themselves about the local authoritarian political culture, such as: "Tie your horse where the boss says," or "An ounce of power is worthier than a pound of brains ", "If we can not make it the other way, we'll do it fairly: so we'll see who will cheat whom."

According to some analysts, this area shows more characteristics of the Asian countries. Its culture is less democratic than the European countries' culture. The political effect is like in Asian countries where we have the strengthening of the authoritarian norms. The uniqueness of the Balkan political culture is to be seen in very pronounced emotional attitudes of the people towards political leaders. This kind of relationship reproduces, in the context of achieving national interests, praising, worshiping, blind following. In the case of a personal or national threat love quickly turns into hatred, even demonization, and the denial of the former merits. Such attitude towards leaders stems from the subjugating authoritarian culture that involves uncritical political awareness. This awareness superficially judges about evil and good without any clear, rational criteria.

The area of the Balkans is still considered to be the area of serious political and security problems. The presence of intolerance, pathological nationalism and underdeveloped democratic political culture which causes the absence of compromise are the reasons for that. That's why the Western Balkans represents the toughest and the most challenging issue in the EU integration process. World Values Survey, of the University of Michigan, conducted a study of the political culture in the Western Balkans, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia twice: from1994 till 1999 and again from 1999 till 2004.7 The results of the research are highly interesting because they break the usual stereotypes about the Balkan region. A significant percentage of the respondents in the Western Balkans think that democracy is better than the previous political regime, although they are aware of the obvious problems in the functioning of the system. Only in Macedonia and the Republic of Srpska the support for the democracy was smaller than 80 percent. Although a vast majority of people in the countries of the Western Balkans supports democracy, they are not satisfied with the pace of development of democracy in their countries. Macedonians

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7 TANIYICI S.: EU copenhagen political criteria and the political culture of the western balkan countries: are they compatible? International Conference on Balkan, Studies, 2008., pp.91-98.

and Croats are the least satisfied in this regard. The most serious competitor of the democratic regimes in the countries of the Western Balkans is management by experts. A significant percentage of the respondents in the surveyed countries thinks that a political system in which experts would rule could be very or even pretty good. Experts are most valued in Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. It can be concluded that the economic problems associated with the transition from communism to a free market, convinced the population that the economy of their countries could be better run by experts, and not by undecisive politicians. However, a significant proportion of the respondents in each country think that despite the problems, democracy is better than the other political regimes. A vast majority of the population of the Western Balkans thinks that the old communist regime was a bad political system, for example, 90.6 percent of Albanians thinks so.

Do the results of this study open a hope in a faster process of democratization of Southeastern Europe? Do they give us a chance to run away from the negative connotations of the term Balkanization? In an attempt to answer these questions, we can use the results of the Putnam's study conducted in Italy, which was published in the famous book *Making Democracy Work* (1993).[8] Research has shown that in the medieval period in the northern part of Italy mutual aid, solidarity, and trust had developed, while in the south of Italy a relationship was established based on the coercion and dependence. These historical differences left traces after many centuries in the functioning of the regional political institutions in Italy. Putnam's conclusion points to the great importance of the social context and the history for the efficiency of the institutions.

Conclusion

From the very first beginnings of civilization humans do not choose rules for living – the values are being mediated to him, values that enable him to live in a society. These values are different in different cultures and societies. Political institutions are rooted in the values of the political community and its political culture. That's why the rooted habits in Southeastern Europe are hard to change. The economic transformation in Southeastern Europe was easier

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8 On the Croatian language books published 2003rd

than the political one. Much more difficult issues than the economic development are issues related to political stability, respect of human and minority rights, independence of the judiciary, regularity of the elections. In these areas old Balkan habits in the politics such as fraud, use of nationalism for political purposes, disregard of democratic procedures, and corruption have not vanished. For the young democracies clientelism as a form of corruption is particularly dangerous. The term derives from the Latin word *clinens* denoting a citizen who due to his/her unfavorable position in the society seeks a support *patronosa* in exchange for services, such as giving a vote in elections. Nowadays it is manifested through the practice of supporting and pushing the client to certain positions, not on the basis of his/her ability, but based on loyalty to the party. Between these loyal clients and those from the former one-party systems there is no big difference, because the relationship maintains the moral and political suitability.

Political leaders also have an impact on the democratization in the transitional countries, L. Pye believes. Pye sees democracy as a political activity that is designated as a political behavior, not only as something influenced by economic indicators. Are political leaders oriented to the national interest or to their own? Success or failure of democratization lies in this question. Every leader, based on his/her personality and the function he/she preforms in the political system, has some kind of control and power in the management of the events that affect other members of a given society. It is therefore important to be, as a political leader, loyal to democracy and democratic norms and values. One of the greatest theorists of democracy R. A. Dahl claims that proper conduct with the State preserves democracy[9]. It requires resistance to all the huge temptations of power and an unwavering devotion to the public good and not to your own interests. It is clear that any abuse of the power by political leaders, in mind, clientelism or similar, shows clearly that the political developments in that country are going the wrong way. This is especially dangerous for young unconsolidated democracies.

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[9] DAHL, R. A.: *O demokraciji*, the edition of the Croatian language, Politička kultura, Zagreb, 2000., pp. 76,77.

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