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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Simoska, E., & Atanasov, P. (2016). Political values or the value of politics. *European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities*, 5(2), 36-45. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-46830-7>

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Political Values or the Value of Politics

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Date of submission: March 16th, 2015

Date of acceptance: April 18th, 2016

Abstract

This essay was motivated by the gap between proclaimed democratic principles and the perceptions of politics which are exhibited by the citizens in transitional countries -more specifically in the Republic of Macedonia. It is based on research data collected in the past few decades, which illustrate that, in their political actions, the citizens are highly motivated by personal benefits and profits, rather than by their internalized values and ideologies. Non-democratic, authoritarian values prevail, while politics is perceived as a value itself, in the most materialistic meaning of the word. It creates a suitable milieu for growth of corruption, nepotism and clientelism. The authors conclude that such a *circulus vitiösus* is a corner stone of the Macedonian political regime, and an enormous obstacle for the advancement of the participative, democratic political culture in reality, in spite of its formal acceptance.

Keywords: political values, authoritarianism, corruption, clientelism



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European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities - EQPAM, Volume 5, No.2 (April 2016), pp. 36-45.
ISSN 2285 – 4916
ISSN-L 2285 – 4916

Introduction

The main idea for this paper derives from an everlasting question related to the motives of the citizens for their political engagement. More specifically, the roots of their aspirations to be involved (individually or within a political party) in the political battle. Is this battle a genuine consequence of one's ideology, political values and orientations, in the sense of the ideals to be believed in and the ideologies which give the individuals "meaning in life" (Adams, 2001)? Or, are people driven by more pragmatic reasons, perceiving politics as means for solving their everyday problems more easily?

The topic shall be approached from the aspect of collective political values which are internalized, and not by going into the factors influencing individual political psychology, although this is not a category to be ignored. As it will be presented, on the case of Macedonia, the starting point of this analysis is - as written long time ago - that "the parts are *in* the whole, but the whole is not the *sum* of the parts" (Anderson, 1917), constraining the authors to tackle those questions in a specific manner when the so-called 'countries in transition' are concerned.

The mentioned '*sum of the parts*' is included in the data from various researches conducted by the authors of this text in Macedonia during the (still ongoing) transition to democracy.

The Context

When political changes in the former socialist states in Europe started, the political rhetoric produced the term "countries in transition". Those states (especially former Yugoslav) often used this phrase to define themselves, recognizing the political transition as a process of advancement, improvement, progress... With regards to the political culture it was meant to imply transformation of an authoritarian into a participative model, in a sense as Almond and Verba described it in their well-known typology (Almond, Verba, 1989). Reflecting on the issue of democratic values it was expected that ideological boundaries would be abandoned in favor of some more common values; transforming historical burdens into a broader, future oriented view.

Exceptions, in a sense of retrograde processes, are of course more challenging to analyze. Macedonia is unfortunately one of the most interesting examples in this regard. Radical changes in the matrix of the political culture have taken place in the country during the past two decades. However, they were not following the expected direction of advancement, but moving forward and backward in a manner which does not resemble a *trend of progression*. In an over politicized context (but without resistance towards the political changes), the attitude of the citizens towards politics varied and so did their motives for engagement. The enthusiasm of the population in the early 1990s did not result in a long term, clear trend of democratization. Decades later, the country is still functioning as a hybrid political system, while in the past few years, the weak points became weaker, and the strong ones did not improve. Nepotism, partocracy, clientelism... all have produced old-new perceptions of politics, which is the motive (and the context) for this analysis.

Former totalitarian regimes left numerous brainwashed generations who sincerely believed that politics is about internalized official ideology only, but also skeptics who saw politics as an easy way towards comfortable life. (A big contribution to the later was in a great deal due to the alienation of the citizens from the politicians, who were perceived as the "others", either more valuable or with a possibility to obtain more (visible) values.) Motivation for political engagement was drawn from both: the political values and ideology, or the value of the politics itself. Consequently, two types of political behavior were

inherited and reproduced until today. The first one still inspired by ideologies and political values - acting accordingly and engaging in politics "pro ideas" (even voting based strictly on the acceptance of the promoted ideologies, programs ...) and the other - the pragmatic one - which continued to evaluate and measure politics based on the "personal profit" principle.

The context was of course different in individual societies. When analysts describe Eastern European countries during communist regimes, they often describe public opinion and values as "an area of massive ideological propaganda", not being subjected to surveys, where people could sincerely and openly express their opinion about the regime, the leaders etc. (Voinea, 2015) However, Macedonia, being itself country in transition is in many way specific. Together with the rest of the former Yugoslav countries, it could never in any way be positioned behind the iron curtain. Regardless the one party political system, people enjoyed freedoms of movement, some freedoms of speech and specific forms of civil society. Regular public opinion polls were conducted, and regardless the results (which were not always in the interest of the regime) they were published and discussed on conferences. As consequence, people were constantly under a positive influence of many values, standards, models of behavior, imported from the democratic societies.

Another important fact for understanding the context is that the former, so called *self-management system* did not bury the individual under the collective values. Something which was important for the future development is that the status of the state or the only political party were not important as much as in the other communist countries, as compared to the interests of the individual. This however, does not mean that the political transformation which happened with less noise and more evolution, left less consequences. The discrepancy between old-new values became complicated. There was the former ideal society as was described in the official system, the aspired future ideal society and finally - the reality, none of the three corresponding with each other.

The crisis of values which was a syntagm often used to describe the countries in transition, was actually crisis in the perception of politics itself. Few factors contributed to this crisis in perception. On one side there were the newly introduced democratic values, the new political rhetoric demanding political participation as a form of higher level of political culture, motivating people to take part in the democratization of the country and promoting politics as a field of articulating various interests; before all - fair competition. The other side was the reality in which politics became synonym for corruption, clientelism, and was perceived as an instrument for easier employment, wealth, comfortable life... This dimension mainly suppressed the previous one, and for those reasons it would not be exaggerating to say that in Macedonia politics became "opium for the people", but in its ugly version, placing on the surface as key categories: the fear, the power, the interests... It was of course not a unique case, since all the former communist states experienced this phase. The paradox is that it is happening presently with a trend of extreme growing in the last 7-8 years, accompanied by the growth of corruption, clientelism, decrease of freedoms and human rights, or rule of law. Domestic and foreign analysts, reports of international organizations have all recently pointed as characteristics mainly the: non-democratic regime, abuse of political power, corruption, politically abused media. This is indeed the context and the reality.

Value Indicators

An appropriate alibi for the described state is usually the former system. In this case, we can say that indeed there was a suitable mille regarding the perception of politics. To illustrate this we can use the

answers to one question in a survey conducted in 1985¹, dealing with the reasons and the motives of the citizens of Macedonia (Socialist Republic at that time) for political engagement. (The survey measured the political values of the citizens and compared them to the official political values. It was applied on a representative sample for Macedonia of 1600 respondents, with *face-to-face* interviews). The results which cannot be presented entirely in this context showed that less than 40% of the population had accepted values which resembled the official political culture. For this purpose it is interesting to see whether the citizens wanted to participate in the political life within the only - Communist party, and why? The following table illustrates it:

Table 1. Survey Question: “Why would you like to participate in the political (party) life?”

I agree with the official ideology	37%
I trust the political leaders	12%
I expect to solve my everyday problems more easily	38%
Other reasons	5%
I do not want to participate	18%

Source: Project: Ideology of the Citizens of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, conducted by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research - Skopje, 1985/6

It is obvious that the 38% who openly related politics with pragmatic is a pretty high figure and most likely higher in reality, due to a political context where one would expect more opportunistically and politically correct answers (such as the acceptance of the ideology, or the confidence in the political leadership).

This pragmatic dimension of the politics as an instrument for solving individual problems in the decades which followed unfortunately grew even more. In a normal process of political transformation, one would expect that people would recognize the possibility to make choices between ideologies, values or directions for developing of the country - as contribution of the pluralism. Instead, the choice is made between political parties on the principle "which one can help me more" or "where do I have more relatives and friends".

Numerous research studies conducted in the country showed that the individual values have nothing in common and do not at all resemble the ideology of the political parties which people vote for. What is different from the mentioned research of 30 years ago is that the number of the people who decide to be engaged in a political or party activity in order to gain something now exceeds 60%.

The reason why people see politics as a facilitator for solving everyday problems is mainly because at present, the borders between the ruling political party and the state do not exist. According to the perceptions of the citizens, it is not the institutions - but the **party** which proposes concepts, adopts them, executes them, which controls the media, the legal system, their lives...

The following data shows the aspiration of the citizens to join a political party in various periods.²

¹ Project: Ideology of the Citizens of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, conducted by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research - Skopje, 1985/6

² Public opinion polls in 1992, 1999 and 2009 conducted by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research - Skopje and Public opinion poll in 2014, conducted by Institute for Social Analysis - Skopje

Table 2. Survey Question: Do you agree with the attitude: "One must belong to a political party"?

	1992	1999	2009	2014
Yes	28%	25%	38%	58%
No	72%	75%	62%	42%

Sources: Public opinion polls in 1992, 1999 and 2009 conducted by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research - Skopje and Public opinion poll in 2014, conducted by Institute for Social Analysis – Skopje. All surveys were conducted on a representative sample for Macedonia of 1600 respondents, with face-to-face interviews.

There is no doubt that the dependence on collective political bodies is not a positive indicator. Taking into account the overall context and the data points at present, the dependence on such collectivities is highest. The explanations that the respondents gave show that in spite of a great disappointment in the political parties, they "need to be part of them, because they cannot provide a simple existence without it. (e.g., attitude presented at a focus group complementary to the 2014 Public Opinion Survey).

Non-democratic Values Indicators

The other side of the perceived political party profile however shows that citizens in a great deal share the opinion that "there is corruption practiced by all political parties" (over 70% according to the public opinion survey from 2014³). Further, they are fully aware of the clientelism and nepotism practiced (over 70% in the same survey). Yet they continuously seek support and expect solutions (social, economic, health...) from the exact political parties they support (over 60%), whether they rule at the moment or are expected to do in future. It points at a well-known identification of the political parties with the state institutions. In Macedonia at the moment, it is done in a percentage which exceeds the one from the time of the former system. In fact, such attitudes fully resemble the reality in the society, which is completely functioning as a partocracy in which all formal and informal, clientelistic and nepotistic relations are conceived and applied through the ruling political party.

Such a collision between the negative set of values (corruption, clientelism) and survival of the individuals in an economically exhausted country has always and everywhere resulted in conformism. A research conducted on political identities⁴ using Feldman's instrument for measuring social conformism has shown exactly that. The results describe over 70% of the Macedonian population as "moderate conformists" in all social structures (Serafimovska, 2011).

Corruption and clientelism have been pointed in the reports on Macedonia of numerous international institutions as one of the biggest problems. All domestic analysis based on surveys show that the majority of citizens locate it mainly in the state institutions, judicial system and the public sector. According to the laws, there is the only Commission for fighting Corruption which is defined as an independent body, but its members are elected by the parliament (majority), which prevents its objectivity. Thus, it is perceived as just another state institution. Civil initiatives are modest. The ones that exist are labeled as opposition instruments every time they bring up a problem, even with evident proof. There is no

³ Survey conducted by the Institute for Social Analysis - Skopje – 2014.

⁴ Project: Political Identities in the Republic of Macedonia, Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research - Skopje, 2011/2012.

communication between those civil associations and the state, especially the ones which are in charge of fighting corruption, and what serves as the worst example - there is no responsibility.

To complete the picture, it should be pointed that the size of people who believe that politicians are corrupted, that clientelism exists on all levels is high and growing. A brief comparison of different periods illustrates this⁵.

Table 3. Survey Question: "Are politicians corrupted?"

	1997	2002	2014
Yes, most of them	34%	38%	60%
Yes, some of them	22%	25%	22%
A very small part	25%	19%	12%
No	19%	18%	6%

Sources: Public opinion polls in 1992, 1999 and 2009 conducted by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research - Skopje and Public opinion poll in 2014, conducted by Institute for Social Analysis – Skopje. All surveys were conducted on a representative sample for Macedonia of 1600 respondents, with face to face interviews.

A similar trend can be noticed when respondents are asked particularly about the Government and the judicial system, while symmetrical proportions appear with regards to the nepotism and clientelism practiced by the politicians in the ruling parties. All of this describes a perception of severe political abuse and manipulation.

In this context one cannot expect a distinction between the perception of the formal and informal activities and structures, almost in a sense in which Lomnitz explains the informality of clientelism as "adaptive mechanism and complementary to the imperfect formal system" (Lomnitz, 1988). There is also no clear answer about the rejection of those negative values or their acceptance as "unavoidable evil". More specifically, are corruption, nepotism and clientelism the phenomena which should be fought because they distort and slow the processes of democratization of the country, or simply because those who reject them are the "victims" at the particular moment?

Authoritarian Values Indicators

What happens to political values in such a context? The mentioned crisis cannot be entirely explained with the remnants from the past, although it is obvious that the Macedonian political culture is not progressing in parallel with the economic and political changes. One of the main explanatory factors can undoubtedly be found in the presence of the authoritarian values - partly because they are inherited, but mainly because they are reproduced by the actual authoritarian concept of governance described above.

Authoritarianism and its trends in Macedonia have been measured regularly in many surveys in the past two decades, due to its importance as a great obstacle for democratization of the country. The following data collected in different periods can clearly illustrate its presence among the population⁶.

⁵ Public opinion polls conducted in 1997 and 2002 by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research - Skopje and a public opinion poll in 2014 conducted by the Institute for Social Analysis - Skopje, on a same sample and methodology.

⁶ The data from 1999 are from the project "Political Culture" - Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research - Skopje; The data for 2011 are from the project "Political Culture and Identities" - Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research. The data for 2011 and 2014 are from the project "Democratic Awareness of the Citizens" - Institute for Social Analysis - Skopje. All projects are based on same methodology and sample and thus highly comparable.

Despite the fact that the authoritarianism cannot be accurately measured by a poll and a scale for measuring values, there are several groups of indicators that illustrate it perfectly. Theodor Adorno's scheme was used in all surveys, regarding the indicators of authoritarian submissiveness, aggressiveness - as a need to punish any deviation out of usual norms, conventionalism (obedience, subordination mentality, opportunism) and uncritical respect for the authority, rigor and discipline, repression.

The data base is very rich and cannot be presented in details for this purpose, but the basic resume would show that the comparative levels of authoritarianism of the citizens during the past 20 years has not decreased, but in terms of some indicators it is still prevalent. The differences between various social groups are reducing (it is no longer typical for generations socialized in the former system, or less educated ones), showing a clear reproductive dimension.

In those past decades, the citizens have exhibited an emphasized need for authority and leadership which was increasing until 2011, but has decreased in the last year, probably due to the present general disappointment. For example:

Table 4. Survey Question: "Who is the highest authority for you?"

	1999	2009	2011	2014
I have no need for any authority	29%	22%	24%	34%
President, Prime Minister	27%	19%	18%	10%
Minister in my field	1%	2%	2%	1%
My boss	2%	7%	7%	8%
My professors	2%	3%	3%	9%
The leader of my party	7%	4%	5%	8%
God, Allah	28%	42%	41%	27%
Other	4%	1%	1%	3%

Sources: Public opinion polls in 1992, 1999 and 2009 conducted by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research - Skopje and Public opinion poll in 2014, conducted by Institute for Social Analysis – Skopje. All surveys were conducted on a representative sample for Macedonia of 1600 respondents, with face to face interviews.

Further, the citizens (weather they believe or not in authorities) wish for a single man who would have credibility and authority to run the country.

Table 5. Survey Question: "Do you agree with the attitude: 'The state should be led by a single man who has the authority'?"

	1999	2009	2011	2014
Yes	83%	68%	64%	52%

Sources: Public opinion polls in 1992, 1999 and 2009 conducted by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal Research - Skopje and Public opinion poll in 2014, conducted by Institute for Social Analysis – Skopje. All surveys were conducted on a representative sample for Macedonia of 1600 respondents, with face-to-face interviews.

Whether this decrease comes as a result of a lack of authoritative politicians or it is about authentic progress and democratization, is a topic for an additional study. But it is obvious that the solutions are expected everywhere, but in the citizens themselves and their participative potentials. The following data originating from the above sources can be used as illustration:

The 'state' as a highest value is accepted in all four periods between 88% in the earlier periods down to 70% in 2014. However, in the focus groups which were complementary to the survey, it became obvious that by 'state' the participants often understand the ruling party or the Government.

Fear, submission and obedience dominate among a significant number of citizens. 'Obedience' as a highest value, for example, was accepted by over 50% in the first three periods, but has gone down to 43% in 2014.

Justification of repression dominates as a tool for dealing with negative phenomena (severe punishments and restrictive measures for deviations were preferable for a population between 35% and 50% in first three periods, while it has decreased to 30% in 2014, probably due to the latest approaches on practicing such measures in reality).

'Order and discipline' are highly aspired with a tendency of growth, probably as a result of a high level of distrust in the functioning of the legal system and the rule of law in general.

Authoritarianism has always been a 'necessity' in building group cohesion; thus it would be an illusion to expect that there is a government, a social or ethnic group, or a political party, that would sincerely wish to transform it. But to build a whole system over it in a context where the official political values contradict it, such as it is in Macedonia today, means nothing but to contribute to the chaos in the value matrix of the citizens, their political manipulation and abuse. It is nothing less than a direct obstruction to the development of the political culture in the society.

Conclusion

As Schopflin stressed, speaking of Central and South-Eastern Europe, state-national independence did not inherently *"produce democracy or stability, though it may be step in the right direction [...] The mere reception of democratic institutions is not in itself a guarantee of a democratic way of doing things."* (Schopflin, 2003).

In the gap between the values of liberal democracy and those of an authoritarian model, most of the countries in the region showed weak results in the past three decades. This paper argues that in the case of the Republic of Macedonia, in the "battle" between proponents of political ideology *vis-à-vis* individual benefits through political engagement, it is the latter which dominates. The process of participative democracy as higher political level of democracy has lower leverage than the acquiring personal benefits of being involved in the politics. On one side, the heritage of the communism does not allow the proper political parties to emerge via socially based interest groups. On the other side, the massive participation in the domestic politics, as it was in the golden days of communism, is one of the factors due to which the new political entities continued to support by "delivering the goods" by patronage. This obstacle cannot be overcome, which has been proven by the existence of strong perceptions of high level of corruption in the highest echelons of the state structures. Corruption is the symptom, but patronage is the sickness. Non-democratic values are prevalent as shown above by the empirical data. Above all, the authoritarian values have never really left the region. They are the corner stone of the Macedonian political regime, regarding formal acceptance of democracy that, one can say, is being suppressed before it has fully arrived.

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