

ppi 201502ZU4645

Esta publicación científica en formato digital es continuidad de la revista impresa
ISSN-Versión Impresa 0798-1406 / ISSN-Versión on line 2542-3185 Depósito legal pp
197402ZU34



CUESTIONES POLÍTICAS

Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Derecho Público "Dr. Humberto J. La Roche"
de la Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Políticas de la Universidad del Zulia
Maracaibo, Venezuela



Vol.39

Nº 70

2021



The interests of state and civil society as a determinant of the democratic political development of Central and Eastern Europe countries

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46398/cuestpol.3970.25>

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Abstract

The article analyses the state and development of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe as basic determinants of its development, using integrative indices of civil society sustainability. The external and internal logic of these indices for 2019 is studied. The research uses methods of cluster analysis, linear correlation, and multiple regression analysis to model the interaction of the determinants of civil society development in the region. The results of the analysis in the Central and Eastern European region reveal interesting links not only between the status of civil society and the state, but also in the relationship of factors that reflect the analytical triangle of relationships. People's satisfaction with government is not a simple consequence of the economic situation: the relationship between social wealth and economic progress. The status of civil society also turns out to be a factor in this system of relationships, along with the quality of social relations and the existing sociopsychological characteristics of the population. The numerical values

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of the civil society situation and development indices obtained in this way can be used in statistical models.

Keywords: civil society; state; integral indices; statistical modelling; Central and East Europe.

Los intereses del Estado y la sociedad civil como determinante del desarrollo político democrático de los países de Europa Central y Oriental

Resumen

El artículo analiza el estado y el desarrollo de la sociedad civil en Europa Central y Oriental como determinantes básicos de su desarrollo, utilizando índices integradores de sostenibilidad de la sociedad civil. Se estudia la lógica externa e interna de estos índices para 2019. La investigación utiliza métodos de análisis de conglomerados, correlación lineal y análisis de regresión múltiple para modelar la interacción de los determinantes del desarrollo de la sociedad civil en la región. Los resultados del análisis en la región de Europa Central y Oriental revelan vínculos interesantes no solo entre el estatus de la sociedad civil y el estado, sino también en la relación de factores que reflejan el triángulo analítico de relaciones. La satisfacción de la gente con el gobierno no es una simple consecuencia de la situación económica: la relación entre la riqueza social y el progreso económico. El estatus de la sociedad civil también resulta ser un factor en este sistema de relaciones, junto con la calidad de las relaciones sociales y las características sociopsicológicas existentes de la población. Los valores numéricos de los índices de situación y desarrollo de la sociedad civil obtenidos de esta manera pueden utilizarse en modelos estadísticos.

Palabras clave: sociedad civil; estado; índices integrals; modelación estadística; Europa central y oriental.

Introduction

Civil society and the network of its institutions, the so-called civil society organizations (CSOs), determine the existence of modern democracy. According to the views of F. Fukuyama, the weakness of civil society, the displacement of its institutions by state institutions, leads to negative consequences. They include the development of dependency in citizens and the loss of the ability to joint actions not caused by external coercion, which are a prerequisite for political democracy and development, the degradation of human capital (Fukuyama, 2000).

According to modern views, the relationship between the state and civil society is not always harmonious. As a rule, there is opposition between the state and civil society. In authoritarian states, such disharmonious relations take the form of open conflict. And even in political democracies, such as France (Fukuyama, 2000), the strong role of the bureaucracy can stifle the free development of civic activity.

Modern democracies are characterized by the complementarity of state and civil society institutions, the productive distribution of competencies. However, there is a historical difference in the formation of civil society-related discourse between Western and Eastern European countries (Mastnak, 2005) and the institutional differences between their societies (Letki, 2004).

In its simplest form, civil society institutions are divided into two groups. The first includes those that provide citizens with the necessary public goods in the areas of social assistance, culture, and environmental protection. The second group includes organizations that focus on protecting the rights of citizens and involving them in an active position on a certain socially significant issue. These areas are intersecting in some places (Diyjak and Forbici, 2017). Currently, the role of civil society institutions is widely recognized, which is manifested in their inclusion in the policy of public finances, involvement in the formation of state and municipal policies in a wide range of areas. Social development trends that pose a threat to civil society are also analysed in relevant national, regional, European, and global policies, in particular development policy (Wood and Fällman, 2019).

The concept of “civil society” is widely used and involved in the field of policy-making at various levels and directions. However, it should be noted that its use is associated with a number of theoretical and methodological problems. The main ones are the following. To date, there is not generally accepted and complete definition of CSO (Diyjak and Forbici, 2017). The assessment of the sphere of civil society, CSOs, their interaction with the state is not based on a stable and informative system of indicators, and the publications on the problem are dominated by qualitative methods and evaluative judgments.

There are several international databases that should reflect information on civil society institutions. First of all, it is a database of the UN and its agencies. The Integrated Civil Society Organizations System provides information on the number, names and contact details of CSOs by region, field of activity and type of organization (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). A similar set of information is contained in the database of non-governmental organizations UNESCO (United Nations Educational, 2021). The database of civil society organizations — The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) — contains information on partnerships and funding received by CSOs (The Swedish

International Development Cooperation Agency, 2021). There are thematic databases of CSOs that carry out activities in a specific area. For example, The Peace Women Organizations Database for Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which also provides a list of existing CSOs that declare their activities in this area.

Quantitative characteristics of civil society are available in national and European statistical systems. In the group of indicators of the quality of life of the Eurostat system, the characteristic of the activity of civil society in the countries is the indicator of active involvement of citizens, which is analysed along with other indicators of civic activity of the EU population. In 2015, it ranged from 31.3% (Sweden) to 2.1% (Cyprus) for the EU-28 (Eurostat, 2021; European Commission, 2020). The system of European statistics is complemented by information on national and multi-beneficiary initiatives to support civil society – The Civil Society Facility (CSF), established in 2008 (European Commission – European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations). National statistical systems, including those outside the European Union, can be even more problematic in terms of the characteristics and dynamics of civil society. For example, official statistics of Ukraine are marked by a general weakness of the system of indicators that characterise the social and political life of society.

The State Statistics Service of Ukraine records the number of public organizations (in terms of their types and regions of activity), the number of their members, sources and volumes of their revenues and expenditures (for example: Activities of Public Organizations in 2016: Statistical Bulletin, 2017). Independent research centres publish more information on the country's CSOs. In particular, these are survey data on the involvement of citizens in CSO activities, volunteering, public confidence indicators (Civil Society of Ukraine: Figures and Facts, 2018). The possibility of comparing non-EU national statistics with European statistics is a problematic issue. The issue of the proposed classification of national NGOs, as well as their affiliation with civil society, may be raised (Gorelov, 2014; Yakymenko, 1991; State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2017). This is important given the proposed classifications of civil societies that indicate their structurally and fundamentally different nature (Peerenboom, 2003).

As a result, qualitative methods, descriptive data, and subjective assessments predominate in those summaries that compare the situation and development of civil society in different countries. A representative study Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe: Monitoring 2019 conducted by ERSTE Foundation experts is based on 1,758 questionnaires that were subjected to manual processing and summarised by descriptive analysis (More-Hollerweger *et. al.*, 2019). The obtained numerical indicators reflected the feelings of CSO respondents from the legal conditions of their activity and the status of interaction with public authorities.

Finally, the methodology based on identifying the subjective feelings of CSO respondents or members of the expert community is used to construct the existing integrated indices — USAID’s Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (USAID, 2021) and Nations in Transit Freedom House index (Freedom House, 2021), where the civil society development index is a component.

The aim of the study is to verify the validity of integrative indices of interaction between civil society (CSO) and the state on the development of civil society in Eastern Europe. We plan to investigate a subjective component and their suitability for identifying trends in the development of civil society in the countries of the region. The hypothesis of this study is that the integrated indices of the status and development of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe, based on expert surveys, are determined by subjective factors, and have limited relationship with objective indicators of the dynamics of interaction between state and civil society. That is, research objectives are the following: 1) study of the external logic of index values, their compliance with the current political situation in the region; 2) study of the internal logic of indices, their interconnectedness and interaction; 3) study of the validity of these indices and their relationship with indicators that describe the state and the relationship between civil society and the state.

1. Methods

The sample is based on the numerical sequences of the USAID’s Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) and the Nations in Transit Freedom House (NIT). Both indices are based on a survey of experts who assess the changes in the state of the relevant indicators. These are 7 indicators of the state of civil society (Legal Environment, Organizational Capacity, Financial Viability, Advocacy, Service Provision, Infrastructure, Public Image) for CSOSI; and 11 indicators of the state of national democracy (National Democratic Governance, Electoral Process, Civil Society, Independent Media, Local Democratic Governance, Judicial Framework and Independence, Corruption) for NIT. Both indices are measured on an interval scale with a range of 1-7 points, where 1 is higher for CSOSI and lower for NIT. The study includes data for 24 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, including Russia. Complete data for all 24 countries are available for the period 2000-2019 for CSOSI and 2005-2020 for NIT.

The following methods are used to fulfil research objectives. The first stage of the study involved the method of hierarchical cluster analysis with the calculation of Euclidean distances and using the method of Ward’s

minimum variance in order to group and study the external logic of index values, their compliance with the current political situation in the region. The sample included transit countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including Transcaucasia and Russia, which are close in terms of political, social, cultural, and historical conditions of development. Index data were analyzed for 2019; these data are the most complete and devoid of the inevitable distortions caused by the conditions of the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020-2021. In the second stage, the method of calculating paired linear correlations in the system of indicators that form indices was used to study the internal logic of indices. In the third stage, a method of multiple linear regression models was used in order to study the validity of indices and their relationship with indicators that describe the status and the relationship between civil society and the state, where civil society indices are included in the predictors, along with other indicators of state efficiency, and their impact on the dependent — target — variable is revealed (Table 1).

Table 1. Composition of the analyzed variables

Title of variable	Abbreviation	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
CSOSI	CSOSI	24	3.608	0.874	2.100	5.900
NIT	NIT	24	4.813	1.362	1.000	6.250
GDP per capita PPP (current international \$)	GDP	24	25191	9983	11971	43005
Healthy life expectancy at birth	HLE	24	67.677	1.888	64.300	71.400
Perceptions of corruption	Corr	24	0.810	0.138	0.457	0.963
Gini of household income	Gini	24	0.360	0.055	0.254	0.454
Human capital index (HCI) (scale 0-1)	HC	24	0.654	0.070	0.557	0.777
GDP growth (annual %)	Gr	24	3.582	1.333	1.400	7.600
Confidence in national government	CNG	24	0.387	0.151	0.160	0.858
Life Ladder	LL	24	5.757	0.597	4.702	7.034
Social support	SS	24	0.875	0.074	0.675	0.949
Freedom to make life choices	Fre	24	0.785	0.068	0.657	0.945
Generosity	Gen	24	-0.121	0.119	-0.289	0.267
Democratic Quality	DQ	24	0.138	0.601	-1.097	0.985

Source: World Happiness Report (2020).

The Gini Index was used according to the Gallup Institute. Data on this indicator provided by the World Bank's World Development Indicators are based on official country statistics and are unreliable in some cases.

The composition of variable models was selected according to the step-by-step algorithm of the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC).

2. Results

Classification of countries by the CSOCI index allows identifying four groups of countries (Figure 1).

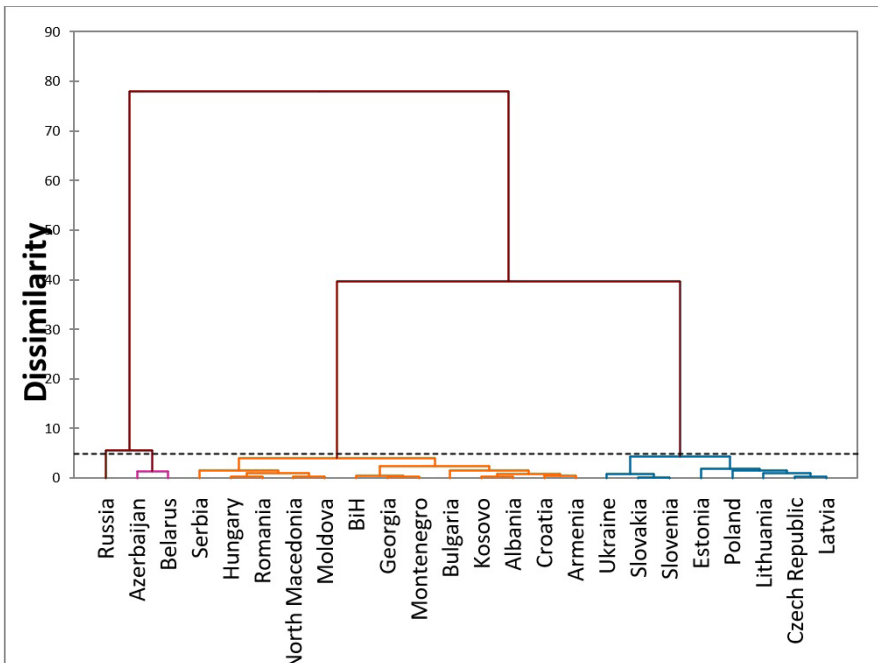


Figure 1. Cluster dendrogram of the classification of countries in the region by the CSOCI (2019) Source: calculated according to USAID (2021).

This classification is intuitive and can be interpreted as: a group of authoritarian countries with underdeveloped civil society (Azerbaijan, Belarus); countries that pursue a policy of systemic counteraction to civil society (Russia); middle-income civil society countries with two subgroups;

countries with a stable and developed civil society. Classification of some countries into groups may raise questions. Ukraine belongs to the group of strong civil societies.

According to the NIT, we grouped on a broader basis – the indicator of the development of civil society is in the system of other features of the state of democracy (Figure 2).

The selection of three groups of countries is also intuitive and can be easily interpreted as: countries with authoritarian political regimes (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia); countries with a medium level of democracy in the region (Albania... Ukraine); countries with developed democracies (Estonia... Slovenia). In the second group we can observe the subgroups like the CSOCI classification, which can be interpreted as groups of problematic/ degrading democracies (Hungary, Serbia, etc.) and progressive democracies (Armenia, Ukraine, etc.). This corresponds to the classification of political regimes given in the index itself. CSOCI indicators reflect the opinion of experts on the status of individual indicators that describe civil society in countries.

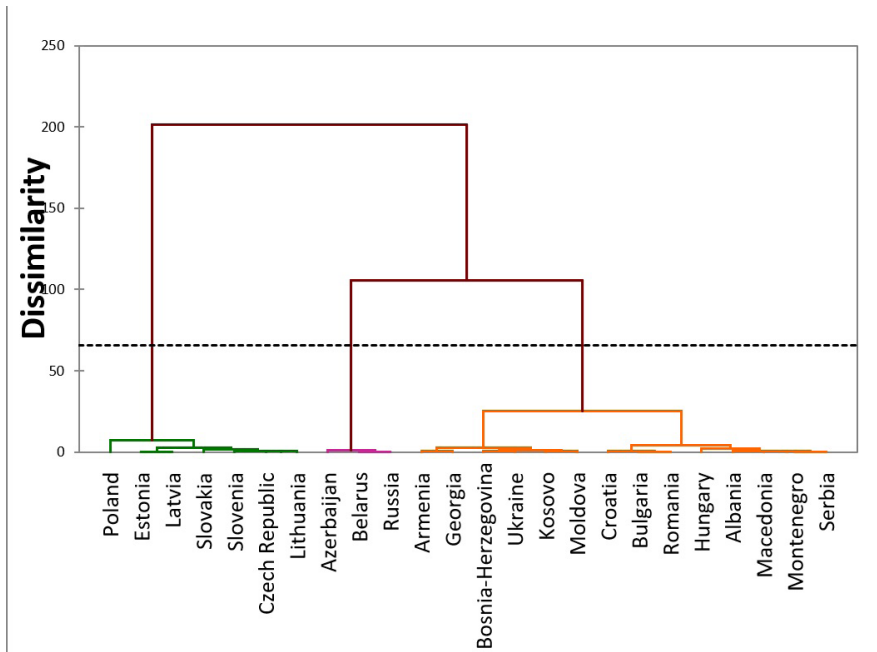


Figure 2. Cluster dendrogram of the classification of countries in the region by NIT (2019)

Source: calculated according to Freedom House (2021).

They are strongly mutually correlated (Table 2) with linear correlation coefficients of 0.91-0.79. A correlation of the legal conditions of activity with other indicators that make up the index is a relatively smaller. This can be understood as the fact that the interviewed experts tend to have a single impression of the state of civil society, transferring it to all areas outlined.

Table 2. Table of correlation of the CSOCI components

	<i>Legal Environment</i>	<i>Organizational Capacity</i>	<i>Financial Viability</i>	<i>Advocacy</i>	<i>Service Provision</i>	<i>Sectoral Infrastructure</i>	<i>Public Image</i>
Legal Environment	1.00						
Organizational Capacity	0.82	1.00					
Financial Viability	0.79	0.91	1.00				
Advocacy	0.89	0.88	0.83	1.00			
Service Provision	0.84	0.88	0.90	0.85	1.00		
Sectoral Infrastructure	0.80	0.88	0.88	0.79	0.90	1.00	
Public Image	0.90	0.91	0.87	0.90	0.88	0.80	1.00

Source: authors development.

Among the individual components of the index is the strongest degree of statistical relationship between organizational capacity, financial viability, and the public image of civil society organizations. Such results are logical, they outline the importance of the institutional stability of civil society. In authoritarian countries, there is systemic pressure on these aspects of civil society organizations. They are weakened through discrediting campaigns in state-controlled media, discriminatory legal norms regarding the conditions of their organizational activities and exerting pressure to limit their sources of funding. Such a system of measures is implemented in Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation in its fullest form. The most favorable conditions for the institutional activity of civil society organizations are in the Central European countries of the EU and the Baltic countries.

In the NIT structure, individual indicators are marked by almost the same strength of correlation (Table 3) with linear correlation coefficients of 0.96-0.83.

Table 3. Table of the correlation of the NIT components

	<i>National Democratic Governance</i>	<i>Electoral Process</i>	<i>Civil Society</i>	<i>Independent Media</i>	<i>Local Democratic Governance</i>	<i>Judicial Framework and Independence</i>	<i>Corruption</i>
National Democratic Governance	1.00						
Electoral Process	0.90	1.00					
Civil Society	0.84	0.94	1.00				
Independent Media	0.93	0.93	0.88	1.00			
Local Democratic Governance	0.93	0.94	0.86	0.89	1.00		
Judicial Framework and Independence	0.96	0.90	0.83	0.92	0.92	1.00	
Corruption	0.94	0.89	0.85	0.91	0.90	0.92	1.00

Source: authors development.

It is reasonable to interpret these data in the same way – the general impression of the state of democratic development of the country is transferred by experts to all outlined spheres. The indicator of the state of civil society in the system of indicators assessed by the survey shows the greatest degree of correlation with the electoral process (linear correlation coefficient 0.94) and relatively smaller with the state of the legal system (linear correlation coefficient 0.83). It should be noted that there is the strongest correlation between such indicators as civil society and the electoral process. This may indicate the importance of this aspect of the interaction between the state and civil society as the most basic determinant of the democratic vector of political development. The degree of democratic electoral process is manifested in the interaction of the state and civil society in its organization. Such interaction can have many aspects, but one way or another civil society creates an environment for a positive electoral process, and it is the language of the fullest realization of democratic choice of society through the effectiveness of all its stages – from nomination of candidates (parties, blocs) and representation in society to the counting of votes.

Statistical analysis of the validity of the indices of the status and development of civil society was conducted according to three models of multiple linear regression (Table 4).

Table 4. Results of statistical analysis

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Dependent variable*	CNG	LL	DQ
Multiple R ²	0.8315	0.5816	0.9092
Adjusted R ²	0.7578	0.4935	0.8901
F-statistics	11.28	6.0602	47.55
p-value	3.843 x 10 ⁻⁵	0.001659	1.221x10 ⁻⁹
Statistical significance of t-statistics of independent variables			
CSOSI	-	0.287280	-
NIT	0.000190	0.488169	0.00035
GDP	0.023393	0.000292	5.86x10 ⁻⁵
HLE	-	-	0.01527
Corr	-	-	-
Gini	0.016557	-	-
HC	0.007857	-	-
Gr	0.000644	-	-
CNG	-	-	-
LL	-	-	-
SS	-	-	0.08113
Fre	0.148415	-	-
Gen	0.030083	0.017869	-
DQ	-	-	-

* The codes of the dependent variables are given in Table 1

Source: authors development.

Model 1 has as a dependent variable indicator of confidence in the national government. This connects the relationship between the state and civil society. Confidence in the government is seen as a general indicator of

citizens' satisfaction with the political regime, politics, and the ruling class. The statistical quality of the model is high. The impact of basic economic indicators of economic development, income distribution, freedom in social life on the attitude of citizens to the government is logical. At the same time, the indicator of the development of civil society as part of NIT shows high statistical significance in this model. The model can be considered as one that reflects the relationship between the basic indicators of the effectiveness of interaction between the state and civil society in the field of public welfare. Achieving effective values of wealth and social stability of society is associated with a developed and sustainable civil society. This dependence is statistically significant and reproducible even though in the group of authoritarian countries in the region the value of individual indicators of wealth (GDP per capita) may be high, but the value of social stability of society (social income distribution, human capital development) still remains at low or medium values.

In Model 2, the target is the indicator of the so-called "life ladder". According to the methodology, it is based on a survey, where citizens answer a direct question about the subjective feeling of satisfaction with their own lives. The involved algorithm excludes the analysed indices of the state and development of civil society from the composition of variables for this model. Their inclusion leads to a slight deterioration of its statistical characteristics, which are not high. The indicator of self-satisfaction is statistically related to the indicator of society's wealth and the indicator of people's readiness for charity. Such a model may have plausible socio-psychological explanations, but in this case, they do not include or indicate the importance of civil society.

The target variable of Model 3 is the democracy quality indicator. This indicator itself is an integrated index calculated on the basis of seven separate statistical indicators of the quality of democratic governance (World Happiness Report, 2020). The statistical quality of the model is high. As such, the values of this index are well related in the model to the indicators of society's well-being — wealth and quality of life, as well as social comfort. The NIT civil society indicator is also included in the model with a high statistical significance. In general, Model 3 reproduces the same substantive inferences about the principles of balance of interests of the state and civil society, as a basic determinant of the democratic vector of political development of Central and Eastern Europe, as Model 1.

3. Discussion

Thus, both indices quite effectively reflect the current understanding of the nature of political regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. In this study,

differences in indices were considered within one region, which narrowed the possibilities for determining the cross-cultural component in CSO activities, as defined, for example, in Kim and Jung (2021). Both CSOSI and NIT are suitable for this purpose, at least when it comes to comparing countries within one region without drastic cross-cultural differences. When it comes to diagnosing the status of civil society in countries where there is an assumption of the development of another socio-cultural model (Kessler, 2018), such a comparison based on the indices under consideration may be problematic.

However, it is not advisable to use these indices without analyzing the methodology and content of their indicators, as the analytical report *Civil Society of Ukraine: Policy of Promotion and Involvement, Challenges and Transformations* does (Yablonskyi *et al.*, 2019). The changes on the index scale for an individual country are not informative. The formation of classification models indicates the possibility of grouping and comparing countries within the group. However, the analysis with the construction of structural models of civil society, such as with vertical or horizontal systems of relations (Solioz, 2011), heteronomous or autonomous types of civil society (Riley and Fernández, 2014), is not possible.

The state of civil society is an assessment of democratic and authoritarian ways of governing the countries of the region. In the practices of authoritarian countries, one can find signs of underdeveloped or consistently suppressed civil society, which is almost not a factor in the political process in the country — Azerbaijan, Belarus, and signs of policy to fight the existing civil society — the Russian Federation. If we turn to the values of the CSOSI components, Azerbaijan is most characterized by strict legal conditions against civil society, unfavorable conditions for organizational and financial activities of civil society organizations.

For Russia and Belarus, given the general negative background of the activities of civil society institutions, along with the strict legal regime, such indicators as the public image of civil society institutions play a negative role. Until recently, there was a tendency to underestimate the level of authoritarianism in the Russian political system (Tandon and Brown, 2013), although this is reflected in the indexes. This points to the role of the media and state-organized propaganda as means of suppressing civic activism. Similarly, the results of the situational analysis indicate a greater degree of progress of civil society after Euromaidan in Ukraine (Krasynska and Martin, 2017; Lyasota, 2018a) than the indices show, and the importance of supporting civil society institutions for democratization in the region. This is also relevant to the Ukrainian experience (Korenke, 2017) analyzed in this study, and the findings of other democratizing societies, including those that do not belong to the region of Central and Eastern Europe (Kim and Jeong, 2017).

An analysis of the internal structure of CSOSI and NIT raises questions about their subjectivity and the influence of “general attitudes” in determining them. NIT is more effective. As noted above, the indicator of the status of civil society is one of the components of its structure. It is possible to construct statistically qualitative equations that link the electoral process well with the status of civil society and the status of local democratic government. This scheme is fully linked to theoretical and practical ideas about modern social democracy. It is appropriate to clarify the relationship between the assessment of the level of sustainability of civil society in terms of its individual institutions.

Thus, the connection of participation in trade unions with the level of perception of corruption revealed in statistical models (Zakaria, 2013) should be clarified through the materials of countries in the region where trade unions have a different nature —the experience of post-Soviet countries and Poland (Praszquier *et. al.*, 2017) can be seen here as contrasting. It can also be clarified through the materials of gender inclusion in the organization of civil society and gender equality (Ruxton and Van Der Gaag, 2013; Liasota, 2018b; Public organization information and analytical center “Public Space”, 2018). In this regard, it is important to assess the difference between the development of CSOs caused by the spread of the EU welfare state system to some countries in the region (Cook, 2015; North, 2006). In the authoritarian countries of the region, for example, in the Russian Federation, there is a tendency to establish and develop vertical links between civil society organizations involved in social work and political elites (Ljubownikow and Crotty, 2017), which is also a factor to be taken into account.

The analysis for the region of Central and Eastern Europe revealed interesting connections not only between the status of civil society and the state, but also in the set of factors that reflect the analytical triangular or quadrangular relations. People’s satisfaction with government is not a simple consequence of the economic situation — the relationship of social wealth and economic progress. The state of civil society also proves to be a factor in this system of relations, along with the characteristics of the quality of social relations and the existing socio-psychological peculiarities of the population.

Conclusions and recommendations

Thus, the availability of tools to assess the status and degree of development of civil society in its relations with the state is a necessary tool used in both scientific and political research, which can be observed in practice. Such indices make them not only a scientific but also a political

factor, which increases their relevance. Indeed, the use of common integrated civil society status indices based on expert surveys is relatively effective, as evidenced by the models built. The use of modern methods to improve the quality of the results obtained during the survey (rejection of extreme estimates, etc.) really makes them effective. The numerical values of the indices of the status and development of civil society obtained in this way can be used in statistical models.

However, the main problem of these indices is the method of subjective assessments, which is the basis of their methodology. The nature of these indices is largely a “black box”, which may be the ability of surveyed experts to identify the characteristic public attitudes. These indices may have little practical value and reflect banal provisions that are also obvious to society. It is important to create such integrated indicators of the status and development of civil society and its interaction with the state which would be based on objective measurable indicators. Accordingly, such indices can be expected to have better prognostic potential.

A positive balance of interests of the state and civil society as a basic determinant of the democratic vector of political development of the country can be ensured through a wide range of conditions. According to the literature review and analysis of the research materials, these conditions are different due to cross-cultural, institutional, historical and discursive differences, which can be observed even within a relatively homogeneous region, such as Central and Eastern Europe. Measuring the degree of their development requires the definition of a wider range of statistical indicators, which should be objective in nature. That is, they should be based on indicators that reflect the measurable changes in the process of interaction between the state and civil society in the diversity of aspects of this process. Coverage of various aspects of the interaction between the state and civil society, such as regional differences in the nature of civil society organizations, cross-cultural differences, gender equality, etc. are necessary.

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CUESTIONES POLÍTICAS

Vol.39 N° Especial

*Esta revista fue editada en formato digital y publicada en octubre de 2021, por el **Fondo Editorial Serbiluz**, Universidad del Zulia. Maracaibo-Venezuela*

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