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CIVIL SOCIETY PHENOMENON IN FRANCE AND ROMANIA: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT:

THIS PAPER AIMS TO ANALYZE, IN A COMPARATIVE METHOD, THE WAY IN WHICH THE CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IS PERCEIVED, ESPECIALLY THAT OF TRANSNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY. IN ORDER TO EXPLORE THE EVOLUTION OF THE PHENOMENON AND THE MOST SIGNIFICANT NUANCES, IT WAS CONSIDERED NECESSARY TO CHOOSE A REPRESENTATIVE CASE, NAMELY FRANCE, FOUNDING STATE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES. ANOTHER CASE, METHODOLOGICALLY CLASSIFIED AS DEVIANT, IS ROMANIA, AN EMERGING DEMOCRACY, WHICH JOINED THE EUROPEAN UNION IN 2007. THIS ARTICLE AIMS TO ANALYZE HOW CIVIL SOCIETY MANIFESTS ITS ACTIVITY WITHIN TWO STATE ACTORS, ROMANIA AND FRANCE. MORE THAN THAT, THE RESEARCH WILL FOCUS ON THE WAY OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION, FINANCING, OPERATION AND COMMUNICATION OF NGOS IN THESE STATES. OUR OBJECTIVE IS TO COMPARE THE STRUCTURES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, IN PARTICULAR ACTIVITY AND SIZE. THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH PAPER IS TO MAKE A RANGE OF THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND TO THE LITERATURE AND ACADEMIA REGARDING THIS STUDY. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE RESEARCH QUESTION WE WANT TO ANSWER IS THE FOLLOWING: "WHAT ARE THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE FUNCTIONING OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN ROMANIA AND FRANCE?". THE METHODOLOGY WE USE IN THE DATA COLLECTION METHOD ARE DOCUMENTS AND ANALYSIS METHOD WILL BE DONE THROUGH DOCUMENT ANALYSIS. IN CONCLUSION, ROMANIA AND FRANCE HAS SEVERAL SIMILARITIES, BUT THERE ARE ALSO NOTABLE DIFFERENCES DUE TO THE HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND.

KEY WORDS: CIVIL SOCIETY, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS), ROMANIA, FRANCE

INTRODUCTION

Inspired in particular by the new social movements and the movement for democracy in Eastern Europe, in social theory the "renaissance" of civil society developed especially in the 1990s, with the search for a space that was autonomous both from the state and the market [1, p. 938]. Civil society organizations tend to work within a third sector, neither state nor market, mostly in the form of well-structured NGOs and instrumental and sometimes single-issue coalitions. The concept of civil society has been used as a synonym for associative life.

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Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in particular, is increasingly able to play an active role in global security issues [3, pp. 85-106]. First, the power of NGOs is non-economic, non-military and non-violent Last, the power of NGOs is primarily cultural (the ability to involve public opinion), political (autonomy in program management; contacts with national and international power centers), moral (adherence to values and principles of international law) and ideational (transmission of original and captivating projects [3, pp. 85-106]. Civil society actors play an important role in responding to humanitarian crises, working closely with governments, international organizations and affected communities to provide aid and services, advocate for more effective policies and promote social cohesion and integration. due to the resources they are able to mobilize, NGOs are perceived as a threat to the state, they play significant roles that are not fulfilled by the state and international actors [3, p. 85-106].

The importance of studying the phenomenon of civil society in France and Romania is provided by contemporary society, the dynamics of events, political metamorphoses and the totality of events regarding the era of globalization and interdependencies that highlight the defining role of civil society and involvement in the European decision-making process. The motivation is the lack of identification of a specialized literature that represents par excellence a comparative study between the two actors (identification of a gap in the literature). The methodology we use in the data collection method are documents and Analysis method will be done through document analysis. The article will include three chapters, the first chapter will highlight the theoretical one and will include the review of the specialized literature and the analytical framework. The second will be the methodological chapter and will cover the selection of cases together with the method of data collection and analysis. The analysis will represent the third chapter and will highlight the form of management and use of the operating, financing, institutional and communication components in the case of NGOs from Romania and France. And, finally, the emerging conclusions will be found [3, p. 85-106].

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The involvement of civil society organizations in the field of international relations brings with it a decision that is full of uncertainty [4, pp. 386-387]. Not only is there no strategy to follow in the process of globalization, but this requires a series of skills, resources, strongly interconnected relationships, intercultural communication, elements difficult to systematize for most actors [5, pp. 3-4]. In 1969, James Rosenau called for the development of a nexus theory, supported by a research agenda on national-international flows of influence [6, pp. 227-246]. The absence of such a theory was, according to the author, due both to the lack of communication between those specializing in national politics and those specializing in international relations and to the radical revision of the standard conception of politics that this theoretical approach presents numerous paradigms [7, pp. 149-171]. Twenty-five years later, another prominent international relations scholar, Robert BJ Walker, made a similar call to understand the politics of connection, spatial boundaries, and the politics of movement, which should take into account the changing contexts of political action to over time.

Civil society organizations and their related mechanisms represent an attempt to incorporate the roles of non-state actors—mainly, at the time, multinational corporations—into international relations studies is becoming a vast literature that considers an increasingly diverse set of actors, strategies and processes [8]. The contributions of the last four decades have been truly welcome innovations in a traditionally state-centric literature on international relations. However, most analyzes have focused on trying to understand why non-state actors have become so important. Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink usefully distinguish between transnational networks, advocacy coalitions and campaigns, and social movements that

involve, respectively, informal transnational contacts, coordinated tactics, and the mobilization of large numbers of people in protest [8]. Civil society in general is commonly used to refer to a "third system" of agents, namely, privately organized citizens, as distinct from governmental or profit-seeking actors [8].

The theorists of associative democracy took a more institutional perspective; they have carried out institutional design projects in which the functions currently exercised by public and market actors would be "delegated" to voluntary organizations, thus overcoming the shortcomings of welfare state bureaucracies and representative party politics. In Central and Eastern Europe the concept of civil society has re-entered the political debate emphasizing the role of democratic forces of society in opposition to state-led communist society, while in South American and African countries it has been used to draw attention to the forms traditional social organization in confrontation with the Western [9, pp. 57-58].

In the meantime, the role of civil society organizations has been emphasized in the democratization of international governance structures, which lack the established democratic institutions of national states, but are increasingly invading the policy-making space of the latter. The concept of civil society, known as the process of "governance beyond the state" has also found its way at the European level, in both the institutional and the academic debate [9, pp. 57-58].

METHODOLOGY

3. 1 Selection of cases

Romania can be cataloged, according to specialized literature and methodological patterns, as a deviant case regarding the status of civil society. The importance given to non-governmental organizations and interest groups, their involvement in the decision-making process or their consultation in various issues represent the gaps that provide ambiguity, lack of legitimacy and equity between state and non-state actors when we talk about decision-making power and of the aggravation of the democratic deficit. The status of non-governmental organizations is widely debated in the specialized literature, as they do not have decision-making power as state actors, formally or officially, to provide them with legislation. NGOs can only bring a series of recommendations, so the force is different, because no entity that is part of civil society, whether we are talking about NGOs or interest groups, can vote on a law. On the other hand, France, a founding state of the European Community, has a much "older" and broader history regarding the concept of "civil society" and "social movements". In this context, France can be cataloged, according to specialized literature and methodological patterns, as a representative case regarding the status of civil society.

3. 2 Data collection method and Analysis method

The methodology we use in the data collection method are documents. This was achieved by consulting secondary and primary sources, official websites of authorized institutions, specialized literature, books, articles and collective volumes. Analysis method will be done through document analysis. This will be done using the order and chronology of events, consulting selected sources.

ANALYSIS

4. 1 The structure of civil society. Case study ~ Romania

After 1989, civil society began to develop rapidly, especially as a reaction to the communist regime. There was a strong push for democratization and civic engagement. All the while, the most sustainable financing strategy is diversification of income sources. A

sustainable approach to NGO funding is one that avoids dependence on any single source of income, external or internal. It is difficult to determine a formula for the percentages that must be derived from various sources to support a "financially sustainable NGO" [10, pp. 70-72]. In the case of NGOs in Romania, as in many others, a balance between externally and internally generated resources is necessary to allow an organization to support its operating and administrative expenses, while maintaining the freedom to determine program priorities and projects regardless of donor preferences. Financial sustainability can vary between for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, depending on the structure of revenues, the structure of the business and the established priority objectives of the organization [11, pp. 34-35]. In this way, the NGO reserves its ability to operate indefinitely. Financial sustainability is thus a key aspect for NGO survival and effectiveness.

First of all, one of the most important elements of the financial component of NGOs in Romania is the management of the organization's budget. An organization that presents a series of objectives, values, strategies, management process, leadership style, organizational culture needs the development of a budget that is consistent with the strategic objectives of the organization and the management of resources, so that they are allocated efficiently. The financial component is responsible for monitoring actual performance against the budget, identifying any variances and taking corrective action [12, pp. 167-168]. Second, other key points that define the financial component refer to the way of managing investments, fiscal planning and risk management, human resource management, developing the marketing process, developing budgets and future forecasts for marketing activities [12, pp. 167-168].

NGOs were significantly affected by the Ukrainian refugee crisis following the outbreak of the Ukraine War in 2022, a moment that produced further changes. An organizational reinvention was needed, provided by the new solution to the problem and the context of the war, the services remaining the same, to some extent. Donations came from the following actors : HEKS Eper, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), thus benefiting from international donors, and the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations for Social Services (FONSS). Campaigns to attract resources was through social networks, In this context, the support of local authorities was low, to absent, all donations from individuals or legal entities, but also sponsorships from local patronages [12, pp. 167-168].

According to the latest report, carried out on October 31, 2023, highlighting the significant impact of the services provided in supporting communities affected by the humanitarian crisis, more than 400 families benefited from counseling and essential material support. "Regarding diagnosis, assessment and counseling services, 1,123 sessions were provided, of which 560 were dedicated to children " [13] These services were complemented by the provision of material support by providing 1,212 allowances and 3,621 kits that include hygiene products, clothing and school items, as well as the distribution of 40 laptops [13].

The organization highlighted its commitment to education by offering more than 7,700 services, including afterschool and kindergarten activities, Romanian and English language courses, occupational therapy [13]. The Department of Management, the Department of Financial Management, the Department of Strategic Partnerships, the Department of Social Assistance and Vocational Counseling, the Department of Training, the Together Club, Social Services for Refugees, Collaborators have coordinated their entire activity to respond to the tasks. At the same time, through 1,537 support group sessions, the organization acted actively in the management of emergency situations, providing support to affected communities [13].

The strategies they used to communicate with the refugees was the hiring of a Ukrainian-speaking social worker in the "Social Service for Refugees" department, as well as the recruitment of volunteers. "One of the first announcements we made were related to the

involvement of Ukrainian-speaking people in our team, and after less than 10 minutes we had a full inbox, dozens of volunteers, and one of them was later hired and became our colleague" [13]. He took care of the translation of all the institutional notices and not only that the refugees received, he made plates with the names of the towns and streets in Suceava county in Ukrainian and created Whatsapp groups in which more than 150 Ukrainian refugees communicated [13].

4. 2 Case study ~ French

Civil society is diverse and well organized, with many large organizations having a significant impact. There is an extensive network of associations and foundations. Civil society has a long tradition, rooted in the revolutions of the 18th century. Organizations of this type are well established and are perceived as an integral part of democracy. France has a higher level of citizen engagement and civil society organizations are often better funded, thanks to both public and private support French civil society has access to a wide range of resources, including government subsidies and a well-established framework for philanthropic donations. French civil society is rooted in the ideals of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and a strong tradition of republicanism and secularism.

Further, as a case study, we will analyze NGO Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF), this is the non-governmental organization with the highest percentage of private funding, opening delegate offices in the USA, Japan, Australia and the United Arab Emirates [14, pp. 857-858]. Every time France opens a section abroad, the reason behind it is to raise funds. For example, MSF-United States has a board controlled by MSF-France, given that the president of MSF-France is a member of this board. Also, in the by-laws of MSF-USA it is stipulated that it will hand over 50% of the private funds obtained to MSF-France [14, pp. 857-858]. According to French rules on granting subsidies, the opening of offices abroad can only be done by accessing one's own funds, which come from private fund raising. Only an NGO like MSF, which had a significant amount of private funds, could make a long-term financial effort by opening offices abroad. The other French NGOs have chosen another path, namely accessing public funds [14, pp. 857-858]. For example, Action Contre la Faim (ACF) is dependent on public funds and has opened foreign sections only where it could access a source of funding: ACF's US foreign section has resorted to USAID funding [14, pp. 857-858]. Equally, Médecins du Monde (MDM) has struggled to raise private funds. Although MDM has set itself the goal of attracting private funds, this objective has not been met [14, pp. 857-858].

In September 2015, states adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which promote a new global partnership between states, but also between the state and non-state actors (NGOs). In implementing the SDGs, states have high expectations from NGOs, but without clearly defining what these expectations are [15, p. 3]. Therefore, what are the roles that NGOs must play in the implementation of the SDGs? Elisabeth Hege and Damien Demailly identify four roles:

1) "Holding the government to account"

NGOs participating in the policy process on the SDGs and through their activities can lobby for the SDGs to be integrated into domestic and foreign policies [15, p. 3].

2) "Holding the private sector to account"

It's a difficult task to fulfill. Firstly, most NGOs consider that the main task for implementing the SDGs lies with the public sector. NGOs also fear that the state has ceded its responsibility for the implementation of the SDGs in strategic areas to the private sector [15, p. 3].

3) "Implementing projects"

Through their own projects, NGOs can contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. But the vast majority of NGOs claim that their work already contributes to the implementation of the SDGs.

4) Communicating the SDGs

NGOs are aware that they play a fundamental role in disseminating the coordinates of the SDGs to the public, making any political process more transparent [15, p. 4].

According to French law, there are two main forms of non-governmental organizations: associations and foundations. Associations can be of two types: general interest and public utility. There are also three types of foundations: public utility foundations, sheltered foundations and corporate foundations. There are five other types of foundations, which are rarely created: research foundations, partnership foundations, university foundations, hospital foundations, and scientific cooperation foundations [15, p. 5].

CONCLUSION

If we were to summarize the research thread, one of the preliminary conclusions we reached concerns the fact that the functioning of civil society in Romania and France has several similarities, but there are also notable differences due to the historical, political and cultural contexts of the countries. Both Romania and France have a vibrant civil society that plays a crucial role in advocating for political rights, social justice and environmental issues. Civil society organizations (CSOs) in both countries act as mediators between the state and the public, providing a platform for marginalized groups and voicing concerns about various issues.

Civil society in Romania was significantly repressed during the communist period (1947-1989). After the fall of the Ceaușescu regime, civil society began to grow, but faced challenges related to weak institutional frameworks, corruption and lack of trust in political systems. The 1990s and early 2000s saw a period of maturation, with Romania's entry into the European Union in 2007 further encouraging the growth of civil society. The French, on the other hand, even if they use the same financial, institutional and communication tools as Romania, are generally more used to engaging in protests, strikes and other forms of activism and civil society is a key actor in challenging government policies.

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