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POLITICAL IDENTITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

ABSTRACT

Political identities in one society are undoubtedly related to political parties, the social cleavages that these parties are structured on, i.e. their ideological (political) profiling. Can we talk about political identities when depolitization, departization and floating voters have become the most significant characteristic of contemporary political life? If these tendencies can be recognized in established democracies, do they and how do they pour into or are recognized in the so-called postcommunist societies, one of which is Republic of Macedonia itself? The additional challenge for the research team was to examine this issue in the specific political environment in Macedonia, which is represented by strong political confrontations on the political scene, confrontations that oftentimes interfered with normal political dialogue.

The main goal of the research project was to determine the different political identities in the Republic of Macedonia, to see on which social cleavages they are differentiated on and where are their positions on an imagined ideological spectrum. Or to put it differently, whether the strictly distinguished political confrontations represent one dichotomous, i.e. segmented political structure, soundly founded on the social cleavages of the Macedonian society. We've tried to do that by: analysis of the social affiliation of citizens, analysis of their party affiliation and analysis of a certain number of political attitudes and values that they've accepted. We started from the basic assumption that if these three elements are related then we can say that the party-political divisions are founded on social divisions and that the high political polarization in Macedonia is based on the existence of differentiated social profiles of citizens, who belong to different and strongly confronted cultures/poles.

Key words: identity, political identities, party identities, R. Macedonia, political parties

INTRODUCTION

Researching political identities in one society is undoubtedly related to political parties, the social cleavages that these parties are structured on, the positions and policies of those parties, i.e. their ideological political profiling. If ideas give sense to political organization and ideology defines the personality and identity of the political parties, making them recognizable on the political scene, which is something all politicologists agree on, then what is their identity based on and what differentiates them from other political parties? In a time of the end of history and ideology can we at all talk about political identities when depoliticization, departization and floating voters have become the most significant characteristic of contemporary political life? Is the New as opposed to the Old policy, marked by postmaterialistic values and liberal individualism capable of producing solidarity and homogeneity, i.e. political identities that are very much needed for political action? And ultimately, if these processes and tendencies can be recognized in established democracies, do they and how do they pour into or are recognized in the so-called postcommunist societies, one of which is Republic of Macedonia itself?

There's quite an extensive politicological literature that deals with these issues and many authors, by means of theoretical debates or research studies (comparative, longitudinal, case studies) offer new arguments and information in defense of their theses (Diamond, L. and R, Gunther 2001, von Beume, K. 2002. Vahudova M. A. 2008, Kitshel H. 1992, 1995, Merkel 1997, Klingeman 1994, Kaldor M. and Vejvoda I.: 2002, De Waele J. M (ed), 2002). There are few analyses of this type in Macedonia though. If one of the challenges of the research team was to try and give if only a small contribution to the theoretical and empirical elaboration of the problem, the other challenge came as a result of the specific political environment in Macedonia, represented by strong political confrontations on the political scene, confrontations that oftentimes interfered with normal political dialogue or confrontations that presented all elections as historical and referendum elections when as a rule they were accompanied by violence and irregularities, giving room to disputing the legitimacy of the winner. The political conflict based on the idea Traitors – Patriots pushed the citizens of Macedonia into one continuous political battle in which one Macedonia needed to conquer some other Macedonia – completely... On the other hand, there are no anti-system parties in Macedonia; the strategic goal of all of the political parties is our accession to EU and NATO, all of them accept the concept of liberal democracy and strive to establish it in the Republic of Macedonia etc.

The study entitled Political Identities in the Republic of Macedonia presents the results from a scientific research project of the same name, conducted by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research in the period from 2006 to 2009.

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Such a defined research task set the subject, goal and the methodological approach to our research. Within the subject of the research we identified the political parties and citizen/voters in terms of their ideological-political profiles. The political parties were perceived as monolithic units and the research was aimed towards their self-identification (through their name, the statements of their party leaders), towards the analysis of their primary document –the political program of the party and corresponding analysis of their political profile or image in the public (meaning what is the public or the citizens' perception of the party in terms of its ideological-political profile), what is its identity or the way it portrays itself in public communication (or what is the others' perception of that particular party). The researchers had no intention of confirming nor denying the established image/stereotype of the party, but to only point out the distinctions of that particular "product" offered on the political market.

The second level of analysis was aimed towards the citizens/voters. The survey of the citizens consisted of a complex questionnaire that covered several segments: questions regarding the conservative-liberal values, questions concerning the linear spectrum of the left and right, questions in terms of the dimension of social conformism –personal autonomy (SC – A) and the usual questions related to election behavior and the election preferences of the citizens. Such a designed questionnaire was meant to allow us to gain more knowledge into the basic political and value

orientations of the voters in the Republic of Macedonia and the dependence of these divisions from the party preferences.

The research had to be in line with the complex structure of the Macedonian segmented society, which is we also analyzed the Macedonian political bloc as opposed to the Albanian political bloc.

POLITICAL PLURALISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Almost all of the analysts of transition agree that pluralization in Macedonia developed in a conservative environment and rather slowly (Mircev, 1991, Mojanoski, 2000, Milosavlevski, 1993, Jovevska 1999, Spasov, 1993). It was in such a political environment that the pluralistic explosion of the 1990s in Macedonia occurred and a highly segmented party system that remained as such throughout the entire transition period. If the number of the political parties was the first characteristic, then the second was the instability of the political offer (the establishment of new political parties, the division of the old ones, their merger, the transition of certain MPs from one to another political party, all of this brought about a change in the political menu from one to another election).

However, the analysis of the election results in this 20-year period showed that only several political entities stood apart from the others by leaving a special mark on the development of the Macedonian democracy. Those were the parties in whose programs, leaders, views and policies, the majority of the voters recognized their own interests, those that they identified themselves with and for which they manifested either their loyalty or distance.

DOMINANT SOCIAL CLEAVAGES AS BASIS FOR PARTY PLURALISM

Right at the beginning of the transition period the ethnicity of citizens became (the most) significant determinant of their political behavior, which is why all ethnic communities formed their own parties which they used to express and protect their own interests. An array of social circumstances (economic, cultural and political) further emphasized these divisions and the way they were perceived, which means that also in the future this cleavage will remain an important factor in the election behavior of voters.

If we take into consideration the ethnic structure of the Macedonian society, the political parties of the ethnic Macedonians and those of the ethnic Albanians are of special importance to the political stability of the country and the development of

democracy. However, those political conflicts that appear within the ethnic political blocs point to the fact that they are not monolithic and that some other cross-cutting cleavages or circumstances have shaped the political life within them.

Albanian political bloc. In the past period, there were three important political entities differentiated in the Albanian political bloc: the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), the Democratic Party of the Albanians (DPA) and the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI).

If we analyze the political dynamics of the parties in this ethnic bloc we will distinguish the following characteristics: firstly, all of the political parties have their focus (exclusively) on the Albanian national cause, which after 2001 was rationalized with the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Secondly, they differ only in the radicality of their views regarding the rights of the Albanians and the radicality depends on the fact whether that particular party is the governing or the opposing party; thirdly, the intra-ethnic conflict is so strongly expressed that not only do these parties oftentimes use quite rough and at times militant rhetoric, but they even do not refrain themselves from attacking the party headquarters which sometimes includes physical assaults, too. This animosity, especially evident in pre-election campaigns, gets passed down from the élites to the members which makes it hard to identify a particular cleavage as a cause for the confrontation; and fourthly, the instability of the party system is even more expressed than in the rest of the political parties in Macedonia: from the beginning of the transition period up till now there haven't been any political parties with a differentiated and stable voter's body, but voters just go from one party to another.

Macedonian political bloc. For the whole transition period there were two dominant political parties in the Macedonian political bloc – SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE, with a numerous and stable voter's body which made the political system function as a result of their complete alternation of power. They in fact expressed the second division or confrontation in the Macedonian society. Some refer to it as left wing - right wing and some as communism - anticommunism. Further down, we will give an overview of the profiles or the identities of these two poles, the same way they were presented in the public and perceived by the majority of the voter's body.

As a result of the political structures of the former socialist state, SDSM had made full use of the advantages of the old-new party and up until 1998 had been continuously in power (and later from 2002 to 2006). Its critics emphasize the fact that this party had never really fully transformed and by recognizing in it the old communist spirit, they blamed the party for further continuous attempts to maintain its monopoly position in society. By being referred to as Yugo-nostalgic, 'komunjar' - sympathizers of communism and serbophiles who are opposed to all projects that

aim to disassemble communism, the social democrats were blamed not only for being too attached to the traditions of the People's Liberation War (regarded above all as a communist revolution, but also as a certain type of antimacedonianism) on the account of other historic traditions of the Macedonian people, but also for slowing down economic reform.

Understandably, SDSM never admitted to this criticism and defended itself by saying that they were the ones who democratized the Macedonian society and established the Republic of Macedonia as an independent country in one very famous expression: SDSM – nation-building party, as a guarantee and the future for the country.

VMRO-DPMNE is one of the newly created political parties with nationalist orientation, which has integrated into its name the name of the most famous Macedonian revolutionary organization from the beginning of the twentieth century, an organization that the majority of the Macedonian population is emotionally attached to. This sentiment in the Macedonian people, related to the ideal of creating an independent state was particularly nurtured in some families, so one can assume that the core of this party (at least in the first years of its creation) was extracted precisely from this environment. Having been criticized as an unserious party, extremely nationalistic and with bulgarophilic baggage, VMRO-DPMNE was accused that in the case they do come to power they would divide the country, make way for terror and would be incapable of balancing out interethnic relations. Of recently though, (with the party's win on the Parliamentary elections of 2006) it was also accused for obstructing EU and NATO integrations. By denying these accusations, VMRO-DPMNE reminded the public that it was only owing to their self-awareness and the pressure they imposed at the beginning of the transition period that Macedonia was able to establish itself as an independent state (referring here to the srbophilia and the yugoslavism of SDSM) and emphasized its capacity for reforms (especially in the field of economy) as realistically the only political force that could pull the country out of what seemed an everlasting transition process.

In these divisions we can easily recognize above all, the cultural and symbolic aspect of political confrontation (different holidays are celebrated, different heroes glorified, different historic traditions are relied upon) and two worlds are being offered, one that personifies good, and the other evil.

But this is not the complete political identification of SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE. By identifying themselves as left, i.e. right wings, both parties have strived, especially in the last 4-5 years, to reinforce this dimension in their activities so that they could become more recognizable to the voter's body. The need for such a differentiation level most probably comes as a result of the fact that the

voter's body can not be held much longer in a state of high political mobilization merely with long narratives and that specific and efficient policy needs to be offered to solve the accumulated problems. Should the linear ideological spectrum prove inefficient for the differentiation of policies, we would have to look for that differentiation line in the liberal-conservative division based on social values and national identity – a field in which this differentiation is all the more visible even among the Macedonian political parties.

In this way, VMRO-DPMNE is promoting more and more the family, religion, tradition, is trying to establish law and order and adherence to laws by prescribing severe punishments for the offenders, while at the same time not showing enough tolerance towards differences. Also the party is promoting itself even more as a kind of modern technomanagerial structure which is relentless in the improvement of the economic prosperity of the country for joining the EU and NATO.

The need to establish the ideological profile of SDSM has been an ever-present topic in the public since 2006, when the party lost the parliamentary elections and was faced with a crisis. This has been emphasized by SDSM's party leaders as well, but also by the general public and political analysts, who voiced their concern that the Macedonian left wing is impersonal, lacking in ideas and utterly defensive – has no platform that citizens might recognize. The need for having a story of their own that would be aimed at the target groups of the electorate was the main topic of discussion on the Tenth SDSM Congress back in May of 2009.

ARE THERE ANY SIMILARITIES?

The objective transitional environment as well as due to the globalization processes (with special emphasis on the Eurointegration processes), while when it comes to the socioeconomic sphere the arrangements with the World Bank and the IMF also had a major influence, practically contributing to the convergence of their program documents and practical policies. If we add the way in which these parties exercised their power (corruption, authoritarianism, violation of many principles of democracy) the conclusion of many was that 'they are all the same and Macedonia has basically no choice!'

Parallel to these convergence processes, the division of the Macedonian society did not lose its intensity. The division of the political camps into the two of the biggest Macedonian parties and two of the biggest Albanian parties became a source of constant conflict fueled by intense hatred. And this was not only political. Knowing that someone is only a member of the opposite political camp was a reason enough to hate that person, to want to harm them. As one political analyst

noted: ‘with such violent hatred and strong political revanchism, the only way we’ll go is down.’

This division and strong negative emotions towards the Other had also a pragmatic component. In a country where the unemployment rate is over 30% throughout the whole period of transition, where over 20% of the population lives in poverty and where the state is the No. 1 employer, the victory of the Ours was related to people’s expectations for employment in the state administration and public enterprises, for job promotions, private business prosperity etc.

If we come to the conclusion that the motive for political mobilization of these two worlds is symbolically cultural and ideological, but also more and more pragmatic, we ask ourselves the question: to what extent do the citizens or voters belong to these two different worlds, if we take into account their views, life orientation and value judgments. This dimension was further researched through a survey conducted on a national representative sample of 1,599 respondents (mass survey).

POLITICAL AND VALUE ORIENTATIONS OF THE CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

The legitimacy of the aforementioned opposing political identities comes as a result of the voting behavior of the loyal voters, whose attitudes, opinions and value criteria create the differentiated profiles of voters. The three scales of values – one of them related to the division left – right, the other one to the division liberalism – conservatism and the third one to the specific issues regarding the Macedonian political environment were supposed to reflect the ideological-political profiles/differences.

When it comes to the dichotomy left – right, a big majority of the respondents (around 70%) share the so-called left values (they prefer small social differences, a broad package of social services, social security only under the jurisdiction of the country, favoring a type of co-decision in companies etc.). The loyal voters of both the left and the right do not deviate much from the general distribution and that this information refers to both the voters from the so-called Macedonian and Albanian political bloc. When it comes to assessing the value of socialism, a big proportion (over 75%) feel that socialism was in no way a repressive system and that this system took care of everyone. But in the case of the voters of the parties from the Albanian political bloc the criticism towards socialism is very strong (for example, 65% of voters stated that socialism was a repressive system). This criticism in the Albanian political bloc is the result of the perception that the ethnic Albanians were repressed and strongly marginalized during the socialism.

When it comes to the dichotomy liberalism – conservatism, the survey showed a widely distributed conservative awareness among the respondents, which makes unnecessary the analysis on the differences between the left and the right (over 80% of the respondents strive for harsher punishments, strong leaders, respect of tradition, that we need to fight for our own people regardless if they're right or not..., against the rights of homosexuals etc.) We see a wide distribution of conservative views in the voters from the Albanian political bloc, too.

Concerning the social rooting of political parties the results from the survey suggest that there's no clear or specific social profiling of the political parties. These claims have been confirmed with both the bi-variant analysis (contingency table and contingency coefficient) and the factor analysis. Based on the data collected, the social background of the party is in most part strongly established in the ethnicity of the respondents. The rest of the factors are combinations that can have an influence on the choice of the party, i.e. to be elements (factors or clusters) that would help identify parties in the future. The ethnic heterogeneous environment that converges not only with religious and cultural division, but social as well, points to a segmented socio-cultural society, but only from one aspect – the ethnic one.

Evidently the survey results do not give us the right to differentiate between the various value profiles of voters at the Macedonian political scene, where party affiliation would count as a powerful selective factor in the creation of such profiles.

DIMENSION OF SOCIAL CONFORMISM – AUTONOMY

The research, whose purpose was to analyze the political identities in the Republic of Macedonia, also analyzed the personal dimension of social conformism – autonomy, a dimension oftentimes analyzed in context of a basis for building ideologies, democratic behavior and in general, proper functioning of the system of political culture.

A higher score in the SC-A dimension, which is evidence to the preference of social conformism in the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, is most commonly related to women, more senior respondents, members of the majority in the country and members of the low social class, which (social class) was actually defined by the respondents themselves. This data in fact confirmed the already constructed hypothesis (confirmed in numerous other studies besides this one) that envisaged women (mostly due to the still prevailing traditional values in society) and the more senior individuals (mostly due to the developmental changes) preferring social conformism over autonomy, compared to men and younger respondents. Social conformism, associated with the majority of the country, speaks in favor of the

realistically existing endeavors of the country's minorities to not adapt completely to the bigger proportion of citizens (the majority), to the set rules that should apply to everyone, as well as demands for rights to free expression and changing the prescribed rules.

A higher score of the SC-A dimension is also related to the conservative values (an anticipated and envisaged trend), but also with the socialist, left values.

One thing the SC-A dimension was unrelated with was the choice of a specific political party/option, more precisely supporting a certain political ideology in terms of left and right. Apparently, even though in their programs and public appearances the parties propagate certain politically-ideological values, they still fail to manage to profile themselves clearly and to impose themselves with their ideological values onto the voter's body, thus rendering them unrecognizable to the voters. This process does in no way go in favor with building and developing specific, distinctive and recognizable political identities.

CONCLUSIONS

What is the conclusion here? In general, the research results do not reveal a more significant mutual relatedness between the social affiliation of the citizens and their perceptions of the world (the researched dimensions of their political awareness). Maybe the only exception is the social 'rooting' of the parties in the ethnicity. If our research showed that the profile of the average Macedonian voter in the Republic of Macedonia is a citizen with left orientations, with conservative and conformist views, we cannot say that there are two or more differentiated profiles of voters, as a "natural background" of the opposing political identities. At the same time, this was not a hindrance for these political identities to have at their disposal a continuous and strong legitimacy, confirmed above all through elections. If this is so, in the case of Macedonia, we can say that there are two political arenas which (co)exist simultaneously: one at a level of political parties and political competition and the other at a level of the citizen/voter. Where do we seek for the mediation factors or in other words what is the basis of loyalty?

If party identification is not based on structure and interests, does that mean that it is more of a reflection of the superficial preferences based on the charisma of the political leaders and/or the successfully designed image of the party? Do the insufficiently developed and poor societies, with poor civic traditions, provide fertile soil for party competition in which the political projects and interests of political elites dominate? Or is this a general trend of the contemporary democracies in which professionalization, political marketing and the reliance on the media are

the principal traits of the parties? The affirmative answer to this question reminds us of the authors that have emphasized the immense influence parties have on the psychology of the voters, illustrated by the syntagm changed votes – unchanged voters. This also reminds us of the competitive approach that Ware A. spoke of, which focuses on the party leaders, who as successful entrepreneurs strive to politicize above all the differences that earn them the most profit or election votes. And finally, what does this mean for democracy in the Macedonian plural society, with poor civic traditions and visible elements of authoritarian and subject consciousness?

These and many other questions were also raised before the research team of the project, who aimed at analyzing the political identities of the Republic of Macedonia. Fully aware that the information and conclusions that came out as a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the implementation of this project do not completely solve the problem (they in fact only point to some of its dimensions) we remain hopeful that they continue to be a challenge for new research projects of the academic community in the Republic of Macedonia.

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