National Question
in Central Europe

Democratic Responses to Unresolved National and Ethnic Conflicts

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NATIONAL QUESTION IN CENTRAL EUROPE:

DEMOCRATIC RESPONSES TO UNRESOLVED NATIONAL AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS

BUDAPEST, 22–24 MARCH 2013

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

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CITIZENS PARTICIPATION AT LOCAL LEVEL
IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONA

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Abstract

This paper is an analysis on the forms of citizen participation in decision-making process including citizen initiative, council of citizens and models of consultancy with civil society. Also, it analyses the satisfaction of the citizens from the forms and intensity of citizen participation in decision process and models of information and capacity of media system. The paper shows relation between political culture and citizen participation, the role of local self-government in promotion and providing of the concept of citizen participation and power of the civil society to articulate citizens interests.

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1. Civil society and local government

In the period to date, there has been full freedom in terms of citizens' association and about 6,000 civic associations have been registered in the country. Still, the figure does not reflect the real number of active associations. Most of them do not perform any activity and the greatest number of non-governmental organisations (both active and inactive) has a very small membership and presents "one group – one institution". There are few Decisions initiated by the civil society and its active collaboration in the policy-making process is small.

The European Commission, in its 2009 Report, regarding the Government openness to civil society in the policy-making and decision-making processes, underlines:

> *There is no systematic and transparent mechanism for civil society consultations regarding the National Development Policies, Laws, Programmes or other strategic documents.*

Because NGOs in the country have a very small role of mediators between the Municipalities and citizens, the trust among citizens that they will emerge as important factors in the decision-making process is also small. More precisely, according to the results of the Survey performed for the needs of 2010 National Human Development Report (unpublished document), only **one-third** of the respondents deem that participation in associations is *one of the best ways to influence the decision-making process on both national and local levels.* This trust is even smaller in the North-East Region and amounts to 20%, and the same percentage accounts for positive answers by respondents aged 15 to 18 years, as well as those above 65 years of age and people with primary education.

Below, a description is given of **the type and level of citizens' activity in the civil society in the last six months[1]**.

In sports, arts, music, youth or other recreation groups, **84%** are neither members nor participants, however, men are slightly more active in this field than women (men 78%, women 86%), **7%** *are not members, but participate,* **2.7%** *are members, but do not participate,* **5.3%** *are both members and active participants,* of whom 10% men and 4% women, and 34% respondents at the age of 15 to 18 years.

Organisation in Unions - Last years have also seen greater pluralism in Union organizing. It is necessary for the Unions to represent a certain percentage of employees in a particular branch so that they can become authorised employee representatives in the negotiation processes with employers and the Government. **90.2%** of the respondents declared that they *are neither Union members nor participants in Unions' activities*, of whom 86% are employed, 94% have primary education and 86% have higher education degrees.

3% of the total number of respondents *are members, but do not participate in Unions' activities*, and those with higher education are twice as many.

2.5% of the respondents are *both members and participants in the activities*, of whom 3% among Macedonians and 1.3% among Albanians where young people of up to 24 years of age are below 1% and people over 55 are 4.5%. People without and with primary education account for less than 1% and people with higher education account for 4.3%.

About **1.8%** *are active members of professional, business or entrepreneurial associations* while the employed account for 3.6%. Around **93%** of the respondents *are neither member nor participate in activities*. **94%** *do not participate at all in religious Charities*, and this number is higher in Macedonians (95.6%) compared to Albanians (87.7%). **88%** *do not participate at all in women's associations, civic or student associations, associations of pensioners or environment protection associations*, and this percentage is the lowest in the Eastern Region (78%). **2.5%** *are inactive members* and among respondents over 65 years of age, this percentage is 5%, which is due to pensioners' organisation tradition that exists. **4%** *are active members*. In the Eastern Region, they are most numerous (10.5%), women are not very actively organised (3.4%), Macedonians are more active (4.8%) compared to Albanians

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[1] The Survey was implemented in November–December period in 2009.

(2%), while 65-year-olds are twice as the average (8%), which is again due to the said pensioners' organisation tradition, where people with higher education are three times more involved (7.5) as compared to the respondents with primary education. **95%** of the respondents *do not participate at all in groups of people experiencing similar problems (disabled people, single people, alcoholics etc.)*, and this percentage is lower by 10% among youth aged 15–18 years, while **96%** of the population *do not participate at all in immigrant or refugee associations,* which is understandable because the country is not an immigrant destination and since the Kosovo crisis, there has been no wave of refugees.

Membership in *Internet networks (Facebook and the other)* is a special type of social networking, which has been experiencing huge expansion in the last decade. **22%** of the respondents are *active members* on Internet networks, of whom least numerous are in the South-East Region – 11%, 21.7% among Macedonians, 26% among Albanians, 67% in youth of 15 to18 years of age, 59% among 19 to 24-year-olds, 48% among 25 to 27-year-olds, 15% among 35 to 44 year-olds, 5% among 45 to 54-year-olds, 3% among 55 to 64-year-olds and 1% in people over 65 years of age. Of the respondents with primary education, 10% are active members, while in respondents with higher education the percentage is four times higher. About **70%** of the respondents *are not members at all*, and in urban areas this per cent is slightly lower (68%) unlike rural areas. Based on these Survey data, one can conclude that most excluded from social networks are senior people who live in rural areas and who have the lowest education. This is due not so much to the lack of participatory culture, but to the need for internet connection accessibility, basic computer skills and topicality of electronic networks among the younger population. Compared to all other forms of association, it can be concluded that **electronic social networks are most visited** and this can indicate that this model of association will be even further advanced in the future. It is a result of efficiency, globality and accessibility of electronic networking. **It is desirable that the Municipalities use social networks.**

Membership in *other clubs or groups that regularly meet* is extremely low, i.e. **91%** of the respondents *are not members at all*, and **3.6%** are *active participants*, where men are twice as active (5%) compared to women.

There are a high number of non-governmental organisations, but only a small part of them is really active in their field of action. There is no systematic and transparent mechanism for consultations with the civil society regarding National Development Policies, Laws, Programmes or other strategic documents. It is evident from the Survey that the number of citizens who are members in any type of civic association is very small and the number of active members is even smaller. It is understandable that youth aged 15 to 18 years are most often members of sports, arts, music, youth or other recreation groups. Only 15% of the employed have declared that they are members of Unions. The percentage is very low of the people who are members of Charities, student or environment organisations, and the number of those who are members of women's or pensioners' organisations is also small.

From the interviews performed with the Mayors and Council Members it can be concluded that NGOs are relatively quite active in the process of providing initiatives and implementing

particular solutions. They emphasise NGO's high willingness to act as partners in implementing particular projects, first of all, in the areas of sports, environment, culture and social protection. Both the Municipality and NGOs may initiate such projects. However, not in all cases are the criteria clear that the Municipality uses to select the NGOs. **Precise and clear criteria are necessary for selection of NGOs to become partners in particular project implementation, especially where such funds are at Municipality disposal and obtained from Municipal source revenues, State Budget or some donation. It is also necessary to define the procedure for selection of partner NGOs that will tend to involve a greater number of people.** Otherwise, process transparency is brought into question and room for suspected corrupt activities is created.

All the Municipalities underlined the assistance they provide as Local Government Units to NGOs by providing some of them with free premises to use. These premises are allocated by a Municipal Council Decision, but **not every NGO submitting a request and active with its own membership may get such premises. The criteria that Municipal Councils use to identify which NGO will get some office space and where and what size this space will have are not clear.**

2. Public information by local government units

Free access to information, guaranteed by Article 16 Paragraph 3 of the Constitution, is further elaborated in the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Character[2].

> *Information List*
> *Article 9*
> *Information Holders shall regularly maintain and update the Information List they dispose of and publish such information in a manner accessible to the public (web-site, bulletin board etc.).*
>
> *Oral or Written Request*
> *Article 12*
> *(1) The Requesting Party may request access to information orally, in writing or electronically.*
> *(2) Each Requesting Party shall, on the basis of a Request, be entitled to access the information disposed of by the Information Holder by receiving an insight, copy, photo-copy or electronic record thereof.*

With regard to free access to information of public character, some Mayors pointed out that there were some understatements in this area. Namely, it is insufficiently clear what costs are to be covered by the Requesting Party seeking the information. *It is not only about copying costs. Here, costs incurred with regard to human resources should be taken into account as well. Namely*, as they emphasise, *there are situations where such information is requested that makes an officer work overtime for several days, so due to that, current activities remain unfinished,* the respondents say.

The Law on Local Self-Government regulates the right to information on issues of local character as follows:

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[2] "Official Gazette of RM" No 13/06.

(1) Municipal Bodies, Council Commissions and Public Services founded by the Municipality shall, for no compensation, inform their citizens on their work, as well as their Plans and Programmes important for Municipality development in a manner defined by the Municipality Charter.

(2) The Municipality shall enable its citizens access to basic information on the services it provides, in a manner and under conditions regulated by the Municipality Charter.[3]

From the interviews performed, it can be concluded that Municipalities use various forms of *citizens' information*:

− Annual Reports in electronic and printed formats;

− Public hearings;

− Press conferences by the Mayor and Council Members

− Municipal newsletter;

− Web-site;

− Statements and information programmes on local TV and Radio stations;

− Public sessions of the Municipal Council and Commissions; and

− Mandatory once a week meetings with the Mayor.

There are 74 *television stations (both national and local) and the same number of radio stations* in the Republic of Macedonia[4]. This is a high number of broadcasting companies compared to the population number in the country. At the same time, this guarantees that access to information of local importance will be greater. Nevertheless, *the existence of a number of local TV stations is brought into question due to the small market and insufficient TV commercials.* "Regarding the commercial media sector whose main source of funding are its advertising means, the main barrier to its successful commercial operation and development is the small advertising industry potential in the Republic of Macedonia, and primarily this is the case at the local level. In order to achieve greater media sector consolidation, it is planned to regionalise this sector (see the Graphic Illustration below), which is in line with the strategic priorities of the Broadcasting Council.

At present, the regionalisation provides an opportunity for some of the local TV stations that will meet the appropriate criteria to climb up to the level of regional TV stations. This is the first step on a medium and long term. The Broadcasting Council is also expecting for some local broadcasters to start the process of merging and consolidating their capital that will enable them to rise to a regional level and offer better quality programmes and productions of audio-visual contents"[5].

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[3] Article 8 of the Law on Local Self-Government.
[4] Information from the official web-site of the Broadcasting Council [online] Available at: <http://www.srd.org.mk> [Accessed in February 2011].
[5] Information from the official web-site of the Broadcasting Council [online] Available at: <http://www.srd.org.mk> [Accessed in February 2011].

(Graphic Illustration of Broadcasting Regions in Macedonia)

In the Opinion Poll performed for the needs of *2008 Decentralisation Overview* of OSCE Observer Mission in Skopje the following questions were also asked:

How do you get informed on your Municipality's work?

> Other 68.28%
> Municipal newsletter 17.97%
> Municipality web-site 11.70%

What form of communication do you think is most efficient between Municipal Authorities and citizens?

> 1 Regular admission hours for the citizens   52.4 %
> 2 Citizen Information Centres   24.1 %
> 3 Presentations at citizens' meetings   32.2 %
> 4 Local media   35.6 %

3. Satisfaction of citizens with the decentralisation process and services they receive from the Municipality

The 2002 Law on Local Self-Government started the decentralisation process, which, among other things, is aimed at increasing Municipality competencies, making public services more accessible to the citizens and enabling greater citizen participation in the process of local decision-making.   However, according to the results from the Survey[6] implemented two years after the Local Self-Government Law entered into force, 42.2% of the respondents evaluate Local Government Units' work with the lowest mark (poor), while 13.4% put "satisfactory" to it, which proves the low level of trust in Local Governments. This indicates that even from the very beginning of the decentralisation process, the Local Government Units did not enjoy their citizens' trust and that it will take a longer period of time for them to start increasing that

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[6] From the Report on the telephone opinion poll carried out by Stratum Agency in June 2004 for the needs of the Republic of Macedonia's Government.

trust. The latest research[7] shows slight progress, i.e. almost a half (45%) of the respondents are average satisfied, over one-third (35%) are somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their local services. Only one-fifth of the people (20%) are somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the services offered by their Municipality. In the research, people were asked if they thought that the decentralisation process would improve the situation in their local community.

More than one-third of the respondents found that the decentralisation would improve their local community situation, compared to almost one-tenth who thought that the situation would deteriorate, reaching the net balance of 25% of the respondents assessing the decentralisation impact in favour of enhancing the situation.

The question **Do you think that your interests are represented in the Local Government** for the needs of UNDP Project *2010 National Human Development Report*, the answer *To some extent* was given by around **one-fourth** of the respondents. The most positive answers to this question were given by Polog respondents (40%), and the percentage was the lowest on the basis of age structure (27%), while employed people account for 36% and unemployed account for 22%. The difference is drastic based on their education level. Namely, respondents without primary education account for 17.4% while respondents with graduate school account for 53.2%. By the research covered in 2009 Civic-based Analyses, where a similar question was asked, it was shown that four-fifths of the people deemed that they have no influence over their Local Government's decision-making process. This is similar to the result as in the 2008 March issue of this edition.

To some extent yes	**One-fourth**
Polog	40%
Vardar Region	22%
Male	34%
Female	27%
Roma	17.5%
Respondents aged 15–24 years	27%
Employed	36%
Unemployed	22%
Total	25%

In the last local Elections in 84 Municipalities *not one female Mayor was elected*, and in the previous Local Elections, three female Mayors were elected. This means regression in terms of politics gender representation although the number of female Council Members is going up thanks to the Election Code that envisages a proportionate model in distribution of Council Members' mandates using a gender equality quota.

According to the 2009 Decentralisation Process Study performed by OSCE Observer Mission in Skopje, it can be seen that citizens reckon that *decentralisation improved services the most in the area of utilities (55%), and the least in the area of local economic development (33%)*,

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[7] According to Civic-based Analyses, UNDP 2009 issue.

which resembles the perception of decentralisation effects on the part of Municipal Authorities as well.

According to the focus group participants' statements taken for the needs of preparing the *Study on Rural Community Situation*, "there is agreement that this process primarily has great significance for smaller rural Municipalities whose interests and specifics have been losing their authenticity within large Municipalities. In this case, taking a comparative perspective, one can identify some divergence in the responses given by citizen focus groups and leader focus groups. A greater degree of restraint can be registered in citizen focus groups. Namely, for some of the disputant citizens, changes took place only formally and such citizens mainly manifest dissatisfaction with what has been accomplished in their Municipalities. They identify the problem in the amount of funds available to the Municipality, which directly affects its possibility to efficiently implement its competencies."[8]

According to *2008 Decentralisation Process Overview* prepared by OSCE Observer Mission in Skopje, "the citizens were asked *if there were more cultural events than before* (i.e. prior to the decentralisation process) and 52.8% think that decentralisation has brought more cultural events than before as opposed to 23.7% who deem that prior to decentralisation, culture was more present in their Municipalities".[9] In the area of education, 50% stated that education management at the local level was improved, 14% said that it was not improved and 29% that it remained the same as before.

It can be seen from citizens' replies that high Municipal taxes could be the possible reason for illegal building for 39.5 per cent of the interviewees, while the poor quality of Detailed Urban Plan is the second most frequently mentioned reason for it (27.9 per cent). The method of calculating Municipal taxes accounts for only 4.7 per cent. As expected, one-fifth of the interviewees answered that all previous responses confirm the reasons for illegal building.

According to the results contained in *2008 Civic-based Analyses*, and taking into account all public services together, the Study examined people's satisfaction with the services offered by the Municipality. Almost a half (45%) of the respondents are average satisfied, over one-third (35%) are somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their local services. Only one-fifth of the people (20%) are either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the services offered in their Municipality.

As a whole, relatively few respondents deemed that the local Council made efforts to enhance the conditions in the Municipality. The area where least satisfaction was displayed related to the efforts of the Council to get the citizens involved in the decision-making, while Councils are not well off, either, in terms of their efforts to take action with regard to local population concerns or promotion of local population interests.

Next on the bottom of the opinion scale regarding Council's performance is if the Council is trustworthy, if it spends the money prudently and if it provides good value for money. The

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[8] Gaber-Damjanovska, N., Babunski, K., Joveva, A., 2007. *Study on Rural Community Situation*. MCMS, pp.23-27.
[9] 2008 Decentralization Process Overview. *OSCE Observation Mission in Skopje*. p.10 (Macedonian version).

respondents were significantly more satisfied with Council's performance regarding healthy environment issues. The greatest support to Council's efforts was given by the respondents who deemed that their Council was making significant efforts to make their area cleaner and greener, while a relatively large proportion also thought that the Council acts well in relation to Town Centres enhancement making their area safer and their location a better place to live and that the Council is neither distant nor unfriendly.

In accordance with the last public opinion survey provided by MCIC 70.8% know for ZELS and 30.8% know what it does.[10]

An indicator of satisfaction with services provided by the Municipality is also the number of petitions filed with the Ombudsman.

> *"The Ombudsman shall defend constitutional and legal rights of citizens and all other persons when they are violated by acts, actions and omissions of actions by organs of State Administration and by other organs and organisations that have public authority, and shall undertake measures and actions to protect the principles of non-discrimination and appropriate equitable representation of community members in State Government, Local Government Units and public institutions and services."[11]*

From the 2009 Ombudsman's Annual Report it can be concluded that 4,456 applications arrived at this institution, of which 3,672 are completed where in 944 cases a violation was noted and for 787 of them, Ombudsman's interventions were accepted and in 157 cases all legal possibilities were used.

Most applications were filed in the area of: justice, 744 or 20.48%; Employment, 389 or 10.71%; property relations, 361 or 9.94%; correctional institutions and facilities, 347 or 9.55%; consumers' rights **(utility and other fees), 277 or 7.63%**; protection of rights in police procedures, 252 or 6.94%; pension and disability insurance, 181 or 4.98%; **urban planning and construction, 170 or 4.68%; protection of children's rights, 157 or 4.32%;** civil situation and other home affairs, 154 or 4.24%; Social Protection, 95 or 2.62%; Health Care, 72 or 1.98%; Housing, 57 or 1.57%; finances and financial operation, 50 or 1.38%; **education, science, culture and sports, 49 or 1.35%; environment, 21 or 0.58%**; non-discrimination and appropriate equitable representation, 20 or 0.55%; as well as other areas where 234 or 6.44% applications were filed.[12]

The situations where the Municipality is, or could be subject to citizens' rights violation are marked with bolded letters in the above paragraph. If the percentages are summarised, it will be noted that the word goes about spheres where there is a distinct violation of civil rights.

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[10] Project "Trust in Institution and Civil Society", Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, 2010. Official website of ZELS, accessed in February 2011.
[11] Article 2 of the Law on Ombudsman, published in the "Official Gazette of RM" No 60/03.
[12] Ombudsman's Annual Report, p.16.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

- *It is recommended* that the Ministry of Local Self-Government in collaboration with ZELS implement activities to educate Municipal officials on the need for and manner of using social networks, which should also be used by Municipalities, since research shows that such social networks are the most powerful way of people association and at the same time, the most efficient information means

- *It is recommended* that recommendations on precise and clear criteria be prepared with regard to selecting partner NGOs in particular project implementation, especially when the funds are disposed of by the Municipality and obtained from its own sources, State Budget or some donations. It is necessary to also define the procedure of selecting partner NGOs that will tend to include a greater number of people

- *It is recommended* that recommendations be prepared regarding what criteria the Municipal Councils will use to identify NGOs that will be allocated office space, what size this office space will have and where it will be.

- Municipalities use various forms of public information:
  - Annual Reports in both electronic and printed formats;
  - Public hearings;
  - Press conferences by both the Mayor and Council Members;
  - Municipal newsletter;
  - Web-site;
  - Statements and information programmes on local TV and radio stations;
  - Public sessions of the Municipal Council and Commissions; and

- the survival of a number of local TV stations is brought into question due to the small market and insufficient number of TV commercials;

- only ¼ of the citizens deem that to some extent their interests are represented in the Local Government.

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POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY AS CONCEIVED
BY VISEGRAD GENERATIONS

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Key Words: *politics, democracy, Visegrad Group, Visegrad generations*

Abstract

The purpose of this project is to investigate the system of values and political views of representatives of the Visegrad generation, youth born in (or shortly after) 1989 in the Visegrad Group countries. It seems that the political consciousness of young people born and raised in the new geopolitical conditions is both interesting for research as well as important in terms of shaping the future political vision in the V4 countries.

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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS