

## DEFINING THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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### Abstract

Civil society is a springboard for building democratic values. The definition of civil society informs us that its main purpose is to develop a specific issue for a self-created group, which ultimately affects the good of the state. Over the centuries, the relationship between the citizen and the state developed in different ways, and today, different legal norms regulate their relationship. The conversation started at the end of the last century, when the states came to the conclusion that democratic states or states on the way to democracy should not go to war with each other. But the question is how democratic values and the essence of its value are determined. We may be talking about the importance of creating an equal and free environment, but the state alone cannot establish all of this if citizens' consent and their actions are not interconnected. In particular, citizens were given the opportunity, of course, within the framework of the law, to make various important decisions, which actually will not only help them, a specific group, but will also have a positive impact on the state. Nowadays, a number of associations are formed, the most popular are non-governmental organizations, the main area of which is the protection of human rights as much as possible within the state, raising awareness in various directions from the information point of view, etc. It should be added that the non-governmental sector is a significant push in society, especially in Central Europe and the USA. In addition to non-governmental organizations, which mainly operate in the private sector, at the local level, the central government creates various associations where the local population is involved, and in fact, this becomes an example of the fact that the government is interested in the opinion of the population and, based on certain initiatives, has influence through the involvement of the people. This last particular approach is, in practice, a bit difficult for developing countries to implement as they are still in their infancy. Therefore, in developing countries, the non-governmental sector is more relevant and effective. Additionally, one of the significant directions of civil society is the media, which has a great influence on the population within the state. We can safely say that the more independent and demanding the media is, the more healthy and correct information is spread, which is an important key to the formation of society on specific issues.

**Keywords:** civil society, legal norms, non-governmental organization, media.

### Introduction

There is little information about civil society in Georgian sources, on the basis of which it is difficult to understand its important essence. Basically, we get information in articles offered by non-governmental organizations, which, unfortunately, have less response. Due to the fact that the functioning of civil society is quite active in democratic states, they try to show and offer developing countries through various mechanisms, which is manifested by holding various international forums, sharing practices or adding training courses at the university level, where the importance of civil society is discussed. The relevance of civil society derives from its essence, which involves strengthening citizen involvement and building strong institutions within the state. In developed countries, such as Western Europe and the USA, the civil sector works strongly and there are a number of associations represented in the form of clubs. In developing countries, like our country, it is relatively less developed, and that is why it is important to understand and strengthen the platform of civil society. In order to create a democratic society, it is necessary for the central government to

consider the opinion of the people and then, based on this opinion, make decisions about what the people really need and how the state can provide some help. On the one hand, the state has certain obligations, like a citizen, so civil society is a chain for mutual reinforcement of these two institutions. The fact that it is a necessary norm of the state, namely the protection of the government, its citizens and their care, it is also the citizen's obligation to engage in such projects that will contribute to the development of the state. Eastern European countries spent a lot of resources for development and today they are on the right course. To a certain extent, the European Union has contributed a lot to this, although their determination to create an environment for the population where all their interests will be protected is commendable. The European Union is an economic organization, but its members are obliged to have a politically created environment where there will be a high degree of democracy. It is necessary that human rights are protected, a pluralistic environment is created, and most importantly, the rights and opinions of a specific individual are inviolable. The European Union is actively involved in the strengthening of civil society, which is confirmed by the documents proposed by it and a number of summits /forums, where the representatives of the states share the best practices with each other in order to strengthen the citizens. In addition, when the European Union began to expand, and among them, Georgia expressed an initiative on the status of membership, the European Union developed a civil society development project related to the civil society mechanism of the Eastern Partnership. The project description states that - The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Mechanism is an EU-funded project that works with six Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, including Georgia, to strengthen civil society organizations (CSOs) and increase the role of activists. The following activities are discussed in the project;

- learning opportunities for civil society;
- annual civil society hackathons to develop new ideas and tools for transparency, accountability and participation;
- Civil society scholarships to support 120 civil society activists from the region. Regional network and participation of civil society representatives in relevant regional and international events.

The overall goal of the project is to strengthen participatory and inclusive democracy in the Eastern Partnership. The aim of the project is to strengthen the role of Eastern Partnership CSOs and activists and increase their involvement in policy-making processes and policy dialogue, promoting reforms and public accountability. Therefore, the final expectations are also discussed in the project;

- Strengthening the capacity of EaP civil society organizations and activists to engage in policy-making processes and policy dialogue, promote reforms and public accountability, promote local democracy, local development and engage citizens in public debate;
- To strengthen the accountability and transparency of the work of CSOs. Improve the public image of the role of civil society in the Eastern Partnership.<sup>1</sup>

Based on the specifics of the article, it is necessary to determine the following goals, namely to determine what role the existence of civil society has for developing states and how much the activation of civil society contributes to the protection of democratic values. Accordingly, we developed the following tasks based on the goals;

- to study the basic essence of civil society;
- to define the constituent types of civil society;
- to study the civil society of Eastern European (Baltic) states;
- To study the existing civil society in Georgia and determine what challenges they are facing.

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<sup>1</sup>Eu neighbourseast. Eastern Partnership Civil Society Mechanism.

## 1. The essence of civil society

Civil society is a phrase often found in the media and politics, but its correct definition is rarely presented. According to the World Bank, civil society means the union of various organizations, namely; NGOs, community groups, trade unions, local groups, charities, religious organisations, professional associations and foundations. Initially, the term became popular in the 80s of the previous century, when the citizens' union, the movement opposed authoritarian regimes, especially in European states. It was this wave that gave rise to the creation of civil society. Accordingly, "Civil society is a self-generating, self-developing and autonomously independent organism from the state, which is subject to the legislative order and includes all spheres of public life."

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the idea and involvement of civil society became more and more relevant for European states. It turned out to be especially important for the states of Western Europe, which are on the liberal-democratic path. For them, civil society is associated with the development of the state, because citizen satisfaction is directly related to the high quality offered by the state, be it a healthy environment or democratic values.

The following type of association or activity is generally considered in civil society;

- Civil society is a form of relationship that does not fit into the family sphere and is uniquely conceived as a public space, which misses close, friendly or kinship ties;
- Civil society refers to social activities that do not belong to the business sphere. Accordingly, the orientation of civil society is not profit, but the development of a specific field in different ways;
- Any civil society activity and social relations remain beyond the competence of the state ;
- In many cases, it is surprising and amazing, although political parties belong to civil society, although there are different approaches in this regard, some believe that it is not subject to civil society, and some on the contrary, because the task of any political party, from a practical point of view, should be the development of the state after coming to power and existence of relations with citizens;
- Another direction of civil society is mass media. We often hear the term that the fourth government is the media. Media is of great importance in society, because it is the only main source of information dissemination. It is used to articulate and promote public interests. The media also has great power in terms of being a connecting bridge between the citizen and the state;
- The direction of civil society is also represented by trade unions, whose main purpose is to request or express their opinions on the basis of the association of members of specific professions on what is needed to develop their direction and what is the need for help from the state, etc.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Civil society in Eastern Europe

The end of the Cold War was a signal for the European Union to take more steps to promote democracy, while the USA had already taken a number of steps in this direction. The approaches and policies developed by him differed between Eastern Europe and the West depending on the specifics of the state. The United States, in general, has put a different emphasis on bottom-up political change processes, while for the European Union it is more important to build stable and democratic country institutions and further develop them. Consequently, the US tends to place more emphasis on political

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<sup>2</sup> Borrows, G., Abashidze, Z., Mukhiguli, K., Dundua, S., Karaya, Tamar. Democracy and citizenship. 2020. pp. 167-169.

rights and strengthening civil society, while for the EU it is important to identify problems and work on ways to solve them.

The EU's most influential lever for promoting democracy in the region has been its enlargement strategies. The organization did its best to help states to accelerate the use of resources within the state and to take a number of steps to ensure the political agenda. Accordingly, already at the beginning of the 21st century, it covered the states of Eastern Europe and left a number of hopes for the states that are still waiting to join this organization, including Georgia.

The EU has also changed its common strategies in favor of greater adaptation to local preferences and demands, moving away from "one size fits all" approaches. This is reflected in the civil society support manual, which has brought procedural changes to address some of the complex application processes, and in the latest Eastern Partnership priorities. Strengthening civil society is not only an end in itself for the EU, but also a means through which all political and economic reforms must be implemented.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1. Civil society in the Baltic states

The collapse of the Soviet Union presented a different picture for the Baltic countries. The first was due to their ability to escape from an undemocratic regime, and the second was the actions and activities of people who voluntarily engaged in civic initiatives. The first formation appears from the 1980s, when the Soviet Union was already weakened, although, of course, fundamental changes took place already after its collapse. In particular, these three states wanted to raise democracy and freedom of association to a higher level based on the creation of non-governmental organizations. There is no doubt that these goals allowed them to emerge and develop further. The basis for this is the establishment of a number of non-governmental organizations in all three states since 1989.

In Estonia, from 1988-1991, many independent non-governmental organizations were founded, the goal of which was to spread the idea of freedom. Despite the influence of the Soviet Union, Estonia produced a number of miracles in terms of the development of CSOs, as by 1997 more than 18,915 NGOs were officially registered. Additionally, the Integration Fund is popular in Estonia. The Integration Fund is a fund established by the Government of the Republic of Estonia. The Foundation initiates and supports projects aimed at the integration of Estonian society and coordinates funding in this area, including several projects funded by foreign states. The successful course of the integration process in Estonia depends on effective cooperation between all levels of Estonian society, such as state bodies, local governments, schools, universities, private companies and individuals.<sup>4</sup>

- According to the year 2022, more than 30,000 non-governmental organizations are registered in Estonia.<sup>5</sup>

As for Latvia, along with the collapse of the Soviet Union, non-governmental sectors began to form in this country, at the beginning about 1,200 non-governmental organizations were functioning, however, unlike Estonia, they became less popular here and, instead of increasing, the capacity of CSOs decreased. In 1988-1991, its operation decreased by 42%. Main purpose of non-governmental organizations for that period was care and assistance of citizens, protection of social interests and monitoring of the government.

- According to the year 2022 More than 27,000 non-governmental organizations are registered in Latvia.<sup>6</sup>

In the early 1990s, Lithuania had the least functioning NGO sector of the three states, with 900 NGOs registered according to Ministry of Justice data from 1991-1996, but some citizens said the number

<sup>3</sup> Bouchet, N., Balfour, R., Supporting Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans: Old and New Challenges.

<sup>4</sup> Civil society and integration.

<sup>5</sup> Nonprofit Organizations in Estonia — Is an NPO Really so Beneficial?

<sup>6</sup> List of Nonprofits and Charities in Latvia.

was much higher. Most Lithuanian non-governmental organizations were active in religious, charitable and human rights fields. However, legislation that provided tax incentives became difficult to achieve, and growing corruption made it difficult to achieve the ultimate goal of foreign support, and this had a negative impact on the growth of the capacity of the non-governmental sector at the time.<sup>7</sup>

As of today, in the Eastern and Central Europe and Eurasia region report, Lithuania remains the most sustainable among the countries with non-governmental sector and leads in the advocacy dimension. The sustainability of CSOs of the country remained stable in 2021. There has been little positive change in the service sector: municipalities have shown more interest in transferring services to NGOs, and NGOs have expanded the range of services they offer. The Lithuanian NGDO platform works to strengthen intercultural, civil and democratic societies, expand the capacity of Lithuanian non - governmental organizations to participate in international development cooperation activities and help develop their skills.

- According to the year 2022 Up to 20,000 non-governmental organizations are registered in Lithuania.

## 2.2. Civil society in Georgia

For Georgia, like the states that strive for democracy, the functioning of civil society is one of the important springboards. Georgia fought many wars in the past and is still trying to survive the occupation. Foreign security is important for any state, the prerequisite of which is necessarily the strength of the domestic policy. As we have already mentioned above, it is important for the EU to have political stability in its member states as much as possible, and it does this by sharing their practices. Accordingly, Georgia has the opportunity and resources to use the examples of the states that have already passed for its benefit.

When talking about civil society, we cannot ignore our history, which was formed for a long time, changed and continues to this day. The existence of civil society is definitely not alien to Georgia, although, of course, the mentioned sector worked differently in the old days.

The first one that should be mentioned was the " Literacy spreading society among Georgians ", which was formed in 1879. This was the first creation of the civil society, when an organization was created with the spirit of the union of citizens, the purpose of which was the study of the Georgian language. Despite the fact that Russia had a great influence on Georgia at that time, the selfless work and spirit of the citizens did not back down and left us a very important historical exemplary mark.

Later, from 1890, with the initiative of Ekaterine Gabashvili and other feminist women, the first women's school was opened in the house of Ekaterine Gabashvili, where women had the opportunity to get an education. At the beginning of the 20th century, Kato Mikeladze founded "Voice of a Georgian Woman", where many problems of Georgian women were discussed based on the background of that time.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the efforts of civil society in the field of gender equality were recorded earlier in Georgia than in European states. On the one hand, this is a message that women in Georgia started talking about their problems earlier than after the century it was written as one of the important values of democracy to be a gender-protected equal and equal environment.

Effective steps were being taken until 1921, before Georgia was Sovietized. Prior to that period, trade unions, sports clubs, writers' and artists' associations, etc., were created. Therefore, we can safely say that despite the difficult period, the population of Georgia had hope and spirit for the development of their homeland.

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<sup>7</sup> Mačiukaitė-Žvinienė, S., Challenges for Civil Society: Participation in the Baltic States Region Building.

<sup>8</sup> Georgian woman's voice, 1918 | October 31.



Another important step in the existence of civil society in Georgia in the last century was recorded on April 14, 1978.<sup>9</sup> In particular, the great protest of the students produced the final result when the Soviet Union's constitution was amended to remove the Georgian language, which fortunately did not happen. The heroes of this historical moment turned out to be Georgian students, through whom no change was made and the Georgian language remained the main language of the state.

Modern civil society appeared in Georgia in 1991-1995. During the mentioned period, political groups and social movements were formed, the majority of which were students and the youth sector. Like the Baltic countries, Georgia had strong anti-communist values, especially the thirst for an independent state. Unlike the Eastern European states, Georgia faced a more difficult task. It is that, depending on the geographical area, less investment was made in Georgia. Since 1994, foreign aid has slowly started in the country. International funds started opening branches in Georgia, the main idea of which is financial and technical support. In addition, it should be noted that, like in Eastern Europe, members of the civil society of that time began to come to power in Georgia. After the Rose Revolution, there was less investment in CSOs, both from the government and foreign partners, as the total investment went to government resources. Especially in that period, the young population was actively involved in anti-occupation movements, which was one of the important manifestations of civil society.

In Georgia, like other Eastern European countries, civil society is associated with non-governmental organizations. Of course, the first step in the formation of civil society and its development was the creation and operation of CSOs. A number of non-governmental organizations are officially registered in Georgia, whose directions, in particular, the goal, are different. For some, it is necessary to protect human rights and inform the population, for others, it is necessary to promote the correct spread of feminist ideas, to develop the educational field and to support students through various supporting projects, and to ensure travel to study abroad, etc.

A few years ago, non-governmental organizations were particularly relevant and highly trusted by people, but nowadays, unfortunately, the background has changed. Despite the fact that non-governmental organizations have made a great contribution to the development of Georgia in many directions, advocacy, raising knowledge, etc., there is still a negative attitude among the population, which is revealed by numerous surveys.

Media is one of the significant directions of civil society. Like other states, media outlets are actively watched in Georgia. In our case too, the media has a great influence on the formulation of public opinion. According to the Democracy Index, which is published annually by the Economic Forum, there is still some question in relation to the media in Georgia as to how independent and strict it is. Accordingly, the level of democracy, not only determining how equal and free the environment is, but also political functioning and one of the springboards is the impartiality of the media.

## Conclusion

Civil society is the driving force for ensuring democratic functioning within the state. Civil society is the chain between the citizen and the state to ensure. Its role is especially important for developing states, because they are the ones who take a number of steps to build the country's democratic institutions and create a politically stable environment. Almost most of the states of Eastern Europe have one historical past, which is connected with the Soviet Union, therefore the states of the mentioned region need not only economic or political development, but also mental changes.

The European Union is a supporting force for European states. As we have already mentioned, this may be an economic organization, but it plays a much greater role in the development of the states to have a healthy political environment. In addition, it should be noted that the European Union helps states to make the most of their domestic potential. That is why joining this organization is one of the important vectors for Georgia.

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<sup>9</sup> Tbilisi events of April 14, 1978 and excerpts from the Western press.

The European Union has proposed a number of projects on civil society to the member and future member states. This is represented by the holding of various forums, where Georgia directly participates. On the other hand, the practices that sound in the said forums should be an example of how the state can develop more quickly and efficiently.

Civil society has a great role in the development of the country. With the involvement of citizens, things are done more productively and efficiently than if only effective steps are dictated by the central government. Nowadays, many clubs have been created at the university level as well, which help students to find various important information from an informative point of view. In addition, the role of non-governmental organizations is also important, because in many cases it is the organization that helps to identify the problem within the country and to take effective steps in the future.

Developing countries, including Georgia, have realized how important the satisfaction of citizens is. It is impossible to lean towards democracy without creating a citizen-oriented environment. In practice, all states have different approaches, but Eastern Europe has a common political past. Accordingly, the mentioned states have a very close environment, and in the case of Georgia, it is possible to implement good practices in its own state.

In order to increase the civil society, specifically in Georgia, it is necessary to take the following steps;

- Providing correct information about civil society to the population;
- At the local level, more projects should be introduced by the government, where the population will be involved as much as possible;
- The role of non-governmental organizations should be increased and their activities should be challenging to change the negative attitude of the population to a positive one.

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