I
GENERAL ASPECTS
OF TRANSITION

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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY PROJECT

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Abstract *Sociology and social sciences in general failed to predict the imminent collapse of the socialist regimes in Central Europe, but they nevertheless played an important role in paving the way for these changes. This role cannot be ascribed to all social sciences but primarily to a "civil society approach" in social sciences. This approach implied that the socialist societies were characterised by a zero-sum game between the civil society and the authoritarian state; the broader were the prerogatives of the state the more limited or even totally suppressed were the faculties of the civil society. It provided a cognitive framework in which the opponents of the regime defined the motives and aims of their activities; they perceived themselves as advocates of societal potentials in front of authoritarian state. This ideology which was highly operative in the preparatory stage of democratisation, lost much of its influence in the period, lost much of its influence in the period of the institutionalisation of democracy. The fall of civil society project also signalled the decline of influence of nonconformist intellectuals, the main proponents of the project. The democratisation which was fostered by dissenting intellectuals, as developments in Slovenia show paradigmatically, thus has not brought the most benefits to its most ardent supporters.*

civil society, intellectuals, transition from socialism

There is a broad consensus among sociologists that sociology failed to notice and explain the signs of the imminent collapse of European socialism. The failure has been so profound that, according to some authors, not only the achievements of the "sociology of socialist societies", but the achievements of the whole sociological enterprise should be critically examined (see Hollander, 1992). Though this profound "self-criticism" may bring certain benefits, it could also unduly underplay the role of sociology in the process of radical transformation of former socialist societies. Instead of speaking of the complete failure of sociology it can be argued that its role was contradictory; on the one hand it was characterised by the "lack of preparation for the recent wave of mobilisation in Eastern Europe" (Tarrow, 1991: 12), but on the other hand sociology and social sciences in general contributed importantly to the upsurge of the wave of mobilisation

which eroded away the socialist regimes. To put it differently, sociology influenced the course of societal changes which it could not sufficiently explain, let alone predict. From this point of view, the role of sociology in "recent historical events" was contradictory because of a marked discrepancy between its practical influence and its explanatory and predictive inabilities. In this perspective, the examination of this discrepancy seems much more productive than a general self-criticism of sociology.

In this paper only one, rather marginal, aspect of this discrepancy will be dealt with. The paper will focus on one of the ways in which sociology influenced the course of changes of socialist societies. It will be argued that this role cannot be ascribed to sociology in general but primarily to a "civil society approach", which in the eighties bacame undoubtedly one of the most prolific approaches to the study of state socialism. Its importance was especially determined by the fact that it was widely accepted by the social scientists in socialist societies (see Misztal, 1993: 452; Stammen, 1993: 24-29). After a brief outline of the main assumptions of this approach its practical influence will be examined. In this context, the agents of change who were constituted by the civil society approach will also be identified. Most of the supporting evidence will be related to the transformation of Slovenian society, but it will also be briefly shown that the Slovenian experience is in many respects comparable to the transformations of other Central European societies. In the concluding part of the paper the discrepancy between the practical efficiency and analytical relevance of the civil society approach will be highlighted. It will be argued on the one hand that its explanatory and predictive achievements fell short of its practical relevance and on the other that this approach was much more productive in the initial stages of the great transformation than in the period of stabilisation of the new order.

1. The Civil Society Approach as an Ideology of Nonconformist Intellectuals

In the eighties, most East European sociological analyses of socialist systems agreed, despite differences between theoretical approaches and differences between socialist societies, at least on one important point. The consensus related to the claim that the functioning of socialist systems was primarily characterised by the domination of politics over other spheres of society, especially the economy. This broad idea was elaborated in different theoretical contexts. As already indicated, the most innovative and productive among them seemed to be the approach according to which the growing tensions in socialist societies could be explained by a contradictory relation between politics (i.e. the socialist party-state) and civil society. The proponents of this idea argued that the nature of this contradiction started to change significantly in the eighties: the once omnipotent socialist state was facing an increasingly dynamic and powerful society. The most important indicator of society's increasing dynamism was the growth of the "second society" (Hankiss, 1988). This concept refered to the emergence of those parts of society which were relatively independent of political control and were self-organised. It was stressed that the emergence of the "second society" was not limited to the economic sphere (the grey and black economy) but also gradually emerged in the sphere of politics (in various forms of political dissent) and culture (as underground culture, samizdat, etc.). The emergence and growth of civil society

was seen as a clear sign of the failure of the socialist state's attempts to organise the whole of society as "a big office and a big factory". On this basis the proponents of the civil society approach also predicted future developments - the state would, under the pressure of self-organised society, sooner or later retreat to its "natural borders". This would enable all spheres of society to reorganise themselves and to develop fully their intrinsic potentials. Thus the emergence of civil society was seen as a sign that socialist societies were facing far-reaching transformations.

To put it in rather simplistic terms, the civil society approach implied that the socialist societies were characterised by a zero-sum game between civil society and the authoritarian state; the broader were the prerogatives of the state, the more limited, even to the point of total suppression were the faculties of civil society. The maintenance of the relative stability of socialist regimes was to a high degree due to the mortification of civil society. That was why the troublesome "slow growth of civil society under repression" (Nowak, 1991: 61) in at least some socialist societies in the eighties, epitomised especially by the growing political and cultural nonconformism, was seen as a decisive sign of the imminent transformation of the socialist regime. From this perspective, the exit from the "cul-de-sac" of real socialism was possible only through a revival of civil society and the demise of the socialist state. This process implied the awakening of various collective agents (not only political, but also cultural, economic, etc.) and broadening of the scope of their potentials for action, which were limited or even annihilated by the socialist state. The growing potentials for action of new collective agents should transform the society mortified by the socialist state into an active society.

The aim of the civil society approach was not only to explain the tensions in socialist societies and to predict their developmental tendencies, but also to provide a cognitive basis for actions which should strengthen the civil society. This approach was not and did not want to be a disinterested analysis of socialist societies, but a "guide for action". This does not mean that it was more successful in explaining and predicting the course of events in former socialist societies than other theories; its distinctiveness was in the fact that it "assumed a more voluntarist perspective" (Misztal, 1993: 453) towards the socialist reality. Thus the abstract concept of "'civil society' ... had been the democratic (and revolutionary) password of the opposition since the mid-1970s" (Ost, 1993: 455) and many of its theorists came to power after the collapse of the old regime.

Obviously, the civil society approach did not provide only a "theoretical background" for political nonconformism and opposition, but also enabled the formation of collective agents who played the crucial role at least in the initial stages of the great transformation. Despite great differences in the pace and intensity of changes in individual Central European countries, one may convincingly argue that the protagonists of these changes were intellectuals. Although widely accepted, this claim needs some important clarifications. If we leave aside for a moment the vagueness of the concept of intellectuals, the role of the "masses" should be mentioned. These played different roles in individual Central European societies, but without their at least latent support the overt dissent would have not produced such far-reaching consequences. To para-

phrase Marx (1969/1844: 208) one may say that the head of the process of dismantling of socialism was "philosophy", whereas its heart were the "masses". The masses paved the way for efficient political dissent by gradually withdrawing their compliance with the ruling elite because of the latters inability to fulfil their minimal expectations (see Rychard, 1989). With the exception of Poland, the erosion of mass consent did not lead to immediate mass protests. For their part, the intellectuals with their nonconformist political activities created a free space in which the broad masses could manifestly express their grievances and thus accelerated the collapse of the old regime. There is no doubt that the motives of intellectuals and masses for the rejection of the old regime differed in many respects, but they nevertheless reinforced each other. This implies that the intellectuals can be considered as the "vanguard" of the opposition to the old regime and not as the sole agent of historical transformation of the former socialist societies.

In addition, it should be considered that not all intellectuals took a critical stance towards the old regime. Even if a rather restrictive definition of intellectuals is employed, according to which they are individuals engaged in the creation, elaboration and dissemination of theoretical knowledge, ideas and symbols (see Geiger, 1949: 12), they are still a broad social grouping which is internally differentiated in many respects. With this in mind, it would be empirically untenable to argue that the whole intellectual stratum opposed the socialist regime; from this stratum both loyal supporters and opponents of the old regime were recruited. That is why the question cannot be avoided of which parts of this stratum dared to voice their dissent. A stimulating analytical basis for this answer was developed already in the seventies by two Hungarian social scientists writing under the pseudonym of M. Rakovski (1988). They argued that in the intellectual stratum in socialist countries there was a small group of intellectuals who tried and to a large extent managed, despite the strict control of political authorities over intellectual activities, to create and reproduce their own ideology and culture. Though they possessed no power which could amplify their dissenting voices, this group of intellectuals was closely surveyed and penalised by the political authorities. For this reason the authors called the members of this group "marginalised nonconformist intellectuals" (Rakovski, 1988: 77).

Though a relatively small group, the nonconformist intellectuals had only a few "common denominators". They were engaged in different intellectual activities, though the activities of the majority of them were related to different spheres of cultural creativity, such as art, science or journalism. Because of their internal differentiation, they could not be defined in structural terms, but chiefly by their "mentality"; i.e. the marginal nonconformist intellectuals consisted of those individuals who "made their position very clear in word and deed, rejecting the policy of the party establishment" (Šiklova, 1990: 349).

This characterisation of the agents of the "civil society project" facilitates an understanding of the content and function of this project. In this context, the claim advanced by Polish sociologist J. Szacki (and regarding Polish society) seems especially pertinent; in his view civil society theory could at best be described as "only an ideology exerting influence over a small group of people who possess some kind of vision of our future and future social institutions" (quoted in Misztal, 1993: 454). The phrase "only an ideology" should not be construed as disparaging; in the perspective proposed in this paper it actually stresses the prac-

tical relevance of the civil society project. This project enabled the nonconformist intellectuals to establish minimal internal group integration and to uphold their common identity. They were not just individuals opposing the same "enemy", but a proto-group integrated by a common project. Though this project ("vision") was vaguely defined and open to different interpretations, certain central ideas stood out. As already indicated, at the centre of the civil society project was the idea that its proponents were voicing the interests of society at large. In other words, the marginal intellectuals did not see themselves as "organic intellectuals" of only one class, stratum or professional group but as representatives of the society before the authoritarian state or, at least, as the rousers of civil society's suppressed potentials (see Ash, 1990: 31). Due to the notion of the universality of their interests, the project contained pronounced moral undertones. Political nonconformism was not perceived as a means to achieve certain pragmatic political aims, but as a value in itself. That is why they did not perceive their activities as political, but rather as "anti-politics" (see Mastnak, 1990: 440).

In accordance with their "anti-political" stance they did not envisage just a change of power elite, but a substantial reconstruction of the whole of society, which would enable it to develop all its intrinsic forces. This transformation would have, as the theorists of civil society believed, a paradigmatic value for the Western societies, where the autonomy and self-organising abilities of society also needed revival. With this in mind, one may argue that the civil society project was a kind of "scientific anti-communism". It relied on science as a primary source of its cognitive consistency and legitimacy, but it entirely discarded the idea that a "good society" could be established in accordance with a preconceived plan. Society should generate a "good society" spontaneously.

Although the proponents of the civil society project were limited to a small group, their activities generally provoked sharp reactions from the ruling elite. This was a sign that political nonconformism was perceived by socialist regimes as a serious threat to their stability. Nevertheless, political nonconformism was treated differently in different Central European socialist societies. These differences became particularly obvious as the socialist regimes became increasingly unable to fulfil the expectations of the masses, i.e. in the time of their decreasing legitimacy. On the one hand, there were regimes, as in Czechoslovakia and East Germany, which tried to minimise the influence of nonconformist ideas by more or less overt repression. On the other, there were attempts by some regimes, as in Hungary, Poland and Slovenia (as opposed to the other Yugoslav republics), to establish certain forms of dialogue with nonconformist intellectuals and even to implement some of their ideas. In the following part of this paper it will be shown that the response of the political elite to political nonconformism importantly influenced the initial phases of the transition towards democracy. But in the concluding section it will be argued that in both cases the expectations of the proponents of civil society were largely disappointed.

2. The Slovenian Case: A Paradigmatic Career of the Civil Society Project

As indicated in the previous section, Slovenia belonged to those societies where the conditions for political nonconformism were relatively favourable. The first signs of its resurgence appeared

in Slovenia in the early eighties. This indicated that the attempts of the political elite to eliminate almost any form of dissent, which characterised political life in the seventies, were losing momentum. The repressive measures had not been directed only at overt political dissent; even "deviations" in art and social sciences had been carefully enclosed within small enclaves and thus marginalised. The first change was felt precisely in this field: "The distinction between 'alternative culture' and the 'generally acceptable' or 'official' one became soft, ... whereas the situation in the forties, seventies and also the sixties was much harder, exclusivistic and conflict-ridden." (Rupel, 1987: 243). The growing autonomy of cultural activities created possibilities for relatively free and public discussion in which subjects which were not strictly "cultural" were also addressed. It is not surprising that the first forms of political dissent, such as criticism of some aspects of the dominant ideology and of certain political decisions, were couched in "cultural" terms.

One important sign of the growing autonomy of cultural activity was the ability of some forms of youth subculture to withstand repression. This subculture created the space for "autonomous social action" which, in the middle of the eighties, was filled up by new social movements, especially by peace, ecological, feminist and gay movements (see Mastnak, 1990: 440-442). In these movements younger intellectuals played an important role. These intellectuals gradually "took over" the weekly magazine "Mladina" (Youth) which in the mid-eighties became an influential disseminator of alternative ideas and bitter social criticism.

Although perceived by their protagonists as non-political or as "anti-political", these ideas and activities exerted an inconspicuous, but nevertheless far-reaching political influence. By bringing new subjects and problems into public discussion, they gradually changed the political scene. A good example of such influence was the initiative for non-military service for conscientious objectors, initiated by the Slovenian peace movement in the mid-eighties (see Tomc, 1987). Although the initiative was rejected by the "official" organisations (the rejection by the federal authorities and the Yugoslav army was harsher than by the Slovenian authorities), the topic could not be banned from the political scene and it influenced subsequent discussions. At the same time, the rejection demonstrated the sterility of the political elite and the inability of the "official" political system to generate innovations or to adopt them.

These experiences directed mainstream political nonconformism towards more active - or more "political" - actions. This gradual shift of interests can be well illustrated by the case of "Nova revija" (New Review), a monthly founded by a group of writers, philosophers and social scientists in 1982. The foundation of the journal was approved by the political authorities after long hesitation and discussions. Thus the foundation of the journal was itself an important success of intellectual nonconformism. The founders defined the main aim of the journal as fostering autonomous cultural production, but the emphasis on autonomy left the selection of topics wide open. Among the many topics which emerged in the first two volumes, the "Slovenian national question" deserves special attention. The mainstream approach to this question was determined by the thesis that there existed no Slovenian national programme (S. Hribar, 1983: 2044). This thesis, which was initially meant as a critique addressed to the political elite, gradually stimulated

the collaborators of the journal to adopt a more active approach to the "national question".
These endeavours culminated in the publication of an issue (1987) devoted exclusively to this
topic; it consisted of analyses of various aspects of Slovenia's "present situation" and its perspec-
tives.

The publication of these analyses provoked a sharp reaction on the part of the political authori-
ties in Slovenia and Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, attempts to discipline the journal failed. These
attempts revealed the decreasing ability of the political elite to suppress overt political noncon-
formism; at the same time their failure encouraged the collaborators of "Nova revija" to formu-
late their political dissent in an even more overt and active way. This course was most clearly
manifested in the publication in 1988 of "Theses For a New Slovenian Constitution" and in 1990
of an issue on Slovenia as an independent state. The last two publications clearly indicated the
gradual transformation of relatively diffuse alternative ideas into a more consistent political pro-
gramme aiming primarily at Slovenian political independence from the Yugoslav state.

The formulation of an opposition political programme, i.e. the transformation of political
dissent into an at least loosely organised opposition, signalled not a culmination of the civil
society project, but rather its gradual disintegration. In Slovenia, the idea of civil society
played an important role in the early stages of the formation of political nonconformism
and dissent. It provided a general ideological framework for various activities of noncon-
formist intellectuals. As in other Central European societies, it was employed at once as an
analytical concept and as a means for the integration and legitimation of nonconformist
activities. That is why the concept remained, despite numerous discussions and attempts to
refine it, semantically overburdened and open to different interpretations. At a conference
on civil society and the state held in Ljubljana in 1987, which was one of the culminations of
the long discussion on this topic, F. Adam noted that "the concept of civil society as societal
opposition has not been theoretically elaborated and remains merely an attempt at self-
perception and self-interpretation of alternative activities on the part of their actors" (Adam,
1978: 7). The elasticity of the idea of civil society was, as F. Adam showed, most strikingly
demonstrated by the fact that it was also selectively domesticated by the dominant political
ideology (see also Gantar, 1987: 43). These observations show that the practical influence of
the civil society project was not directly dependent on its sociological elaboration.

The domestication of the concept of civil society by the dominant ideology was not only a sign of
the concept's elasticity but also a sign of the elasticity of the ruling political elite in Slovenia. After
the beginning of the eighties the elite realised through experience that the dynamics of "society"
(i.e. groups of nonconformist intellectuals, new social movements, first independent mass me-
dia) could not be effectively controlled through repression. Faced with a rapid loss of its legiti-
macy and with an increasingly active "society", the Party had to adopt a more conciliatory attitude
towards political nonconformism. As already indicated, one of the important indicators of this
trend was the fact that as early as 1985 the concept of civil society, which was the hallmark of
dissenting ideology, found its way into the Party ideology (see Mastnak, 1990: 444). Due to
selective and cautious domestification of some aspects of the idea of civil society on the part or
the political elite, this did not imply a convergence of the dominant political ideology and the

dissenting ideology. Nevertheless, it was a clear sign that the Party tried to benefit from the discussion on civil society and not to block it. In the following years the political elite tried on the one hand to "make contact" with some groups and personalities from the alternative scene, and on the other hand to use limited repression to control certain other alternative activities, as the case of "Nova revija" showed. This strategy did not lead to the pacification of political dissent, but it nevertheless accentuated some differences in the ranks of the alternative (see Rupel, 1988: 279, who speaks of alternative and "alternative"). The repercussions of these domestication attempts on the political elite and their organisations were much more profound. The ability to learn from some of their critics did not strengthen the position of the Communist Party; moreover, it led to its gradual transformation into a proper political party. In this process the Party also lost control over the allied organisations; moreover, one of them - the Youth Organisation - established itself relatively early as one of the centres of political alternative. In 1988 the Party declared its readiness to "retreat from power". Thus a necessary consensus between the political opposition and the representatives of the old regime was established which enabled a relatively smooth transition to democracy.

The transformation of the Party into a party was an important component of the Slovenian "Velvet Evolution", which culminated in the parliamentary elections of spring 1990. This transformation was complemented by a gradual differentiation in the ranks of political alternative and its transformation into organised political opposition. Of course, the process of democratisation was not prompted by the Party, but by the political alternative. The changes in the ideology and actions of the Party were primarily prompted by the loss of its legitimacy. To regain a measure of public support, the internal reform of the Party and other organisations was not enough; the elite had to dissociate itself from the other Yugoslav political elites, especially from the those which saw the future of the Yugoslav federation in increased centralisation. Thus the Party had to accept some new political themes proposed by the political alternative, including the idea of a radical break with the Yugoslav state. The protagonists of the mainstream political dissent had good reason to celebrate - they had not only "arranged" the great political transformation, they had also proved that their "vision" was correct. Or, as one of the founders of "Nova revija" put it at the tenth anniversary of the initiative for founding the journal: "Events in Slovenia took a course which was in accordance with our wishes and was anticipated by many of our analyses. We tried to foster this development with each issue of the journal..." (T. Hribar, 1990: 1098).

As already indicated, the advent of democratisation was linked to the decline of the practical relevance of the civil society project. This was not a peculiarity of democratisation in Slovenia, but a conspicuous trend in all Central European socialist countries. In the next, concluding section some implications of the "exhaustion" of the project will be highlighted. Special attention will be paid to the question of the role of the protagonists of the project in the new circumstances and to the question of the analytical applicability of the concept of civil society.

3. The Civil Society Project under Real Existing Democracy

The formation of democratic institutions in former socialist societies was a clear sign of the fruitfulness of the marginal intellectuals' dissent activities, but at the same time confronted them with new challenges. The main problem for the (former) dissenting intellectuals was how to retain their "leading role" in the context of emerging democratic institutions. Without taking into account differences between individual Central European societies, it can be claimed that non-conformist intellectuals as a group were relatively unsuccessful in coping with the new situation. Their failure was significantly related to their political "vision", at the centre of which stood the idea that they voiced the interests of suppressed "society" at large and not particular interests.

This ideology, which played a decisive catalytic role in the "preparatory" period of democratisation, proved to be relatively inefficient in the period in which democratic institutions were gradually established. This inefficiency was most obviously reflected in the fact that the (former) nonconformist intellectuals were generally quite unsuccessful, in comparison to political latecomers and in some cases also to the successors of the old political elite, in establishing firmly organised and competitive political parties. This failure was not just due to the fact that they lacked the necessary resources; in this respect their position was even better than the position of the latecomers. The main problem for marginal intellectuals was that a party formation represented the decisive step from "antipolitics" to the sphere of "realpolitik". It is not surprising that some nonconformist intellectuals looked with obvious disappointment at the process of democratisation, in which, in their opinion, those parts of "civil society" were mobilised which "could be described as politically and democratically undeveloped" (Mastnak, 1990: 449). In their view, these "undeveloped" social forces significantly influenced the further process of democratisation and its outcomes. Seeing that "real existing democracy" was not what, according to their political ideals, democracy should be, the most active proponents of the civil society project "retired into a corner and at most got on with some writing" (Šiklova, 1990: 355).

Parallel to the disintegration of their common ideology, the group which had decisively influenced the course of democratisation disintegrated. While assuming the old "anti-political" stance a substantial section of the veterans of the "fight for democracy" returned to their original activities. The rest entered politics as professional politicians and soon experienced that the rules of the political "fight for democracy" sharply differ from the rules of democratic political fight. One may argue that this is not just a disintegration of a relatively small group of marginal intellectuals, but signals a much broader process of disintegration of the intellectual stratum. In socialist societies this stratum was united by similar privileges "conferred" on the basis of formal education. Their actual performance played a relatively unimportant role in determining their social status. In fact, only those who dared to voice their political dissent risked being denied these privileges; i.e political loyalty was a price which the majority of intellectuals had to pay and was ready to pay for a relatively advantageous and stable social status. This can be explained by the fact that social stratification in socialist societies was largely moulded in accordance with the interests of the ruling elite (see Bernik, 1992: 69-82). In the changed situation, the social status

of many intellectuals is increasingly determined by the market; not education per se but education as a means to gain a favourable market position determines their social status. Thus credentials no longer automatically guarantee a homogenous position for intellectuals in the stratification system. Furthermore, the market "pushes" intellectuals towards increased functional specialisation; this specialisation enables intellectuals to find new market niches and to monopolise certain market positions. In this light, one may argue that in the new circumstances the stratum of intellectuals is actually "dying out" and will be replaced by different groups of professionals.

The preceding paragraphs suggest that the career of the civil society project and its protagonists was more or less completed by the establishment of a democratic political order. But it would nevertheless be premature to claim that the idea of civil society has completely lost its relevance. As its normative and mobilising function has been exhausted, its analytical function - which in the time of action was largely neglected - has once again come to the fore. Of course, the concept is no longer used to predict the future of the post-socialist societies, but rather to explain the relative failure of the civil society project in the concluding phase of democratisation. The most straightforward explanation has already been briefly presented above; according to this explanation the process of democratisation revealed that not all section of civil society were sufficiently "politically and democratically developed". But these sections skilfully used the free space created by representatives of more "developed" civil society to gain political influence during the definitive demise of the old regime. This explanation suggests that the proponents of the civil society project were wrong in their assessment of society's potentials for democratic transformation. It also acknowledges that they had too high expectations regarding the outcome of the democratisation process; instead of an expected new type of democracy they witnessed the formation of "immature" and unstable democracy. That is why this explanation can also be read as a self-criticism of the proponents of the project and as legitimation of their critical stance towards newborn democracy.

Even much more detached assessments of the fate of civil society under the new circumstances are in many respects similar to this one. There is a wide consensus among specialists on socialist societies that the democratisation in these societies has not led to the "reconstitution of civil society", though democratisation presupposes and enables this reconstitution. Contrary to expectations, democratisation has revealed the absence of society's potentials for self-organisation and self-reliance. This is dramatically expressed in the claim that post-socialist societies are experiencing "a state of anomy" (Marody, 1990: 281; see also Sztompka, 1993: 89). This claim implies the idea that in socialist societies there exists a suppressed but dynamic society which would decisively shape the course of democratisation was wishful thinking. In this perspective, the troubles of post-socialist democracies are not due to prevalence of "conservative civil society" (as suggested above), but due to its unexpected weakness. Thus the uncertainties of transformation of the former socialist societies can be explained by the "failure" of civil society, because "so far the organisation of civil society in the post-communist period has been surprisingly weak ... the state has maintained its strong position" (Ost, 1993: 453). The same author also observes that the failure of civil society also explains why "the political liberals who had been leaders of the triumphant opposition found themselves being pushed aside, denounced and marginalised" (ibidem).

It is obvious that under the new circumstances the concept of civil society has acquired a new function; whereas during the "battle for democracy" in socialist societies it expressed the optimism both of the protagonists of democratisation and of many social scientists (as already indicated, in many cases these two roles were merged), it now expresses their disappointment and unease regarding the new democracies. The content of the concept has changed in many respects, but its status has remained basically the same, i.e. it remains strongly value-ridden. Its status can be aptly characterised by N. Luhmann's general remark that concepts and theories which are strongly related to political interests and conflicts are not "... scientific theories in the true sense of the word but, if one may say so, scientifically subsidised theories" (Luhmann, 1981: 134). As has been shown in the preceeding sections, in the case of the concept of civil society "political" prevailed over "scientific", which was clearly reflected in the discrepancy between its practical efficiency and its analytic relevance; the scientifically "subsidised" project of civil society played a decisive catalytic role in the process of the demolition of the old regime although the analytical usefulness of the concept remained controversial.

The new circumstances are generating an obvious tendency towards congruency between both aspects of the idea of civil society. As already indicated, its political relevance has been exhausted or is at least declining. At the same time its scientific status remains questionable. Every attempt to employ the concept of civil society as an analytic tool sooner or later faces the "translation" problem, i.e. the problem of activating this vague and elusive concept with the help of more standardized sociological concepts with a structured theoretical background. This problem was already stressed in Slovenian discussions of civil society by some sociologists in the eighties (see Adam, 1987: 9-13). The "translation" problem indicates that the concept of civil society has been reduced to an incentive for sociological research of some aspects of societal self-organisation. The decline of both its political relevance and its inability to establish itself as a sociological concept proper show that the brilliant career of the idea of civil society is inevitably coming to an end under "real existing democracy".

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