

Minority Civil Society

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Abstract. Both the concept and the issue of civil society is a matter of dispute in respect of theory and practice alike. The present paper has a triple ambition: outlining the history of ideas behind the concept, providing an interpretation, and carrying out a distinct analysis of the processes characteristic of the East-Central European region. Owing to the unrealistic expectations formed around the concept, mystification poses a great danger to present-day civil society. In what follows, we will analyse the dilemmas evolved around the issue of civil society.

Keywords: civil society, democratization, East-Central Europe, active individual and community, solidarity, civil roles and functions, Hungarian civil society in Romania

1. History of Ideas and Interpretation

When investigating the roots of the history of ideas concerning today's civil society, certain issues deserve special attention, such as: the relationship between state and society, social structure, and community action plan. The concept of civil society, either directly or indirectly, appears in almost every relevant philosophical system.

John Keane defines three categories of contemporary literature on civil society (Keane 2004: 38). The texts included in the first category discuss civil society as an interpretive framework, analysing the connections between socio-political powers and institutes. According to his categorization, the second group comprises the pragmatic authors, who first of all consider civil society as a directive and an action plan, the means of a good social system. Keane includes here several classics such as Thomas Hobbes, Edmund Burke, Tom Paine, and also names a few contemporaries: Guillermo O'Donnell, Ernest Gellner, Karl Popper, Juan Linz, and Alfred Stepan. The representatives of the third tendency (John Keane, Robert Putnam, Richard Rorty, and Adam Seligman) call into question the moral

superiority of pragmatism and make efforts to demonstrate that civil society is a necessary condition of democracy. There are some who list certain authors (e.g. Jeffrey Alexander, Ralf Dahrendorf) into a category of their own: according to these authors, civil society is the sphere of solidarity and mutual responses (Vercseg 2004: 6).

The ideal of civil society can be traced back to Aristotle. As postulated by him, a city-state (*polis*) is an independent community with a constitution (*politeia*) of its own, what he calls a political community (*koinonia politiké*). The Latin equivalent of the Greek term *politicos* is *civitas* – this is what led Cicero to create the term civil society (*societas civilis*).¹ With the spreading of Christianity, the issue of a certain differentiation comes to the front: besides the religious community – the congregation of believers found under the jurisdiction of the Church –, civil society is registered separately as a constituent part of the state, which leads to the distinction between *lex aeterna* and *lex terrana*. The issue of this distinction, apparently so simplistic today, was the source of centuries-long major tensions and the root cause of civil wars. Christian tradition has a decisive role in the modern-age interpretation of the individual taking responsibility for his/her community. Witnessing the bloody and painful processes (an all-out warfare) of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Thomas Hobbes searches for a new interpretive framework (*Leviathan*), and gives up on considering social organizations as natural ‘formations’. He believes that state is not a structure based upon the family pattern and, at the same time, it does not come into being by divine ordination; he lays stress upon civil associations, that is, to his mind, state comes into existence by way of a collective agreement. The term *contract* mentioned by Hobbes linked society to the state. First Hobbes, then John Locke hypothesises that people’s peaceful living together presupposes a certain civil (rights and virtues) existence, but under no circumstances can we talk about a structure separate from the state. Furthermore, we may also exclude the idea of voluntary civic organizations; hereby, we refer to Montesquieu’s interpretation, according to which civil society represents an ambition governed by public law so that it serves as a means of separating financial and family situations from the government. This is the trail followed by Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith, who both set out from the idea that society has laws of motion separate from the state. Ferguson considers the concept of civil society as the strengthening of individual freedom, and contrasts civil society with natural state as well as society governed by social contract and legal order with despotism (civil–savage dichotomy).

The direct precedent of the idea of civil society in the modern sense appears with Hegel, who distinguishes between state and society: in his philosophy, in spite of their coexistence, civil society (a system of financial and social relations)

1 See Judit Gesztiné Ajtósi – Dániel Csanády: *Együttműködés a harmadik szektorral (Co-operation with the Third Sector)*, Európai Tükör Műhely-tanulmányok sorozat, 2007/91.

detaches itself from the state (governing and direct policy). Hegel's civil society is built on Locke's and Montesquieu's philosophy: its members are economic operators whose ambition is to put forward their economic interests in and through politics. What was a concept devoid of ideology in Hegel becomes invested with a different interpretation in left- and right-wing politics. At the beginning of the 19th century, economy gained more and more significance in social life; the concept of civil society gets filled with actions and institutes of economic character. Civil society passes for a social sphere where individuals perform their material-economic actions. Marx, on the one hand, identifies the concept of civil society with the bourgeois society and, at the same time, he narrows it down to economy: in his view, the concept stands for the pursuit of egoistic interests as well as for alienation from human possibilities and environment. The right-wing view of the concept comprises the non-state components of society; it goes beyond economy, including culture as well.

F. Tönnies makes a distinction between community and society, which however does not refer to the difference between civil society and state but civil society is given a double interpretation. As postulated by Tönnies, a community is the complex entirety of the natural, direct relationships present in the civil life of pre-capitalist societies; this is compensated by the atomizing and alienating tendencies of (modern) society.

In summary: until the end of the 18th century, the concept of civil society appears as a synonym for the concept of state and political society. Such an interpretation of civil society suggests a civilizational development leading to the establishment of a 'civilized' society, a civil social order. The development of capitalism and the evolvement of political economics brought about the separation of state and civil society (Kumar 1992). The severance of civil society and government is well under way in several European countries. Thus, civil society is the result of a long and complicated historical transformation; its establishment is the achievement of the modern world. However, the dividing line between these two spheres, state and civil society, is not permanent: the boundary gets shifted every now and then, once deepening, once growing dim (Hankiss 1986).

The 20th century brings along certain novelties regarding civil society as well: the concept now becomes the dimension of institutes and social interactions located between state and market (A. Gramsci). According to the Polish political scientist from Oxford, Zbigniew Pełczyński, civil society is a sort of a social arena where individual interests, group actions, social solidarity, and the spheres of welfare dependency interlace with one another (Pełczyński 1984). John Keane believes that there is a mutual relationship between civil society and state, both of them being the precondition of the other's democratization (Keane 1999).

With the detachment of the state, civilization, citizenship, and political publicity (J. Habermas) have become the constituent parts of civil society.

According to Gramsci, the sphere of civil society falls outside of politics and economics, its essence being cultural publicity as well as the milieu for the civil core of society to create values and express their opinions (Honneth 1993: 28). He sees civil society as a transitional phenomenon, which is only needed as long as neither politics nor economy provide shelter for the people – this is the point where Gramsci's left-wing position may have led him to be mistaken.

The idea of civil society plays a key role in today's global and local politics alike. According to some of its interpreters, it is the natural model of the western social order, whose superiority urges its spreading all over the world. In Alain Touraine's opinion – who was among the first to recognize the connection between the new global situation and the civil society –, a new social paradigm is to develop in the post-industrial society, where the intermediate operators of social life become the constituent factors (Touraine 1969). Such a perception of civil society provides an ideological basis for maintaining the world order governed by the most developed countries (Gellner 2004: 136). As opposed to this, we will find the bottom-up civil movement, whose main ambition is self-defence, providing the fundamental conditions (food, safety, liveable environment, culture) of human life. Thus, the voluntary movement fuelled by the members of the society performs the duty of the government in power whenever the state, interwoven with foreign policy or economic interests, falls short of performance.

Civil society as the core issue of social structure and community action plan is considered a relatively novel approach among those dealing with the subject. A. de Tocqueville's analysis introduces a trichotomy: he outlines a triple system made up of state, political society, and civil society. While the dimension of state stands for representation, bureaucracy, parliament, etc., civil society provides ground for private actions. Thirdly, political society is the sphere of associations, public life, press, and publicity, exercising some sort of a controlling function over the state. In this context, civil society is the school of democracy: the question and ability to self-organize as well as safeguard interests and values (Tocqueville 1993).

The evolvment of civil society assumes a legally free, autonomously acting individual, and presupposes the existence of the private sector. Another precondition is the existence of the public sphere: such spaces where citizens, as private individuals, aspire to formulate their claims in order to put forward their own interests, live up to the expectations of their individual autonomy, and satisfy their different needs (Seligman 1997), doing all these within the framework and with the help of the various social self-organizing activities. Consequently, the existence of civil society is founded on the functioning of voluntary, self-motivated associations, various groups articulating, mediating, and asserting certain interests, professional bodies, etc., which all come into being as a result of their founding members' free and private decisions. With the role of the state

called into question, civil organizations increasingly come to the front, and the expectations related to them become more and more significant. Certain authors talk about a global 'associational revolution' (Salamon 1994), investing it with considerable significance in the 20th century, comparable only to the development of the nation-states in the 19th century.

Civil society and citizenship, which is intrinsically attached to it, stand for a protective shield, safety, somewhere to belong to, a home. According to Jeffrey Alexander, civil society can be perceived as a solidarity sphere, wherein a community that accepts general principles is gradually taking shape. The more emphatic is the presence of this solidarity community, the more increasingly it becomes expressed (in the public opinion), it develops its own cultural codes and narratives, and its – legal and media-pleasing – institutional forms come into being. Solidarity community itself appears in historically new, inter-conditional characteristics and practices, such as civility, criticism, and respect (Alexander 1998).

There is no civil society without citizenship, as the rights and permissions attached to it are the very ones capable of protecting the citizen against anomie and the predominant market. Miszlivetz Ferenc quotes from Dahrendorf, according to whom citizenship is the epitome of freedom while civil society is the medium that transmits, reinforces, and promulgates this freedom. In short, it is the medium where the citizen can be at home. 'Civil society and citizenship went one step ahead of free elections and the market. These are ambitions worth fighting for, and not mere perils to be avoided. These are moral ambitions' (Miszlivetz in Csefkó–Horváth 1999: 4).

Of particular concern is the role as well as the contribution expected of civil society in the East-Central European countries. Civil society in the communist countries of the eighties represents the medium of self-organizations, taking up the role of opposition against the dictatorial state: it stands for the synonym of 'anti-politics', 'parallel polis', and 'the power of the powerless' (György Konrád, Vaclav Havel, Adam Michnik). Civil society in the East-Central European socialist countries was unambiguously reflecting the dictatorial power while embodying the political strategy of resistance. The strategy was elaborated within the framework of the *Solidarity* movement – this momentum is closely intertwined with the role played by J. Kuron and A. Michnik. They set out from the fact that due to the oppressive regime and the overwhelming military power of the Soviet Union there is no prospect for traditional revolutions in the East-Central European region. The regime must be disrupted from the inside: according to their conceived strategy, the exposure of the single-party state requires its ousting from the everyday life. The objective was not to replace the power, but to contain it – Michnik named this strategy new evolutionism.

The sign that distinguishes democratic transitions from revolutions is that these processes are consciously kept within certain limits. Social movements

and their leaders gave evidence of a self-restraining attitude in order to achieve their aims without blood sacrifices. Civil society in East-Central Europe was the means and the purpose of transforming the system at the same time. The concept was used for specifying the existing social actors that represent the civil values against the regime in power.

Civil society in Eastern Europe formulates itself as the political strategy attached to human rights, the sphere for protesting against the oppressing state (Konrád 1986). In the opposition of civil society and state, the former entity has become the means of social self-defence. The opposition intellectuals borrowed the idea of civil society from their Polish colleagues in a critical situation, living in societies that have already used up their reserves. The Polish *Solidarity* movement could not do without self-discipline: avoiding conflicts with the single-party state, non-violence as well as omitting broad social participations and demagoguery were of the first magnitude. The polysemantic concept of civil society, capable of comprising several ambitions from free-market economy to the social self-help of small communities, proved to be a suitable slogan for the union of a wide variety of opposition groupings (Honneth 1993: 26).

Despite its non-violent character, the final goal of the civil societies in the eighties was to overthrow the regime in power and take over the state functions. Such an approach of civil society is both a moral and political utopia; it is more of an ideal and a demand than reality; its essential element is the rejection of power and the awareness of intellectual power (Bodó 2001: 27).

As a response to the signs of change, the concept of civil society tended to become a political utopia by the second half of the eighties: certain elements became overemphasized, such as the need of direct participation as compared to understanding democracy based on party pluralism. The paradox of democratic transition is that, in case of a success, society gets rid of the previous regime, but this process of transformation is more of an exceptional condition that makes real historical action possible for the broad sections of society. We can talk about a successful transition when society demonstrates its power but it does not avail itself of it. Even though the role played by society is highly relevant in the democratic transition, it still remains symbolic.

In formulating his interpretation of freedom, István Bibó comes upon the idea of 'the small circles of freedom', often quoted in the literature on civil society. According to Bibó, modern freedom has evolved from the earlier versions of self-governance, certain privileges, and the small circles of freedom, and first of all indicates that political power is no more independent from the citizens, but civil consent is part of its conditionality. Power is not a personal domination but an impersonal service that cannot be monopolized by anyone or anything (Bibó 1947).

There was no democratic political culture and none such could possibly develop on the Balkans before 1989. Opposition to dictatorship received no

publicity whatsoever and the processes got under way with difficulty. Civil societies were mostly treated with distrust and doubt in these countries. The mental preconditions for change were not (yet) developed. The situation had been changing then for quite a while: after 1990, civil status in the region stood for the need of a change in mentality regarding the political, legal, economic, and every other kind of field, sometimes requiring the mutual crossing of civil and political boundaries from both directions. Despite that civil society is still underdeveloped and sparsely present in this region, today, we can talk about civil society (although it varies between countries) on the Balkans, too.

Civil society has a different face in every era. Nowadays, in the new medieval atmosphere of general fragmentation, there is a growing demand for 'home' and for belonging somewhere. As soon as it turned out that democracy and market economy are not in the position to offer a home, the focus of the research is transposed towards the fine fabrics of society, towards the world of identification, culture, and values. The concepts were to be fine-tuned.

Ferenc Mészlivetz's opinion may be regarded as a conclusion: he argues that the recurring motif in the critiques of civil society is mystification, having plenty of unrealistic expectations (the synonym for: progress, combating inequalities, and a good society in general) attached to it while also considered some sort of a panacea, the current bright side. Thus, the concept is involuntarily homogenized, loses its dynamic and contradictory character, its vividness. Unrealistic expectations are followed by disappointment: civil society does not live up to the expectations, which entails the usual bottom-line: one cannot do anything about it; it is useless; we should forget about it (Mészlivetz in Csefkó-Horváth 1999).

There are three main possible roles that assign the future duties to civil society structures (voluntary associations, networks, and social movements): protesting potential, initiation of critical discourses, and the social control of power functions. Social democratization is a process: we can never declare that it has come to an end. Therefore, the concept of civil society can be captured much more through the interactions of the various forms of organization instead of a single special organizational form (Alexander 1998).

The above interpretations do not allow for a uniform definition regarding the term of civil society; therefore, the authors either resort to formulating their own definitions or they just stick to one to their liking. In what follows, we will rely on Andrew Arató's definition: modern civil society is made up of the various forms of civil initiatives and self-organizations, which are institutionalized by the legal system that guarantees the promotion of basic human rights while also respecting social diversity. Civil organizations mediate between the state and its citizens as well as between the economic power and the citizens. The determinant momentum, the 'essence' of civil society is publicity, the public critical discourse (Arató 1999).

Due to reflexivity, heterogeneity, and an equal participation, the concept of civil society is unavoidably of contradictory nature. The organizational forms of civil society, the networks, carry out their activities, struggle, debate, and campaign, just like the multiple forms of voluntary associations. Civil society operators must also tackle the permanent contradiction between democratic participation and expeditious decision-making. They have to face the continuously threatening alternative of bureaucracy-co-optation or liquidation-disintegration. Therefore, fragility, provisionality, and existential vulnerability are constant attributes attached to the social phenomenon known by the name of civil society.

2. Civil Function – Minority Environment

Prior to dealing with the topic of civil function, let us consider what different authors and spiritual tendencies understand by civil society organization. First of all, a remark needs to be made: there is a full confusion of ideas. The denotation of civil society itself is not unambiguous because of its various interpretations by countries. The most relevant characteristic features of civil organizations are: institutional status, independence, prohibition of profit sharing, self-governance, and volunteering.

Denotations that may occur in different publications: NGO, third sector, non-profit, civil sector. NGO (non-governmental organizations) is the most inclusive denotation since it comprises all non-state organizations, including interest representation bodies as well (trade unions, employer representations, and professional chambers). We can usually come across the term of third sector in the American literature, where they use it as a distinguishing denomination from the other two economic spheres, the state/government and the business sector. The ‘non-profit’ label picks out a single important feature of civil organizations, namely the prohibition of profit sharing. In its 1997 reflection document, the European Committee refers to civil organizations as ‘voluntary organizations and associations’ (Gesztí 2003: 84). The name of organizations, again, does not lead us to a common position of principle since the German ‘Verein’ (association) and ‘Stiftung’ (foundation), the French ‘économie sociale’ (social economy), the English ‘public charities’, the American ‘non-profit sector’, and the East-Central European ‘foundation’ differ from one another not just from a linguistic but also from a conceptual point of view. The French social economic sector includes co-operative societies, savings banks, and insurance companies, which are not considered part of the non-profit or the voluntary sector in other countries.

However, this chaos also comes with a certain freedom in the choice of names: when choosing the proper name, we tend to focus on the features that deserve special emphasis. If the existence and nature of civil initiatives are to be the focal

point, then we use the term of civil society. The same feature is highlighted by the names of stand-alone/voluntary organizations and civil self-organizations. Inasmuch as the main point is to indicate the separation from the state and politics, the appropriate denotation will be non-governmental organization. Should our name include the term of non-profit, then we indicate the significance of the prohibition of profit sharing. Unlike the other terms, we can attach a place of origin to the appearance of the third sector: it was introduced by the researchers of John Hopkins University, USA, once they recognized the economic importance of this evolving sphere and its manageability as an independent sector at the same time. This term lays stress upon the appearance of civil organizations as an independent sector. Politically, the civil – non-profit, or *public* (with a Hungarian turn of phrase) – sector may be discussed in the context of the bourgeois/civil society, while in economic terms the division denotes for-profit/non-profit sectors. This is how the denotations of non-profit and non-governmental are formed. The EU Committee defines the categories of voluntary organizations according to the functions fulfilled by them as follows:² service providers, interest representation bodies, self-helping organizations, mutual support groups, and organizations coordinating resources and resource allocations. It can be stated that the narrower is the geographical and subjective scope of a voluntary organization's activity, the wider variety of functions are integrated therein, and the more difficult becomes the separation of the single functions within the organization.

Considering the characteristic features of civil society, the following major roles can be assigned: mediation between the public and private sphere, ensuring social control, representing the interests of social-professional groups, and serving public welfare in accordance with the self-organizing needs of the society. There are some who tend to point out the role of civil society in democratization.³ G. White (2007), quoted by M. Walzer, sums it up in four points as follows: 1) civil society shifts the balance between state and society for the favour of the latter. For instance: the civil organizations and movements create the space free from central control. 2) Civil society controls and supervises the state through the public's regard of public morality and of the justification of political decisions. In this case, the purpose is the politicians' and the government officials' accountability. 3) Civil society can act as an important mediator between state and society whenever it comes to negotiations between government institutions and certain social groups. 4) Civil society can increase the number of processes and institutions, which may help the democratic institutions and certain processes already set in motion to address the new challenges in a legitimate and predictable manner.

2 See Az EU Bizottságának közleménye az önkéntes szervezetek és alapítványok szerepének erősítéséről. Európa Ház, Budapest, 1998.

3 See M. Walzer: A civil szféra, és társadalomban betöltött szerepe. www.policy.hu/flora/miacivilszfera.htm.

There are certain authors who tend to discuss the roles and functions of civil society under one roof – in all probability, without any reason. While role implies expectations and established social norms, function is understood as purpose – the former concept is determined externally, the latter internally. Éva Kuti defines three categories for the role-function duet: roles and functions of social character, of economic character, and of socio-economic character at the same time (Kuti 1998).

Charles Taylor presents us three interpretations of the civil sphere: (1) Civil society in the minimal sense can be found with open organizations, which are not under state authority. (2) We can talk about civil society in the strict sense, where the society has the ability to build itself up as a whole; it can direct and coordinate its activities through open organizations. (3) The third interpretation is actually an alternative for the second one: we can talk about civil society anywhere, where the totality of associations can exert a relevant influence on government policy. Taylor presumes that civil sphere and the generally admitted definition of civil society will have a great impact both on our perspectives related to open society and our political practice (Taylor 1995).

The functions of civil society can be summarized as follows (Siegel–Yancey 1993):

- allows for the reflection and active approach of the various complex needs emerging in the society;
- stimulates the individuals to act as citizens in all aspects of social life instead of becoming dependent on it;
- promotes social plurality and diversity through, for instance, safeguarding and enhancing cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and other identities;
- creates the mechanisms that allow for the public to call the government and market operators to account.

After all, civil organizations encourage active citizenship as well as educate the citizens and the new civil society thereby.

Ernest Gellner highlights the importance of control function and argues that civil society is the sum total of the non-governmental organizations that are powerful enough to counterbalance government authority (Gellner 2004).

The image of civil society gets further complicated if we are to analyse the civil society of national minorities. There are some of the above-quoted functions – the last one in the Siegel–Yancey list – that may seem highly unrealistic in a minority situation: minorities are incapable of thematizing the public majority in such a manner and with such intensity that the government or any other public actor could perceive it as a case of a community liability. If the scope of activity of a minority organization is not specifically minority-oriented and it is not linked to safeguarding cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other types of identities, then certain reactions may be expected – for instance, in the case of an environmental

issue – in the public sphere that can be seen as an actual liability. However, in this case, the civil organization is primarily environmental, and the fact that its (founding) members belong to a national minority is only a secondary feature.

Therefore, of primary concern is the kind of organizations that make up the minority civil society. The answer comes in handy: organizations established by members of a minority group or other individuals who – in their role determination – specify certain situations/dilemmas/ambitions linked to minority status as their top priority. In so far as we agree that civil society is the school of democracy (the issue and ability of self-organizations, promotion of interests and values), minority civil organizations are those whose ambition is serving the minority community. Although this issue might cause further dilemmas – given the fact that serving minority community cannot be conceived within the respective minority alone but also by stimulating and shaping the majority–minority dialogue –, our analysis considers minority (i.e. Hungarians, Germans, Serbians, etc. in Romania) organizations as such whose programmes are in the service of their respective minority, and they act in behalf thereof. In addition, their actions must aim to safeguard and strengthen the relevant elements of the respective community's identity. This civil sphere is called a self-building civil society.

In terms of civil society and civil organizations, independence and self-governance were considered relevant features. A good while ago (approx. ten years), it was formulated the dilemma in respect of the Hungarian civil society in Romania as to whether we can talk about an authentic Hungarian civil society in Romania which is capable of clearly articulating its ambitions and duties as well as carrying them out consistently (Bodó 2002). There was also a debate organized around the subject-matter, and those answering in the negative supported their position emphasizing the lack of the control function of the Hungarian minority civil society.

Minority civil society, inasmuch as it acts along the above option, and turns inwards, towards its community, gives up on formulating relevant messages towards the government and central politics in general, then – although not communicated – we believe that it accepts the very absence of the control function and its aborted nature, as the moral content represented by civil society is culturally conditioned.

Let us have a look at the concept of minority society. Ethnic communities living in minority are quite frequently discussed/debated in the context of society, while not even the concept of minority society is sufficiently clarified. Can we talk about society when its relevant institutes, although in the service of the community, are in a manner of speaking 'gateway institutes', or representative bodies? The term gateway indicates that although we talk about a minority school or theatre, it is also part of the institutional system pertaining to the majority society, constantly living up to a double expectation. On the other hand, representation refers to acting in behalf of minority values in various – majority – contexts.

In a minority status, the principle that different (political, economic, and civil) sectors fulfil separate function suffers damage. There are plenty of meaningful examples of this, which can perfectly illustrate the minority status. The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR) is the political representative of the Hungarians living in Romania – it acts as a party in the Romanian political system. In legislation, it represents the interests of the Hungarian minority, often acting as a partner in a government coalition. It also appears as a party in the international community when its representatives manage to get in the European Parliament or when it becomes the member of an international alliance. It is legally registered as a civil association, according to the Romanian laws: it was registered according to the Associations Act, which should include it into the civil sector. In certain cases, it makes use of this ‘identity’ as a reference: for instance, when it receives the financial instruments adjudged for the ethnic minority community from the national budget or when it administers these funds. However, the situation is even more complicated as the 1993 internal structural reforms of the DAHR anticipate the alliance as the local government of the Hungarian community in Romania, and the organizational structure was built on the local government model during several years to come. Although certain changes have occurred in this respect, the idea itself, the self-rating as local community government is still reflected here and there in the organizational documents. In such situations, civil organizations fall short of meeting the basic requirements to take up the role of the political elite and do their share in the government duties – for the DAHR has been a governmental factor in Romania throughout two decades.

An essential dilemma for the minority: who is part of the civil sector and against whom should community interests be represented? Against state and government organizations or the political institutions of the minority community? Furthermore, independence can only be mentioned within certain limits since one of the managers of the financial assistance that fall to the share of/are due to civil society is DAHR, with its politically unclarified status. Certain authors mention a triple dependence of the minority civil organizations:⁴ regarding financial assistance, they depend on the political representation of the Hungarian community; they further depend on the Romanian governmental entities, and the third type of dependency is formed towards the government bodies of the motherland, which is also an opportunity.

4 See the discussions in the journal *Magyar Kisebbség* 2002/3.

Conclusions

Civil society as a phenomenon is difficult to analyse. Yet, more difficult is the task when the research is focused on an ethno-civil society. There are several questions that have to be answered: can we find a definition for ethno-civil society? If we can, then what NGOs are part of it, as this is the civil society they are shaping? How can we add to this knowledge about the Hungarian minority civil society in Transylvania?

Theoretical research as well as analysing the issues around minority civil society have to be carried on for it has not yet been found a common ground accepted by most researchers. The sociological surveys also need to be continued so that we can further monitor the civil societies of the democratizing countries.

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