Russian Paradigm of Civil Society: Politicization Versus Autonomization

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the development problem of the Russian Federation. The development strategy of civil society suggests two scenarios: an initiative from the top and the activity from below. Both scenarios may be developed in today’s Russia. One of them is a purely Russian scenario, while the other one is an Anglo-Saxon. However, the possible involvement of the state in the civil process should be executed in legal provision of this process.

Key words: Civil society • Politicization • Autonomization • Political state • Autonomy

INTRODUCTION

The greatest Russian prophet A.S. Pushkin wrote in olden times: "To live without political freedom is even possible, though it’s impossible to live without a family inviolability".

In national political science and practical politics, civil society development problems are the most discussed issues over the recent years. Obviously, we must distinguish the problems of practical politics in terms of the civil society development; make clear the conceptual and methodological fundamentals of the theory discourse, as well as review the ideologeme/concepts arising around the concerned issue. In this context, one has to avoid the "political creationism", when the political state simply is "called upon" to build a civil society using its constructive activity.

Point is that the civil society is the bearing basis, the "frame" of democratic system and its development serves for the attainment of the guarantors of the irreversibility of democratic change, acting as a central "point" of the polyvalent reformation program of Russia. One cannot achieve democracy through its "foundation" first in political public sphere, in mentality and ideology and then in civil life. On the contrary, a vibrant civil society needs the main function of the state. This means the notorious "destatization" of the social life. In this sense, focus on the state machine, as the main mechanism and guarantor for the development of new civil-law relations is not just a dramatic conflict in Russian history. The statements of this kind represent a permanent feature of the
administrative reformation, when bureaucratic desire to maintain the integrity of the old government institution structure and to limit to any kind of political palliatives for this purpose, is hidden under the guise of teeming "innovative" activities.

Without civil life the government is reported to itself and having no control mechanisms on the part of the population creates the "nutrient broth" that is exactly necessary for the rapid reproduction of bureaucracy.

There are many approaches to the definition of the invariant nature of civil society. Western European and Anglo-Saxon concepts are rather preachy, didactic in nature, not always suitable for the conditions of present-day Russia. In recent times, in the western theoretical constructs, the following concepts are corresponded with our subject: "Information Society" of J. McLuhan, "Telematic Society" of D. Martin, "Completed Society" of J. Makleland, "Active Society" of A. Ettsoni, "Lean Society" of U. Harman, "Cooperative Society" of J. Clifford and "Organizational Society" of R. Prestus and O. Clifford.

In the fundamental work of Jean L. Koen and E. Arato "Civil Society and Political Theory", civil society is defined as "the sphere of social interaction between the economy and the state, which consists, first of all, from the most intimate spheres of communication (e.g. family), associations (voluntary, in particular), social movements and various forms of public communication.

Modern civil society is created with certain forms of self-institutionalization and self-mobilization" [3, 7]. At that, generalization and institutionalization are accomplished through laws and this is the function of the state. In this fundamental study, the authors provide a critical discourse of civil concepts in the XX century: normative judgment of H. Arendt; historicist judgment of U. Habermas, R. Koselleck and K. Schmidt, "genealogical judgment" of M. Foucault and the "system approach judgment" of N. Luhmann.

The idea of 270 civil society lies at the basis of the "postindustrial - communitarian" models. They proceed from the belief that the modern bourgeois society is unable to press the institutionalized sphere, not to mention how to drive it out. Therefore, their task is to reveal the alternative civil society nucleus within a bourgeois society.

These elements are in opposition to the bourgeois elements and, as believed, are less amenable to manipulation by the bourgeois state and potentially are targeted for the life outside and without the state. The growth and the strengthening of alternative civil society is understood by the left radicals as socialist "revolutionary process" in the citadels of capitalism, unlike the political "revolutionary act", swiping away only the bourgeois state machine. Post-industrial (ecological) socialism, denying the logic of industrial society, is intended, according to its ideologists, to restore the integrity of the society, the unity of the labor, life and leisure of the each individual. Information technologies and ecological imperatives are the main thing in the guise of today's productive power of the society. The approach offered by E. Black [4; 238 and 239-240], where he reduces the civil society in Europe solely to the values of the personality and the human rights as an individual, is quite indicative. Here the development of the society took place through various collectivist structures such as cities, guilds, communities and corporations; therefore the values of civil society is only half of the European political tradition, whose second half are the values of mutual aid and partnership, whereas political participation "in practice is only a privilege, a luxury not available for many people".

F.K. Schmitter offers a "network" approach to the analysis of civil society. According to him [5], the origin of civil society took place long before the advent of modern representative democracy. Therefore, civil society contributes to democratization, though is not the cause of democratization. F.K. Schmitter reckons the countries of North America, Australia, New Zealand, Western Europe and its former colonies to the regions "worthy" a civil society as a prize. In his view, civil society never completely monopolizes the relationships between individuals/firms and the state, but along with such direct contacts enjoys other various ways to influence public policy. The more these methods involve intermediary organizations, the higher the level of civil society and, accordingly, the easier will be, ceteris paribus, transition to democracy. F.K. Schmitter realizes civil society as a system of self-organized intermediary groups.

To explain the essence of civil society, "network" approach suggests the presence of horizontal linkages between actors/entities of public relations (NGOs, family, church, etc.) against vertical linkages inherent to the political and public relations. However, for this, the system of civil relations must already have at least a primary structure: the availability of institutions, actors, etc. American sociologists often consider large economic corporations as analogs of not only civil but also "political institution" [6, 205-216].
In general, the idea of civil society owes its origin to the ideology of the New Age which chronologically corresponds to the beginning of Western European Reformation. Most of today’s scholars, both Western and domestic, agree on the fact that the terminologically this concept has been entrenched and defined since the mid-end of the XVIII century in Anglo-Saxon political conception. However, analogues of this concept have appeared in various languages long before, as well as the idea of relations between the state and society. The semantic crystallization of this concept turned specifically into the idea of civil society. A lexical item of "civil society" has arisen in protoliberal paradigm of Western Europe at the end of the XVII century (first appeared in modern Western European languages of the 60-s in the introduction to the French translation of the "Politics" of Aristotle).

The beginning of this process was characterized by emergence of the citizen’s personality - the "self-confident" member of a civil society, who has based his status on a legal ground, which means on an acknowledged private property institution.

The overall freedom can be provided only through developed, structured and mass-character civil society which was formed in Western Europe in early modern period based on its own cornerstone. Europe-wide fame of "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" and the further Napoleonic “Code Civile”, supported by the power of the columns of Napoleon's army, helped the Europeans to better grasp the differences between the "citizen" and the "national". However, in England as early as in 1679, a law on personal immunity, the so called Habeas Corpus Act, was passed. (Although history has known "pure civil societies", such as, for example, the stateless Iceland of sagas era (VIII-XI centuries), which was settled by the Norwegians escaped from the strong kingship power of St. Olaf. This is where they have reached a long-awaited consensus on norms, regulating property matters and other relations). Even this period was characterized by rising non-institutional free-living, non-committed by the state and "state space" gradually narrowed, giving opportunity to civil society to fill the resultant gaps. The church, estates and knightly orders, fading as public institutions, often remain as formations of civil society. On the contrary, the individual components of the civil society become politically functioning bodies while forming and developing. The same thing happened with the Parliament – the voice of proto-civil society of the Middle Ages. The scope of private interests, wage labor and private rights of individuals were moving away from the imminent political control.

According to the author, "civil" concept is an individualized mode of "social" concept, the personal level of social existence and the core of socialization, which means primarily a system satisfying the immediate human needs through the interest of civil society, building up a social structure.

The realities of the post-totalitarian existence of Russian society, the general detente of pedestrian-political atmosphere cause in ordinary mind the illusion of progressive total power vacuum, paralysis of state bodies and functions. This gives rise to calls for the emergence of a "powerful hand", able to restore "order" and the demand for the creation of civil society "through an authoritarian grip". The underlying logic is very simple. As in Russia there are no civil structures, more or less developed, whereas the power in Russia is strongly a priori, then it is the state that using its authority and power should create the desired civil society. Otherwise, "chaos" in social life may happen at a time of growing denationalization accompanied by the liberation of the masses, often having conflicting interests. The task of the authorities at that time is to find legal forms of conflict resolution between the interests, the creation of public institutions of political power.

All the more so, because the civil society is the common denominator of genuine democracy and functioning market economy; what we need above all, is the "creative chaos" of civil society though frightening the post-totalitarian cornball and philistine.

Last but not least hope for a "strong" state when creating structural elements of civil life is associated with the idea of rigidly determined fate of the post-totalitarian society, making its way to democracy, certainly through a strong authoritarian grip, which is destined to ensure the irreversibility of the country movement towards the civil society. Especially because "statism" is one of the main traditions of the Russian social thinking. Russian national-statists are attributing the need to strengthen the family, army, church and society with the state prosperity. Therefore, from their point of view, the only state is a carrier of Russian national origin, which means that the freedom and personal rights can always be sacrificed to the state interest.
"Strong" civil society creates the conditions for a "strong" nationhood and the benefit of citizens will become the main criterion for the government effectiveness.

One of the main institutions of the developing civil society is a system of social/civic organizations and movements. Their natural "growing pains" are added by the state's desire to give them a semi-state motivated character (especially because their recognition, according to the law, gets through the approval of the state agency represented by the Ministry of Justice).

Thus the state bureaucracy is looking for a way to care the nascent civil institutions and initiatives, because losing them means for bureaucracy losing its future at all. The revealed tendency of over-politicization of the civil life means a disease of civil society, yet not strong enough. Thanks of state ability, the diversity of social life is reduced to a simple struggle for a power. In this case, "less politics" means "more civil society" and the pluralism of civil society does not mean at all the growth in the number of associations and organizations.

More important is the efficiency and the quality of their functions performance. Hence, the initiative of civil society development in Russia should belong to its own institutions. It is impossible to create civil society by purposeful activities of the government and the state, but only through the activity of the citizens.

At the proper times, Shang Yang had every reason to say in the "Shang-Jun- Shu" (the book of the Shan State ruler): "Weak nation means a strong state; strong state means a weak nation. The weakening of the nation, therefore, is the goal of the state".

Civic organizations, groups, associations, built on the principles of self-activity and voluntariness, are exactly a school of public self-government in the same sense in which they pertain to civil society, rather than the state. The psychology of "a superstitious reverence for the state", as it was aptly mentioned by Karl Marx, has received excessive circulation. The hall-mark of self-administration/autonomy is mass supremacy and sovereignty, rather than their "involvement" in government of the state. Self-administration/autonomy is approaching when the extreme forms of exclusion of individuals from the property, power and government are pulled through. Self-administration/autonomy is not just a measure of independence of a social association or corporation, its independence from political and state power. This is an essential characteristic of civil relations within such associations, revealing the extent of their freedom and independence/initiative. Self-government and regime of autonomy approach gradually as the public management functions are transferred to emergent civic institutions which are formed by the initiative "from below".

Now the state independence in relation to society, its internal sovereignty is not an indicator of the state strength, rather, they show the weakness and immaturity of civil society.

Autonomy of the civil society, as regards to the state, is reflected in the existence of law. Undoubtedly, the law has a wider social function than simply an expression of the ruling class interests. This function consists in protecting the interests of civil society. And the law, as well as the social contract, can be considered as the matrix that has determined the structure of power relations in European society since the end of XVII - beginning of XVIII century.

The state, which restrains itself, of course, may consider itself to be law-governed state, though it should not be forgotten that setting the limits of power, the state is not reckoned with the will of the electorate and, therefore, unlikely can be a democratic and legal by definition. Actually the activities of such a state are legitimized by civil society.

In the research literature autonomy (autonomia in Greek means self-government, independence) is usually understood as the ability and the right of self-sufficient independent functioning of the political entities within the state formation guaranteed by the Constitution [7]. According to our hypothesis, this conception can be extrapolated to the system of "political state - civil society" relations. Not by chance, the majority of the developed civil societies correspond with a federal form of government.

The main problem when defining the autonomy is reduced to the fact that often autonomy is equated with self-government. For example, Black's Law Dictionary means by autonomy the right to self-government [8, 90]. In accordance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government, self-government is understood as the right and the ability of self-governing authorities to regulate a significant portion of public affairs and manage them, acting within the law under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population (Art. 3) [9, 3].

According to A. Eide, the concept of autonomy should not be associated with other forms of statehood and with a federal structure, also because "the dividing line lies in the symmetric versus asymmetric relationships
between the territorial components. The federal system is composed of an equal number of self-governing units, each having the same scope of self-governance within the framework of the Constitution, while the autonomous unit differs from the other units of the state in terms of the scope of its competence" [10; 274]. In addition, "organization of the federal structure may lack the ethnic factor; autonomy almost always has the ethnic, linguistic and religious purposes" [10].

Autonomy is not synonymous with independence and does not violate the principle of the national unity, as the common law applies to autonomous units that cannot exercise the powers against the interests of state policy. A certain degree of subordination and control over the activities remains in force. It turns out that the function of autonomy and local government/municipality is appurtenance/attribute of civil society, rather than political power of the state, that was mentioned as far back as by Hegel and Constant. Moreover, this function forms in society a special autonomous branch of government. Forgetfulness of this principle leads to the absolute bureaucracy in social life and to the regime of panpolitism. The development level and the maturity of civil society are precisely reflected in the aggregation of freedom and self-government/autonomy of institutionalized amateur civic initiatives. The task of the state under these circumstances is to find legal and political framework of this process and provide the conditions for its formation. Therefore, the formation of the structure of a modern civil society in Russian Federation has two motion vectors: from the civil society to the state and vice versa (if sought 'political will' is available). The current stage of civil society development in Russia can be characterized as a period of gaining internal structure and mass-character of the institutionality of being. And here comes to the foreground such an attribute of civil institutions as autonomy which is an alternative to their politicization, i.e. actual annihilation.

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