ATTILA Z. PAPP

The Concept of Civil Society in the Romanian Press after 1990

1. Introduction: The emergence of the notion of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe

In Romanian public opinion, ideas and conceptions of civil society cannot be separated from all the civil society-related notions and activities witnessed in Central and Eastern Europe during the past two decades. It is not an aim of this essay to analyse the notion of civil society reaching back to John Locke and the philosophers of the Scottish, French and German Enlightenment,[1] but in order for us to understand the analysis of the Romanian press in the past decade from the point of view of treating the notion of civil society, it is necessary to unearth the "hidden" dimensions of the concept with special reference to the tribulations that have surrounded it during the past twenty years.

Today all analysts agree that at the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s this notion experienced a real renaissance, was re-discovered and put on the banner of the fight for demolishing state socialism. It is a question, however, if the then advocates of civil society were using, and the theoreticians of the present are using, the notion in the same sense. As we can guess, the answer to this question is "no", because, as Seligman points out, the concept during its history assumed newer and newer content. In the 18th century it indicated the dimension of social reciprocity, in the 19th century it indicated the dimension outside the sphere of the state, and in the 20th century it followed an "asymptotic" path: west European and North American philoso-

---

[1] For such an analysis of civil society see the first three chapters of Adam B. Seligman: A civil társadalom eszméje (*The idea of civil society*). *Korunk*, 1992, No. 9., 40–49.

phers abandoned it, while left-wing intellectual circles kept it constantly on the agenda. In the wake of the changes in Eastern Europe which led to the falling apart of communist-type state structures, the concept became not only a political slogan but also the subject of scientific analysis.[2]

Although the concept of civil society has been enhanced with newer and newer interpretations during the past two and a half centuries, its core meaning has not basically changed. We may venture the opinion that placed into any new context, its vitality is always justified and implied by the dichotomous separation of the public and the private spheres. No civil society could exist without the existence of these dialectic, dichotomous spheres of life. In Central and East European countries, the reason why the idea of civil society could become one of the driving forces of politics and organising movements was that oppressive, totalitarian state structures wanted to destroy the private sphere. If no legally provided and practically feasible separation of the private and public sphere exists, neither a civil society nor 'openness' can exist. The initiatives of intellectuals in Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s were focused on creating the very institutions of openness and on acknowledging the responsible (private and public) member of society. As Havel put it, the secret of a man hides in his responsibility.[3] To this demand naturally belonged observation of human rights, acknowledgment of minorities and of being different, protection of the environment, justification of alternative behaviours and a visceral rejection of any intention to make things uniform. It is no accident that the analysts of the period after 1990, such as András Arató, in interpreting civil society placed special emphasis on the role of openness: " … modern civil society is to be interpreted as the sphere of social interaction between the economy and the state; this sphere primarily comprises openness and various free associations."[4] The goal of these free associations safeguarded by civil law is not to seize power but to influence and put limitations on it. This was also recognised by the dissidents of that time when they emphasised a non-violent reconstruction of civil society. It is true that emphasising the non-violent approach was based on a rational evaluation of the communist systems built on oppression, i.e. on the acknowledgement of the fact that it was impossible to overthrow these violent systems, which

---

2   Seligman, op. cit.
3   Havel, Václav: *Letters to Olga*. New York: Knopf, 1988., 65.
4   Arató, András: *Civil társadalom, forradalom és alkotmány* (*Civil society, revolution and constitution*). Budapest: Új Mandátum, 1999., 54.

were absolutely superior in strength, in a violent way. Since "we (meaning the representatives of civil society) have no tanks",[5] it is reasonable to take the moral position of non-violence and demand a dialogue from there.

Charta 77 in Czechoslovakia, the KOR and the Solidarnosc movement in Poland, the samizdat publications in Hungary, different colleges, flying universities and clubs all aimed at eliminating the authoritarian and hierarchical social structures and the strategy of their operators was to behave in such a way as if the rights of assembly, association and communication had already been granted to them, hoping that this behaviour would render an impetus to the future institutionalisation of these rights.[6] There are three consequences of this strategy. Firstly, it suggests that the concept of civil society in Eastern Europe is often a synonym of democracy. Secondly, the manifestation of civil society in behaviour underlines the importance of "civil religion" described by Bellah (with reference to America) or of "civil culture" in the sense used by Dahrendorf.[7] Thirdly, it emphasises the responsibility of the individual again as opposed to the "irresponsibility" of the system.

Thus, civil society comprises the freedom and ability of association of responsible individuals, spontaneous, grass-root, non-governmental initiations,[8] and the rights for having a unique personality and the rights for communication.[9] In order to implement all these elements, confidence between people and in institutions is necessary. According to Giddens, confidence can bridge the space-time complex, thereby eliminating existential anxiety which, as social interactions become ever more abstract, can cause unbearable torment and behavioural disturbances.[10] The presence of confidence is also important because it can lead to the understanding of the significance of civility, which is always present even in the embryonic stage of a civil society.

It can be seen that in the 1980s civil society indicated democratism against a tyrannical state and a re-discovery of politics (Tismaneanu), but also anti-politics (Konrád) and it meant the influencing and the limiting of power for the sake of "living in truth and justice" (Havel). In the 1990s the concept

---

5   Michnik, Adam: *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985., 28.

6   Arató, op. cit.

7   Dahrendorf, op. cit.

8   Tismăneanu, Vladimir: *Reinventarea politicului. Europa Răsăriteana de la Stalin la Havel*. Iași: Polirom, 1997.

9   Arató, op. cit.

10 Giddens, Anthony: *The Consequences of Modernity*. Polity Press, 1990

gradually lost its mobilising nature and gave its place to NGOs, i.e. non-governmental organisations. Parallel to this process, the term of civil society was gradually replaced by the terms of civil sphere, non-governmental organisations and non-profit sector. There was more to this metamorphosis than a simple change of name: "the success of new organisations (NGOs) depends at least as much on their professionalism, the successful management of their budget, their PR activities and the organising of their sponsors, etc., than on their social attractiveness".[11]

The appearance of this institutional level of civil society cannot by far mean that the problems of social participation and self-organisation have been solved. Although in Central and Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 1990s a transition to democratic, pluralistic systems made it possible for the institutions and organisations of the civil sphere to unfold, this process was termed by experts as creating "only statistically strong civil societies": "the increase in the number of organisations (...) did not necessarily mean an increase of the ratio of civil society participating in significant decision-making, nor an increasing ratio, proportional to the number of institutions, of control and influencability of the mechanisms of political decision making by the society".[12] The appearance of non-governmental organisation is often encouraged by the political sphere in order to increase its voting base, but we can also find pseudo-organisations that do not necessarily carry out socially useful activities.[13]

The NGOs that came into being in the 1990s had to realise that even their mere existence could become questionable, if they relied on state resources only, thus it seemed reasonable to search for international resources. This attitude intensified the process of the civil sphere's going international and made these organisations aware of the fact that only those could be viable

---

11 Kaldor, Mary: "Transznacionális civil társadalom" *(Transnational civil society)*. In: Miszlivetz, Ferenc (ed.): *Közép-Európai változások. Társadalmi folyamatok és stratégiák*. Szombathely: Savaria University Press, 1998, 126.

12 Miszlivetz-Jensen, op. cit., 143.

13 Therefore, it is not easy to distinguish between real, quasi and pseudo NGOs. In the literature, there is a growing spread of ironic abbreviations used to describe the groups of such NGOs. For example: quasi NGO: QUANGO; NGO directed by donors: DONGO; money-oriented NGO: MONGO; NGO directed by the mafia: MANGO; fake NGO: FANGO, etc. See Miszlivetz, Ferenc -Jensen, Jody: "A civil társadalom metamorfózisa: 1988–1999 (The metamorphosis of civil society: 1988–1999)". In Miszlivetz Ferenc (ed.): *Közép-Európai változások. Társadalmi folyamatok és stratégiák*. Szombathely: Savaria University Press, 1998, 141–169.

in a globalising world which, in addition to the local and national financial channels, were also familiar with the international ones. According to Mary Kaldor, the transnational civil society, which has developed in this manner, can be regarded as a political plan crossing the global/local border. The significance of the supranational civil society was becoming ever stronger during the political events of the 1990s (wars in ex-Yugoslavia, the goal of EU enlargement) and as a political plan had to have a message for both autonomous individuals and individuals in power. "For independently thinking individuals the concept implies that local activities and campaigns must have links to a network of sponsors reaching over the borders and that they must have free entrance to a series of institutions. For those in power, the concept contains the responsibility and (self-interest) of providing genuine help to those who fight for keeping civil values alive in local life."[14]

Kaldor's slightly programmatic concept of a transnational civil society can perhaps resolve the conflict between the idea of civil society and the insistence on national identity, so frequently experienced in Central Europe: "the conservation of the significance of national identity and belonging to a nation hinders us from working out, for civil existence and participation in matters of the national state, a model conceived in the spirit of a liberal- individualistic ideology".[15] This view of Seligman seems perhaps too determined, but the argument behind it is that as long as the civil behaviour characteristic of a private individual has not developed in the countries of the region, we cannot speak of a civil society. The history of Central and Eastern Europe has continuously proved that a permanent clinging to national bonds did not make it possible for Western-type social structures to develop.

The reason why we have considered it necessary to give an – albeit sketchy – account of the development of the ideas of civil society is to make the reader sense the uniqueness of the thoughts published in Romania about this theme. This brief introduction to the international literature will serve as a basis of reference for further discussion and will help in identifying the *differentia specifica* of the Romanian discourse on civil society.

---

14 Kaldor, op. cit.
15 Seligman, op. cit., 160.

2. The notion of civil society in the Romanian press

This study is not concerned with the present situation of civil society in Romania, but how the notion of civil society appeared in the Romanian press after the events of December 1989. Our question is not about the possibilities for the civil society in Romania to unfold, but about the problems and themes arising in a certain section of the Romanian press by the concept of civil society and its getting into discourse. This well-distinguishable section of the Romanian press includes periodicals in Romanian and in Hungarian mainly publishing articles of sociology and political science. Evidently, the monitoring of this discourse will also touch upon the civil society of Romania as it was in the 1990s, but the scope of our attention will not cover the empirical aspects of its unfolding. We are interested only in cases when the possibilities of this appear as part of a reality-creating act of the discourse.

As a preliminary, we have to accept the fact that the public presence of the idea of civil society is a precursor of the actual development of the civilian sphere. This thematic examination of such openness serves us to "locate" the underlying *systems* of arguments of a developing civil society (the use of the plural is important here, because the very basic idea of civil society already embraces pluralism). With this we have not stated, however, that a shaping civil society is the direct consequence of the operationalisation of ideas, because values set as goals cannot be institutionalised without regard to perturbations coming from the everyday world. The wider social environment and the existing mentality feed the dimensions of the resisting media of reality. In other words, an intellectual discourse cannot be institutionalised without obstacles; in fact, if certain values of a civil society take institutional forms, this does not mean that the created construction unambiguously fulfils the function for which it was created. As we have already indicated in the introduction, since the middle of the 1990s it has been often stated that not every NGO is what it seems to be (see footnote 2).

Our study is the result of a survey of the press. This survey included an analysis of essays and articles discussing some form of civil society in a number of Romanian and Hungarian-language periodicals and the comparison of writings published in these languages.[16] Our key question is what sources of the existing professional literature were used by these writings published

---

16 Periodicals in Romanian: *Sfera Politicii*, *Revista de cercetări sociale*, *Polis*, *Sociologia Românească*, *22*; periodicals in Hungarian : *A Hét*, *Korunk*, *Európai Idő*, *Átmenetek*.

in different languages but in the same country and on the same issue, and what cross-communication and conceptual correspondence existed between the two written media of these languages. In short: if the actors of openness speak of civil society, do they phrase their statements on the basis of the same sphere of concept and the same complex of phenomena? Using a fashionable term: does a "fault line" of ethnic or other nature exist in the Romanian discourse on civil society?

The talk about civil society in itself can be regarded as a form of its own institutionalisation, and we can also state that the forums making this discourse possible were established after the turn of December 1989. This is chiefly valid for the Romanian-language press, because the periodicals involved in our survey all came into existence after January 1990. A good part of the Hungarian-language periodicals (*A Hét* and *Korunk*) already existed in the years of dictatorship, thus here we can refer to the manifestation of the earlier "grey" openness within a formal framework. Two conclusions can be drawn from this brief comparison. On the one hand, it is evident that the Romanian-language press openness experienced a more dynamic renewal process after 1990 than its Hungarian language counterpart. On the other hand, this difference might also mean that the distance between the former informal and formal Hungarian-language openness was perhaps not so great to result in such a structural boom as the one that took place in the Romanian press. This can be also explained by the fact that in the Hungarian press already in 1990 a debate developed about civil society and the roots of this debate can be traced back to 1986.[17]

2.1 Ideas about civil society in Hungarian-language publications

The ideas of civil society have "flowed into" the Hungarian-language press of Romania since 1990 from three directions: the first can be called autochthonous dimension, the second channel has been the one coming from Hungary transporting the ideas of being Central European, and the third can be interpreted as the channel for Romanian-language import.

---

17 The volume Zoltán Bíró, József Gagyi, and János Péntek (eds.): Népi hagyományok új környezetben. Tanulmányok a folklorizmus köréből (*Folk traditions in a new environment. Essays on folklorism*). 1986. In this we can read a sharp criticism of the endeavours of intellectuals to recreate the traditional folk culture. As a key issue it emerged whether folklore studies or anthropology was a better way to acquire knowledge of social reality.

The channel we call the autochthonous dimension is primarily represented by KAM[18] in Csíkszereda. In the first issue in 1990 of the periodical *Átmenetek* (*Transitions*), of which only a few issues ever came out, Zoltán A. Biró published an essay with the title *Intézmény – képviselet – civil társadalom* (*Institution – representation – civil society*) and then some reputed Hungarian social scientists living in Romania made their remarks on and contributions to the article. We cannot find a distinct definition of civil society in the article, the concept is rather used by the author in a descriptive, factual way. His basic statement is that the Ceausescu dictatorship (at least in Székelyföld, which is an area chiefly inhabited by Hungarian Szeklers) did not lead to the destruction of civil society, but just the opposite: civil society became stronger. Intellectuals might have become isolated, but in the world referred to by the author as "down there", an intensification of human relations and a strengthening of the network of relations could be observed. The society "down there" seemed to be stabilised, and the organisation of representation that appeared after the turn of 1989 put an end to this very process of stabilisation, because intellectuals tried to project and force their uniform image of the people upon the people itself. As one of the contributors to the debate (József D. Lőrincz) pointed out: this process "did not mean that the community had delegated the intellectuals to represent their interests before the power structure, but it meant just the opposite, the power elite had delegated the intellectuals to represent its interests towards the people."

Comparing this train of thought to the literature of civil society briefly described above, we can say that this conception of civil society is rather negative and defensive in its nature. It is true that in this essay the existence of civil society is linked to some self-organisation, but the self-organisation started in the lack or in the "absence" of the "up there". The communist power was no longer able to show a realistic image of the future, therefore rank-and-file people came together. We must, however, understand that this coming together had a somewhat forced nature and was not part of an organising or – let alone – movement aimed at influencing power. These small communities tried to mitigate everyday the problems of individuals, but the bulk of these problems was caused by the power elite and therefore the world of "up there" was not so far away. It can also be debated that these hidden relations resembling the features of a civil society disintegrated at the beginning of 1990

18 KAM: Kommunikációs Antropológiai Munkacsoport (*Workshop for Anthropology of Communication – WAC*)

due to the appearance of interest-representing organisations. The symbolic policy making of interest-representing organisations facilitated the weakening of the coherence of small communities (because it promoted values that fell far outside the actual dimensions of everyday life), but the long drawn-out transition of the economy also contributed to it to a great extent.

As we can see, the need to clarify the concept of civil society did not yet emphatically emerge in this debate. A little later, however, this need was addressed in the Hungarian-language press. In issue 1990, No. 26. of *A Hét* a debate-provoking essay by László Nándor Magyari with the title *Civil társadalom: utópia vagy realitás?* (*Civil society: Utopia or reality?*)[19] was published. In this essay we can already identify the second source of ideas concerning civil society for the Hungarian press in Romania: here the analysed civil society placed in a Central European context primarily appears through channels (authors and/or publications) coming from Hungary. The authors quoted include István Bibó, András Arató, Ervin Csizmadia and Vesna Pešić. The author of the essay seems to side with the ideas of Csizmadia published in issue 1989/5 of *Kritika*, [20] which postulated that there are three distinguishable levels of civil society. "If we speak of some synthesis of the civil sphere, then this [*everyday civil society* – author's note] can mean the *first* level, or the base or, in other words, the "core". The existence of this level can ensure a healthy *second* level, the sphere of the civil society of movements and the *third level*, the possibility of an *institutional-corporative* civil society."[21] According to Csizmadia, the main question in Hungary is why the level interpreted as the

---

19 Magyari, Nándor László: "Civil társadalom: utópia vagy realitás?" (*Civil society: Utopia or reality?*). *A Hét*, 1990, No. 26., 11.

20 In this article the Hungarian political scientist reacts to an essay by Fricz, Tamás: "Van vagy nincs civil társadalom Magyarországon?" (*Is there or is there not a civil society in Hungary?*). *Kritika*, 1989, No. 2, 2–3. Fricz claims that one must distinguish between civic and civil society: while the former puts the emphasis on the existence of the bourgeois, the latter emphasises that of the citoyen. The concept of civil society is narrower, but it assumes a certain level of institutionalisation: "These institutions of interest-representation and of influencing state decisions are the necessary bases for the democratic functioning of the state and for a civic society to become a civil society, i.e. for the bourgeois to become a citoyen, thereby also preserving his civic existence". As a reflection on this division, Csizmadia points out that it is not enough to indicate that civil society has a state-level interest representation, but the different levels of civil society must also be distinguished.

21 Csizmadia, Ervin: "Milyen civil társadalom van és milyen nincs Magyarországon?" (*What kind of civil society is there and is there not in Hungary?*). *Kritika*, 1989, No.5., 5.

base is missing, which makes a "full turn in civil society",[22] that could also be a genuine democratic turn, impossible.

In relation to Magyari's article, we have given a somewhat more detailed account of the ideas of Csizmadia because they always keep reoccurring in the thinking of Hungarians in Romania. Magyari replants these ideas into the Romanian environment in the following way: "If everyday civil society can be the base of the implementation of a fuller turn in civil society, these self-organising and community-generating frameworks of social existence should be rediscovered and at the same time the justification of demands, goals, common-sense knowledge, etc. of the everyday life of people should be legitimatised and made evident."[23] From this the author draws the programme-like conclusion that the only guarantee of catching up with the rest of Europe is the "animation of society", which is nothing else but the "facilitation of the development of the natural vitality and self-producing mechanisms of society".

A couple of weeks later, also in *A Hét*, Károly Veress reflected on the ideas of the article described above. His somewhat philosophical statements with exclusive reference to the Hungarian minority in Transylvania partially contradict and partially support Magyari's ideas. At the beginning of his essay, Veress considers it a false idea that a turn in civil society could serve as a "conserving force" for the purpose of the "future preservation of our minority existence" because it "assumes that some dimension of existence has a favoured role in the whole of existence. The preference of either economic, or moral, or cultural factors over other conditions of existence and their re-qualification as conserving forces will lead to distortions harming the totality of existence."[24] Around the end of his essay, however, the author claims, "for improving the quality of the content of minority existence" the "sole base can be the creation of a functional, self-regulating, ev-

---

22 As we will see later, the term "turn in civil society" will often and without any criticism return in writings in Hungarian. Without criticism, because if we accept the fact that a civil society is (also) manifested in everyday behaviour, then we cannot speak of such a turn, such a sudden fundamental change (laden with physical and philosophical connotations). According to Dahrendorf, the gradual creation of "civil culture" takes at least a generation's time, or at least 60 years. See Dahrendorf, Ralf: *Reflections on the revolution in Europe*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1990.

23 Magyari, op. cit.

24 Veress, Károly: "Kisebbségi lét és civil társadalom" (*Minority existence and civil society*). *A Hét*, 1990, No. 30.

eryday minority civil society". In relation to this self-contradictory argumentation, we can establish three facts: 1) presumably, even the quoted sections suggest the author's intention of reaching over into the domain of philosophical discourse, but it remains a question if this approach is justified in this context; 2) from the argumentation and the use of words, the presence of a kind of Transylvanian view becomes evident, linking the ideas of civil society with the problems of "our minority existence"; 3) perhaps in harmony with the above, we can also establish that from this contribution references to authors whose works belong to the "canon" of the literature on civil society are completely missing. This is noticeable because, as we saw, an attempt was made to use sources from Hungary.

We can regard as the continuation of the above (germ of a) debate the discussion on civil society that took place on 29 September 1990 in Csíkszereda and about which Károly Veress wrote an account in issues 1990, No. 38 and No. 39 of *Európai Idő*.[25] At the level of the use of concepts and references, this discussion is very similar to the content of the essays discussed so far, therefore we will not go into detail, but only point out that here the issues of the definition of civil society (with references to new authors such as Szelényi, Hankiss, Michnik and Zinovjev) and of the development and animation of minority civil society are still on the agenda. A brief contribution, however, touched upon a question that we will later return to in more detail: *where* is civil society? In Zoltán Rostás's view: "civil societies can function and are actually functioning in modern, urbanised enclaves. Thus a Szekler village keeping order in its own community should not be mistaken for a civil society." The opinions about developing a civil society were again on the pessimistic side, but the necessity to think together was acknowledged by all: "At the end of the discussion the participants agreed that the fact that the discussion took place could be regarded as a genuine result."

Chronologically between these essays by Magyari and Veress, another work with reference to civil society appeared in *A Hét*. Its author, Dan Pavel, explains the post-Second World War period of Romania with the categories of a tacit agreement between civil society and the actual power establishment.[26] He claims that the power elite after 1948, although making all possi-

25 Veress, Károly: "Beszélgetés a civil társadalomról" (*A conversation on civil society*). *Európai Idő*, 1990, No. 38–39.
26 Pavel, Dan: "Civil társadalom és társadalmi szerződés" (*Civil society and social contract*). *A Hét*, 1990, No. 27., 11.

ble efforts to eliminate any embryonic start of a civil society, offered a "deal" to the Romanian people. The author mentions two examples. In 1964 Gh. Gheorghiu Dej offered the following: if political power remains in the hands of the party bureaucracy, in return the people will have the right to be openly anti-Soviet, to continue to work slowly and can count on an improvement in the standard of living. Ceausescu continued these terms of trade in 1965, but he later replaced the anti-Soviet attitude with nationalistic demagogy, which led to the accumulation of tensions between Romanians forming the majority and national minorities. (From this power game, the Hungarian minority emerged as a double loser, because while remaining the subject of the dictatorship, it was also left out of the tacit agreement between the Romanian majority and the dictatorship.) According to the author, this agreement was terminated in 1989 through the fault of the "beloved leader", because he did not notice that while being left totally alone, he committed a severe breach of the contract: he did not provide the people with "bread and circuses". Dan Pavel also claims that at the beginning of 1990 Iliescu offered a new contract to the people, or at least to the majority of the people, because in addition to the "privileges" of the previous decades (guaranteed employment, housing) he offered new values (land, improved supply, prolonged "free" TV, etc.). Therefore, it was no surprise that in the elections of 1990 Iliescu achieved a sweeping victory. Nevertheless, the "beloved leader" will probably be unable to keep the contract, wrote Pavel, and it will be decided by "the existence of certain structures of civil society" who will be the one to succeed him. It can be seen that in this train of thought the concept of civil society primarily signifies democratic structures. Although the author does not state it explicitly, nor does he refer to known works or authors, here civil society appears as a means of influencing power.

This essay of Dan Pavel can be justly considered as part of the third channel, the channel of Romanian-language import of ideas. To the same dimension belong a series of articles taken over from the periodical *22*; authors most frequently translated into Hungarian include Vladimir Tismaneanu, Dan Pavel, Dan Oprescu and Horia-Roman Patapievici. We leave the detailed analysis of these authors to the section dealing with the analysis of the Romanian-language press; here we only note that in their cases the recognition of the necessity of civil society is often associated with a belief in the impossibility of its implementation.

We can read more in Hungarian about this in a series of essays by Dan Oprescu published in *A Hét*.[27] Since these did not originally appear in *22*, we will describe their ideas in more detail below. After claiming that the creation of civil society is the only correct strategy of developing democratic structures in Romania, the author also makes it clear that there is no civil society in Romania: "For the time being, in Romania there is nothing which could be called an independent civil society; the (re-)building of a civil society in Romania must be the main strategic guideline of the next (in fact, the present) period. Privatisation (involving small, medium and large companies), the elimination of central planning, the creation of economic and public administrative units of local authorities, a politically neutral army and police, the separation of powers in the state, genuine trade unions, the revitalisation of (Orthodox, Greek catholic, etc.) church organisations, and an independent press all form a part of the (re-)building of a civil society and this is a criterion on the basis of which it can be judged what is good or what is bad for the country." Perhaps this is the first occurrence in the Hungarian-language press of an operational definition of civil society. While at the very beginning of the 1990s the concept of civil society appeared as an ideal-typical norm and a political slogan, towards the middle of the 1990s the concept started to appear in a more "decomposed" way expressed in concrete terms. Oprescu not only gave such a definition but described those factors as well which, in his view, hindered the rebuilding of a civil society in Romania. These are the following: surviving centralisms, excessive industrialisation, the characteristic features of agriculture, financial and tax systems, bureaucracy, the system of monopolies, the mentality of Romanian intellectuals (based on state benefits), an occasional union of Bessarabia with Romania and international factors (i.e. general recession). Therefore, what Romania needs is not a benevolent father figure, who could relieve the people from the burden and responsibility of decisions, but strategically considered actions, the building of a civil society. In this context, as the author sees it, the endeavours for autonomy of the Hungarian minority do not endanger Romania, in fact, economic regions of this kind, although initially with an ethnic character, could be beneficial.

In the essays of Romanian authors also published in Hungarian we can witness a Romanian paradox concerning civil society: a civil society is a de-

27 Oprescu, Dan: "Értékes útmutatások 1–4" *(Valuable guidances 1–4)*. *A Hét*, 1993, No. 35, 36, 37, 38.

sired, hope-raising dimension, but its implementation in Romania is a mere illusion. Therefore, the implementation of a civil society became a cause for intellectuals, because this is the only stratum of society that recognised its necessity and assumed a role in promoting this recognition.

The presence of doubts concerning civil society is also an underlying feature of essays published in Hungarian. The title of the 1992, No. 9. thematic issue of *Korunk* is: *Civil társadalom Romániában* (*Civil society in Romania*). In this issue we can read the essays of two internationally acknowledged authors (Arató and Seligman), but also two "indigenous" articles. Liviu Matei, the author of one of the two articles, while making a reference to the violent demonstrations of miners transported from the mining regions of the country to Bucharest, mulls over the following: "The question may be raised: Does any civil society exist in Romania today? And the answer can perhaps be a *no.* But then this would give rise to a beautiful paradox: the non-existent civil society turns against the state undermining the chances of the former."[28] The other indigenous writing carries a doubt about civil society already in its title: *A civil társadalom esélye – aknatűzben* (*The fate of civil society – under mortar fire*).[29] The author's argumentation reads as follows: "The experience of mortar fire is, indeed, real. In the hell of the current history of the Balkans, real shells are flying towards real people. Towards people who ended up facing the barren destruction of civil war instead of the affluence of civil society and who may never enjoy the liberating joy of autonomous social thinking and action."

Not only in *Korunk* but also in *A Hét* there appeared an essay of political science with similar pessimistic overtones: according to Miklós Bakk, the "rise and fall" of civil society, to use a then fashionable expression, can be explained by the slowness of development of an elite of the post-totalitarian period and by the spread of political indifference, because the lack of personal commitment and of political identity hinders the appearance of pluralistic opinions in the public domain.[30]

Essays on civil society published later in the Hungarian-language press all relied on one of these three sources or a mixture of them. In *A Hét* interviews were often published with Hungarian sociologists, economists and po-

---

28 Matei, Liviu: "A civil társadalom paradoxonai és esélyei Romániában" (*The paradoxes and the fate of civil society in Romania*). *Korunk*, 1992, No. 9., 3–4.
29 K.S.J.: "A civil társadalom esélye – aknatűzben" (*The fate of civil society – under mortar fire*). *Korunk*, 1992, No. 9., 66–67.
30 Bakk, Miklós: "A civil társadalom tündöklése és bukása" (*The rise and fall of civil society*). *A Hét*, 1992, No. 42.

litical scientists in which they discussed civil society in relation to other social phenomena, such as the relationship between the culture of book publishing, the support of culture and civil society,[31] the differences between local society and civil society,[32] and the connection between the civil sphere and conflict management,[33] etc.

The issue of the conceptual clarification of civil society still remained on the agenda until the middle of the 1990s. We can regard as a part of the Hungarian channel the well-documented, concise essay of Andorka published in *Korunk*[34], in which the author gives a brief account of the "canonised" thinkers of civil society (almost all significant authors are quoted, from Locke to Dahrendorf) and goes on to say that currently we must try "to build civil society with unrelenting efforts" in local authorities, at places of work and in the mass media. In his opinion, under the totalitarian systems of East-Central Europe "perhaps only church communities succeeded in preserving a little of their civil social character".[35]

A peculiar feature of the Hungarian-language press involves addressing the question whether a minority civil society exists or can exist. Ernő Fábián (in addition to the authors of Csíkszereda mentioned previously) tries to give an answer to this question. He analyses the Szekler village keeping order in its own community as an autonomous form of organising society and

---

31 Rostás, Zoltán: "Könyvkultúra a civil társadalomban. Beszélgetés Zöld Ferenccel, a Magyar Könyvkiadók és Könyvterjesztők Egyesületének elnökével" (*Book culture in civil society. A conversation with Ferenc Zöld, the president of the Association of Hungarian Book Publishers and Distributors*). *A Hét*, 1990, No. 30.

32 Magyari, Nándor László – Bodó, Julianna: "Helyi társadalom – helyi hatalom. Beszélgetés A. Gergely András politológussal" (*Local society – local power. A conversation with political scientist András A. Gergely*). *A Hét*, 1990, No. 41–42.

33 Bakk, Miklós: "Civil szféra, társadalmi integráció, konfliktuskezelés. Beszélgetés Bognár László közgazdásszal" (*Civil sphere, social integration, conflict management. A conversation with the economist László Bognár*). *A Hét*, 1993, No. 20.

34 Andorka, Rudolf: "A civil társadalom fogalmának definíciója és használhatósága a kelet-közép-európai társadalmak elemzésében" (*The definition and applicability of the concept of civil society in the analysis of East-Central European societies*). *Korunk*, 1995, No. 5, 14–18.

35 In Transylvania a great role is still intended for the churches. The state is still interpreted as an institution of oppression in the cause of the Hungarian-language university declared and supported by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (in Hungarian abbreviation: RMDSZ). Therefore, the task of implementing (small) islands of freedom created by the university is incumbent upon the churches representing a slice of civil society. It is another question, however, as to what extent the church is prepared for this task and if it is possible at all to create an institution of higher education compatible with European norms solely under the aegis of a church.

then, approaching the present, he states: "the individual can have a real freedom in the minority civil society, because he need not suffer from those forms of discrimination which he faces because of his minority attributes in the macro-society of the national state" and later he adds: "Nevertheless, the civil society of the minority, since it develops out of necessity, is inevitably narrowed down and like minority existence cannot be full-fledged either."[36] According to this view, the civil society of a minority can be pictured as some kind of necessary evil: it is necessary because the members of the minority can feel free here, but it is "evil" at the same time because of its narrowing, limiting nature. Here, as a matter of fact, the idea of civil society covers the minority community. The emphasis on self-organisation approaches, perhaps, the concept used in Central Europe (mainly in the 1980s); nevertheless, this self-organising gains importance not only because of the oppressing nature of the state but also because of the existence of the relevant majority. The minority seems to be forced to carry out a permanent, self-limiting revolution.

The recognition of the existence of a minority civil society gives rise to the following question: Where does this sphere exist and what is to be regarded as a constituent part of civil society? The answers can be structured along two dimensions. One is built upon the antagonism between rural and urban areas and the other is based on the antagonism between the institutional sphere and non-institutional sphere. The advocates of the first pole of the first dimension are convinced that the germs of civil society mostly survived in villages during the years of dictatorship,[37] while the advocates of the other pole say that a civil society can only be imagined under urban conditions (see the already quoted essay of Zoltán Rostás published in *Európai Idő*). On one side of the second dimension stand those who consider the interest-representing organisations, associations, foundations, etc. established by the representatives of the Hungarian minority as a constituent part of civil society,[38] while on the other side stand those who claim that these institutions

36 Fábián, Ernő: "Az autonóm társadalomszerveződés előzményei. Meditáció a pre-civil társadalomról Erdélyben 2" (*The preliminaries of autonomous organisation of society. Meditation on pre-civil society in Transylvania 2*). *A Hét*, 1993, No. 25., 4–5.
37 Nagy, Olga: "A paraszti polgárosulás erdélyi sajátosságai" (*The peculiar features of the Transylvanian peasentry's rise into the middle class*). *Korunk*, 1992, No. 9., 77–82.
38 Horváth, István – Deák-Sala Zsolt: "A romániai magyar egyesületek és alapítványok szociológiai leírása" (*The sociological description of Hungarian associations and foundations in Romania*). *Korunk*, 1995, No. 11., 23–57. and Kötő, József: "A romániai magyar civil szervezetek működési feltételei" (*The operating conditions of Hungarian NGOs in Romania*). *A Hét*, 1999, No. 5., 3–4.

form a peculiar strategy of the intellectuals to build and defend their positions and that civil society must be looked for somewhere else.[39]

Civil society, discovered with pathos but not without doubts at the beginning of the 1990s, generated a number of question marks concerning its implementation as time moved towards the middle of the decade. A characteristic example of this is the issue 1995/11 of *Korunk*. A question mark in the title of this thematic issue indicates the survival of doubts: *Civil társadalom?* (*Civil society?*). Not only this question mark, but also the essays in the issue express their doubts. In the introductory article Levente Salat raises the fundamental question which should be clarified by those using the concept of civil society in the Hungarian public life in Romania: does the Hungarian "civil" individual in Romania exist at all? Then he adds: "if there are such individuals, relative to what are they "civil"? Are they "civil" in opposition to the state power threatening the social existence of the minority, which power is instigated by nationalistic extremists, or in opposition to their own interest–representing organisation also organised in a state-like manner?[40] The question is justified, because the use of the concept of civil society developed during the past decades was always turned against the oppressive, homogenising power. If the Hungarian minority in Romania phrases its endeavours against the actual Romanian state, then the concept of civil society can be used in relation to the entire Hungarian minority and it takes just one step from here to present the Hungarian minority as democratic and the majority nation as anti-democratic. If, however, civil society is conceived in opposition to the interest-representing organisation of the Hungarian minority, one must agree with the statement of KAM of Csíkszereda that the Hungarian civil society in Romania is to be looked for "down there" in everyday life (see footnote 18). It seems evident that a kind of combination of the two versions is also imaginable, i.e. Hungarian civil society in Romania can be seized there where there

---

39 The most characteristic representative of this standpoint is Zoltán A. Bíró. Although not in the section of openness under our investigation, in one of his books he writes: "The actual Hungarian 'civil' society in Romania lies somewhere outside the Hungarian system of institutions of Romania. It exists, but it is not a genuine civil society, because it displays its interests to a very minor degree in public life. As before 1989, this society 'down there' still has its own structures, channels of communication, organisations and models of operation. As shown by the recent municipal elections, this society 'down there' is getting more and more operational." Bíró, 1998, op. cit., 186.

40 Salat, Levente: "Romániai magyar civil társadalom?" (*Hungarian civil society in Romania?*). *Korunk*, 1995, No. 11., 3–6.

are endeavours against the homogenising, unifying interest-representing organisation or against some anti-democratic manifestations of the central power and there where in the wake of the withdrawal of either the interest-representing organisation or the state there is a real social need to be satisfied. Social processes in the broader sense of the term have no ethnic character; grass-roots initiatives within these processes can rightly be considered as parts of the civil sphere. Hungarian NGOs of this kind must achieve a double integration: at local level an "inward" integration in which process they can carry ethnic features (especially, if they operate in municipalities where there is a Hungarian majority); at regional or national level an "outward" integration because this is the only way for them to obtain the resources of finance and information).

In this issue of *Korunk* some excerpts of one of the books of Michael Walzer[41] were published to help in rethinking the militant discourse on civil society. The author points out that the relationship between state and civil society must be re-interpreted, but not necessarily in such a way that the once dissident writers did it. The state is not an enemy of civil society, because "if civil society is left alone, it produces unequal power relations which can only be counterbalanced by the state". In other words, civil society needs the services of the state – even more so under the conditions of globalisation (i.e. international contracts between states can facilitate putting reasonable limitations on multinational companies or prevent environmental disasters, and these goals are also shared by certain NGOs; that is the state and the civil society depend on each other). According to Walzer, civil society is based on active and committed citizens "who partake of settling the matters of the state, the economy, the nation or even the religious congregation, the neighbourhood, or the family." In his opinion, the programme of civil society in East-Central Europe can be successful under the following three conditions: 1) decentralising the state; 2) socialising the economy; and 3) taming nationalism in order to make historical identity pluralistic. Civil society, says the author in conclusion, assumes a new kind of sensitivity to "the local, the peculiar and the random, and the ultimate recognition that the quality of life depends on the details."

---

41 Walzer, Michael: "A civil társadalom fogalma – részletek" (*The concept of civil society – excerpts*). *Korunk*, 1995, No. 11., 7–12.

In this issue, at least according to one possible interpretation, attempts were made by sociologists to capture these local and peculiar attributes.[42] To our knowledge, these authors tried for the first time to map the institutionalised Hungarian civil sphere in Romania through questionnaires in the first half of the 1990s. With this research (and with the report on it published in *Korunk)* the discourse on civil society assumed a new dimension. The incarnation of civil society in institutions was not only the subject of philosophical speculation, but became the subject of research on the sociology of organisations. The earlier pathos faded away and made room for the professional coolness of numbers.

According to the data of Horváth and Deák-Sala, in terms of fields of activity, cultural and religious institutions account for more than 50% of the Hungarian NGOs in Romania. Around 1995, the willingness of Hungarians of Romania to establish organisations was already less intensive than in the early 1990s. This diminishing trend is the most obvious in the fields of culture, religion and education. This can also be viewed in such a way that after 1989 the civil sphere primarily strengthened the symbolic dimension closely linked to minority existence, which could be considered as a response to the retaliating politics of the preceding decades and was obviously also in harmony with the programme of the interest-representing organisation created at the end of 1989. It is no surprise that "a significant portion of the DAHR politicians accept leading roles in the organisations of the civil sphere or support the operation of the different organisations".[43] However, on the list of donors and sponsors from Romania of these organisations the DAHR is in the penultimate place. In our view, this seemingly contradictory situation is resolved by the intermingling of links between the DAHR and the NGOs at a personal level. The interest-representing organisation does not give financial support to civil institutions, but is represented in them as if it performed a certain type of controlling activity. This suggests an intention of expropriation of the civil sphere, on the one hand, and a conversion of "relational capital" deriving from the position taken in the DAHR into "civil capital", on the other hand. The complexity of the network of relations is also indicated by the fact that the NGOs are financed from donations from abroad (according to the authors' data, 71% of their total income comes from abroad), with Hungary being the foremost donor by a great margin. This suggests that the

---

42 Horváth – Deák-Sala, op. cit.
43 Horváth – Deák-Sala, op. cit., 44.

inflow of political (relational) capital into the civil sphere mainly takes place through Hungary, and that this mechanism leads to the creation of political clienteles and to the expropriation of some dimension of the civil sphere.[44]

The authors of the essays did not discuss the mechanisms of operation of this type of network of relations, nor did they try to map career developments, which can cause somebody to end up in the civil sphere. In the thematic issue of *Korunk*, Nándor László Magyari makes an attempt to identify some of these categories: 1) active political career persons; 2) intellectuals pushed out or retired from politics; 3) "second line" players playing in civil social "dress" serving the political elite; 4) beginners of a career struggling with existential problems; 5) those members of the local or national elite who have a frank commitment to the declared goal of the NGO.[45]

We must highlight one more essay from issue 1995, No. 11. of *Korunk*. In summarising a period of five years, József Kötő indicated three practical things to achieve "for us who are forced to play the role of a midwife around the new cultural-educational movement": 1) the main goal of political struggle is to achieve the status of legal entity, therefore "we must set autonomy as a condition for building our civil society"; 2) "self-organisation, the main method of our practice in organising culture and education, stems from our political goal-setting and is the only way to build civil society"; 3) achieving cultural autonomy in constitutional law.[46] From the excerpts quoted it becomes clear that in Transylvanian Hungarian public speech the frequent use of the first person plural emphasises that normative statements are phrased "for the whole community". As already stated above, in the Hungarian-language press civil society frequently is used as a synonym of the minority community. The use of the first person plural refers to the whole of the Hungarian minority ("our community", "our foundations", "our associations", etc.). Later we will see that this form of speech is also wide-spread in the Romanian-language press, but there a "we-they" antagonism is used where "we" indicates the declared civil society supporting democratic values as opposed to the power establishment ("they") not respecting human rights.

---

44 Cs. Gyímesi, Éva: "Vázlatok egy szellemi kórképhez" *(Scetches on an intellectual disease)*. In Cs. Gyímesi Éva: *Colloquium Transsylvanicum*. Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 1998, 32–66. and Biró, op. cit.

45 Magyari, Nándor László: "Civil társadalom, vagy amit akartok" (*Civil society or what you will*). *Korunk*, 1995, No. 11., 64.

46 Kötő, József: "Az elmúlt öt év dilemmái" (*The dilemmas of the past five years*). *Korunk*, 1995, No. 11., 13–18.

After 1995, the notion of civil society mainly appears in the Hungarian-language press in an operationalised way or as a partial topic. Thus, we can read a summary essay on the publications of the civil sphere[47] or on the opportunities of social science dealing with civil society.[48] In the latter, the author examines what is happening to those scientific issues that have been ousted from the focus of attention of official research, but which are still important from the point of view of a community, i.e. scattered Hungarian minority groups. The essay gives no answer to this; presumably the author's goal was simply to raise the issue.

A more recent essay of Kötő attempts to capture further concrete levels of civil society.[49] The author describes and uniquely interprets the effective Romanian legal framework for operating civil society and the relevant reform ideas of the then government (led by Radu Vasile). With regards to the legal framework, Kötő points out that although freedom of association is provided by law in Romania and establishing associations and foundations is regulated by Act 1924/21, this Act contains several centralistic elements putting obstacles in the way. One such element is the provision that a foundation or an association is inaugurated on behalf of the state by the public authority on the basis of prior licences granted by the relevant ministry; or the provision that at least 21 founding members are required for a foundation or association (whereas in western Europe registration is normally a formality and 2 or 3 founding members are sufficient). Among reform ideas there is a plan to modify of the system of support of civil society by the creation of a Development Fund for Civil Society to be managed by the Ministry of Finance.[50]

With regards to the existence of a Hungarian civil society in Romania, the author thinks that "our intellectual elite created the germs of a civil society, but due to the fundamentally contradictory nature of political life and the

---

47 Magyari, Tivadar: "Civil média. A romániai magyar szervezetek időszakos kiadványai" (*Civil media. Periodical publications of Hungarian organisations in Romania*). *Korunk*, 1996, No. 1., 106–115.

48 Bodó, Barna: "Civil tudomány" *(Civil science). A Hét*, 1999, No. 7.

49 # The essay is not completely "recent": we can find paragraphs in it which are (almost literally identical) with parts of the author's earlier writing published in *Korunk* in 1995. See Kötő, József: "Az elmúlt öt év dilemmái" (*The dilemmas of the past five years*). *Korunk*, 1995. No. 11. 13–18.

50 An interesting paradoxical situation may develop: The Romanian state may centrally revitalise its enemy (civil society) condemned to death during the previous decades. While decentralisation is one of the basic pillars of civil society, here, it appears as if decentralisation were to be achieved with democratic centralisation.

delay of the basic social reforms, we still cannot speak of a complex civil society which is able to influence the decisions of those in power in the spirit of public interest. This remains the goal of future struggles." In this statement we can identify the two basic characteristic features of the idea of civil society in Romania: the relevant discourse has a very strong intellectual character and is very pessimistic.

By appearance of the idea of civil society as a partial topic as indicated above, we mean pathos-free references to its importance in relation to certain topics and events. For example, Miklós Bakk in his theoretical essay points out that the fight between secular and church powers in the history of western Europe made it possible for civil society to become politically stronger and richer through business and industry.[51] Civil society also appears as a partial topic in the essay analysing the situation of the Hungarian minority by the authors Bakk-Horváth-Salat on the occasion of the 6th Congress of the DAHR. The authors express their arguments for distinguishing between political and social strategies and emphasise the role of organising society. As one of the factors decisively influencing the future of the Hungarian minority in Romania, they name the ability of civil society to "create viable local communities which act and make people act in a creative, future-oriented way".[52] A couple of weeks later a reaction to their essay came from Béla Bíró. Though not agreeing with several statements of the three authors, in relation to their view of civil society he also confirms that "a real democracy can only be based on small communities, on a self-organising local society and on organisations of civil society (NGOs)."[53] It is clear that although they treated it only partially in these writings, the authors all agree that the idea of civil society is a prerequisite of democracy and they emphasise the role of local organisation.[54]

---

51 Bakk, Miklós: "Állam és társadalom" *(State and society)*. *A Hét*, 1998, No. 46.
52 Bakk, Miklós – Horváth, Andor – Salat, Levente: "A 2000. év küszöbén. Politika és kisebbségi magyar társadalom Romániában" (*At the threshold of the year 2000. Politics and minority Hungarian society in Romania*). *A Hét*, 1999, No. 19.
53 Bíró, Béla: "Képzelt és valódi közösségek" (*Imagined and real communities*). *A Hét*, 1999, No. 23.
54 In one of the Hungarian periodicals, József D. Lőrincz makes a relevant remark: " the conclusion seems to be justified that the concept of civil society is unsuitable for describing and interpreting social phenomena. (It can be used, however, as a normative or critical tool, but then we only learn 'what is that we do not have'.) Therefore it seems reasonable to assume that certain, more common, more differentiated and more tangible concepts that may even have more theoretical connotations, such as 'local society',

In giving a brief summary of the treatment of the idea of civil society in the Hungarian-language press of Romania, we can say that the concept was built on three dimensions:

1) The *autochthonous dimension* covers the work of Hungarian social scientists in Romania. Civil society is interpreted in a peculiar Transylvanian context and often bears no resemblance with the East-Central European interpretation of the concept.

2) The *Hungarian channel of being Central European* means the feeding of the idea of civil society through publications coming from Hungary. Authors using this channel either quote Hungarian professionals or writings published in Hungarian periodicals.

3) *Romanian-language import* covers the writings of Romanian authors that are more or less regularly published in the Hungarian-language press. This dimension represents a kind of cross-communication between the Hungarian-language and Romanian-language public discourse, but we can establish that the interpretations of civil society are naturally different in the two. While the concept in Hungarian is often used to capture the peculiarities of minority existence only, in the case of Romanian authors, in addition to an imbeddedness in the Central European environment, there is a recurrent, parallel thought of emphatic denial of the existence or the possibilities of development of civil society.

In the Hungarian-language media, three phases of development can be identified around this concept.

1) The phase of discovering civil society laden with doubts: a period characteristic of the early 1990s. The main questions of the period included whether any civil society-like developments survived the years of dictatorship and how these could be animated after the turn of 1989. A recurrent thought of this period was that only a "turn in civil society" could contribute to the creation of pluralistic structures, but this was a mere illusion in Romania.

2) The phase of the intention of clarifying the concept of civil society – a period between 1991 and 1995 when numerous essays dealt with the actual

'NGOs' or 'civic society' would help us more in our work." See D. Lőrincz, József: "A civil társadalom fogalma" (*The concept of civil society*). *Regio*, 1998. No. 3., 104. This remark indicates not only the approaching end of the use of civil society as a political slogan, but also its fading away from theory. In the second half of the 1990s, we should abandon the Great Idea of civil society and perhaps its is more reasonable for us to turn our attention to localities and existing institutions, in brief, to " what we have".

definition of the concept. In these writings we can find a growing number of references to Central European theoreticians or to other fundamental books in interpreting the concept. In addition to the intention of definition, an often emerging question concerned whether or not there existed a civil society in that period, and if it did where it could be found; if it did not, what were the factors that hindered its (re-)building.

3) The phase of operationalisation of civil society and its shrinking into a partial topic: from the end of 1995, the concept appeared only in applications. Its concrete manifestations became the subject of sociological analysis. Parallel to this, the "existence" question (i.e. if civil society exists or not) fell into the background. The concept appears as a condition of development of democratic structures and its use is often narrowed down to indicate a self-organising local society.

2.2 Ideas about civil society in Romanian-language publications

After the events of December 1989, the Romania press witnessed a "boom" at least in two senses of the word. On the one hand, earlier ideological limits ceased to exist and thus the choice of content of newspapers and periodicals became richer and subtler, and on the other, it became possible to launch new publications. The Romanian-language print media investigated by our essay is represented without exception by periodicals that came into being after December 1989 upon the initiatives of the Romanian intellectual elite. Therefore it is not surprising that the concept and interpretation of civil society is much more homogenous in the Romanian-language public discourse than in the Hungarian-language one.

Before examining in detail this converging development of the concept, we must note that we can also find exceptions. Civil society was a complete "newcomer" in the space of Romanian intellectual awareness, therefore it is understandable that at the time of its emergence we can find conceptualisations that show little resemblance to the Central European notion of the concept. Here is a characteristic example: in one of the 1991 issues of the (re-)started sociological periodical of the Academy (*Sociologie Româneasca*) there is an article on the "civil and political society of the Romanian transition"[55] which is a good demonstration of the intention of joining the discourse on civil society. Although this discourse, as we will soon see in

---

55 Hoffman, Oscar: "Societatea civilă și cea politică în procesul tranziției în România". *Sociologie Românească*, 1991, No. 3–4., 137–146.

detail, already started at the beginning of 1990, this essay in 1991 wished to join the main line of the discourse without knowledge of the "professional canon" and without the elimination of certain attitudes characteristic of the previous decades. This intention resulted in the dry gobbledygook characteristic of the earlier propagandistic texts (with long and repeated sentence-monsters) and in conceptual inaccuracy. The author theoretically separates civil and political society: the two concepts are located along the imaginary political and non-political axes and mutually assume one another, i.e. civil society exists only relative to political society. In the author's view, political society is provided by organisations, institutions, movements (!), social relations and norms serving the existence and the operation of power (the state), while civil society refers to the economic, professional, family, household and humanitarian sphere. Political and civil societies did not exist in the years of dictatorship, because "totalitarianism not only forces civil society into hidden[56] dimensions outside the scope of the control and the presence of the state (...), but by creating so-called parallel societies it also destroys the political society".[57] Hoffman also claims that the state has a double function: a power and a civil function. Through its second function, political society contributes to the strengthening of civil society. From these thoughts it turns out that the author does not use the concept of civil society in the "Central European" sense. It is beyond doubt that civil society has a great number of links to political society, but the generation of civil society by political society carries with it the danger of the colonisation of civil society and the exaggerated appreciation of state control. As described earlier, until the mid-1990s, there had been a strong faith in civil society as a construction built on grass-root initiatives. This author, however, totally neglected this element.

After this detour, let us follow the main stations of the development of the concept (and praxis) of civil society in the Romanian "mainstream". The first issue of the weekly *22*, published by the Social Dialogue Group (Grupul pentru Dialog Social – GDS), came out on 20 January 1990. This first issue published a declaration of intent by the members of the group in which they confirmed that they represented the clean conscience of a society which had been humiliated and shaken. The group wished to find answers to the fundamental problems of Romanian civil society and be an open forum of debate

---

56 The author uses the word hidden in the Heideggerian sense: the lack of freedom means living in hiding.

57 Hoffman, op. cit., 142.

composed of intellectuals and the representatives of different professions.[58]
During the previous decade the group proved its coherent commitment to
its intents by organising debates not only on issues of actual politics but on
topics that had earlier been considered as taboo in Romanian society and pub-
lic life (i.e. using the mother tongue in the education of national minorities,
the concept of autonomy, the situation of women, homosexuality, etc.).

In September 1990, another group of intellectuals established the Civic
Alliance (Alianta Civica). In their declaration of intent they pointed out that
following Polish and Czechoslovak examples, the Alliance wished to repre-
sent an active and responsible part of society and with their activity they
aimed to lay the foundations for civil society and a civil mentality so far un-
known to Romanians.[59] Almost one year later, a part of the original member-
ship left the Alliance and, in order to rise above the level of street demonstra-
tions and to promote a different kind of civil policy making, they established
the Party of Civic Alliance (Partidul Aliantei Civice – PAC).[60] In order to clar-
ify its doctrine, the party organised a round-table discussion in Temesvár in
December 1992. On this occasion, the political science-oriented periodical
Sfera Politicii (initially published both in Romanian and English) was
launched. The introductory editorial establishes that "the fall of commu-
nism caused millions of people to return to history and parallel to this they
re-discovered public life, civil society and also politics. (...) The aim of this
publication is to develop a form of political culture first within the Romanian
political class and then also outside it." However, the editors were aware of
the difficulties of implementing this aim: "Naturally, we have enough sense
of humour to understand that we will have very limited success".[61]

The appearance and survival of the idea of civil society in the Romanian
media were and are still provided by the forums briefly described above. The
weekly *22* initially published a number of theoretical writings and later it
mainly concentrated on analyses of issues of actual politics. The "Central Eu-

---

58 For the full text of the declaration of intent see: "Declaraţia de constituire a GDS". *22*,
    1990, No. 1.
59 Issue 1990, No. 44. of the weekly *22* gives a detailed account of the foundation and aims
    of the Civic Alliance.
60 We can read more details about the creation of the party, its successes in the local and
    national elections in 1992 and the internal conflicts following the elections in the essay of
    Liana Ionescu: Ionescu, Liana: "Partidul Alianţei Civice". *Sfera Politicii*, 1994, No. 16.,
    8–9.
61 *Sfera Politicii*, 1992, No. 1.

ropean " character of the concept of civil society is largely thanks to Vladimir Tismaneanu, a political scientist of Romanian origin. He is permanently present in the Romanian public awareness, not only through his books but also through his various essays. One of his important writings, which is relevant from the point of view of our theme, was published in the November 1991 issue of *22*.[62] Since the author can be considered as a part of the "canon" of the discourse on civil society, it is not surprising that his findings and the authors quoted by him are in harmony with the versions of the concept developed during the past two to three decades. He also holds the view that "the simplest way to define civil society is as a collective challenge based on *grass-root initiatives* against the post-totalitarian system, as a growing self-awareness of deep social strata oppressed for long years by a bureaucratic-autocratic state machinery".[63] The author analyses the transitions of the East European countries through the prism of civil society[64] and quotes Miklós Haraszti's conception concerning the disintegration of the communist systems. According to Haraszti, this disintegration takes place in three phases: the first is the post-Stalinist phase when oppression is adjusted to the "necessary" level; the second is the post-totalitarian phase when civil society actually emerges; the third is the post-communist phase in which the party-state disintegrates and a multi-party system develops. However, this model is not valid for Romania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, because in these countries the development of civil society and the transition into a multi-party system happened simultaneously.

Therefore, the transition here is accompanied with many more "shocks" than in the other countries of the region. In Tismaneanu's perception: "looking at it from a historical perspective, civil society has developed in Central Europe rather than in Southeastern Europe" and that certain analysts "even doubt that democracy is possible at all in Orthodox countries".

Sfera Politicii, which first appeared at the end of 1992, launched a real campaign to clarify the concept of civil society. In its first issue already mentioned above, there is an essay devoted to the relationship between civil society and

---

62 Tismăneanu, Vladimir: "Societatea civilă, pluralism și viitorul Europei Centrale și de Est". *22*, 1991, No. 46, 47. (In Hungarian: "Civil társadalom, pluralizmus és Közép-Kelet-Európa jövője" (*Civil society, pluralism and the future of East-Central Europe*). *A Hét*, 1991, No. 51.

63 Quotations are from the Hungarian version published in *A Hét*.

64 Here we will not elaborate on this, since we have already done so in relation to his book already quoted. See Tismăneanu, Vladimir: *Reinventarea politicului. Europa Răsăriteană de la Stalin la Havel*. Iași: Polirom, 1997.

political parties.[65] The author claims that by creating movements outside parliament, political parties obtain a higher level of legitimacy, which assumes the existence of a civil society. For this very reason, political parties acting as mediators between the state and society or the people and the state need to have social roots, i.e. they should not be totally integrated into the state sphere. In Voicu's view, civil society appears as the social base of political parties: politics can gather strength, information, legitimacy from here; civil society can relay issues to the state without neutralising its movement character, i.e. staying away from the state sphere. We can accept this train of thought, but it remains a question under Romanian conditions what "resources" make civil society live, how it is created and how it can provide the political parties with information (especially, if it has not yet been created at all). If political parties create civil society, will it then be really civil or will this rather be the expropriation of the idea of civil society? The author did not answer questions of this type, although Romanian examples could have been employed to consider these problems. Was the 1990 and 1992 election success of the National Salvation Front, which was created after December 1989, not attributable to the fact that it practically "loomed over" a largely underinformed people having hardly any knowledge about multi-party systems and being familiar only with authoritarian behaviour, and that it expropriated civil society and subdued its development? (In an earlier section of our essay we have pointed out that similar structural elements can also be identified in relation to the DAHR).

The next issue included an essay of Adam Michnik written in 1976 on a new kind of evolutionism[66] to which an introduction was written by Calin Anastasiu with the title *Civil society v. state.*[67] In interpreting Michnik's thoughts on the importance of the strategy of an autonomous and mobilisable civil society, the Romanian sociologist bitterly remarks that the reason why it is not possible to speak of a transition based on negotiations in Romania is that such a strategy never existed. In an other issue of the periodical, Anastasiu further analyses the Romanian connection between civil society in the Central European sense and political institutions.[68] In his view, in

---

65 Voicu, George: "Societatea civilă și partidele politice". *Sfera Politicii*, 1992, No. 1., 4.

66 Michnik, Adam: "Un nou evoluționism". *Sfera Politicii*, 1993, No. 2., 23–25.

67 Anastasiu, Călin: "Societate civilă vs. stat". *Sfera Politicii*, 1993, No. 2., 23.

68 Anastasiu, Călin: "Societatea civilă și instituțiile politice". *Sfera Politicii*, 1993, No. 4., 12–13.

a post-communist context, civil society cannot be the only condition of democratisation. The author mainly emphasises the responsibility of the new political class, because the everyday implementation of changing society is the task of politicians. They have to have a vision about society, which then can be implemented through the legislature. Perhaps we may venture to say that the source of this argumentation is the fact that in Romania the emergence of structures resembling civil society was much more subdued than in the other ex-communist countries. Although Romanian intellectuals already knew the theoretical and practical attempts at implementing civil society in other countries in the early 1990s, as soon as they refer to such initiatives in Romania, they become inauthentic. It is therefore understandable that in the political-social transition, with the lack of grass-roots initiatives, a greater responsibility was attributed to the political sphere.

The question also emerged in the Romanian media as to whether civil society exists in rural or in urban areas? In the history of Romanian ideology, the village always had a mythical, redeeming character ("eternity was born in the village"),[69] because the majority of the country's population lived in villages. As emphatically opposed to the Romania choosing and accepting modernisation, rural Romania always survived. Therefore the question is what chances civil society has in Romania, which is still considered rural today, and whether civil society can exist at all in the villages. David A. Kideckel gives a witty answer to this question by saying that Romanian village society was stillborn, because the earlier family-centredness and political indifference still live on. This means that the scope of responsibility of the rural population does not extend beyond the family and household relations, as during the Ceausescu regime, and even after 1990 a certain kind of reservation lingered on in relation to politics.[70] The anthropologist Vintila Mihailescu adds that we can encounter a kind of tribal submission, a mentality of subordination (*mentalitate tribuala*) in the Romanian rural environment, which is characterised by a fear of change and a readiness for compromise with whoever is in power.[71] Handling this mentality thematically, moves the issue of civil soci-

---

69 Perhaps this common saying is paraphrased by the title of one of the articles by Ghiță Ionescu: Civil society exists only in the city. Ionescu, Ghiță: "Societatea civilă este numai la oraș". *Expres*, 1993, No. 20.

70 Kideckel, David A.: "Populația rurală și autoritatea în noua Românie". *Sfera Politicii*, 1993, No. 6., 3–5.

71 We can also read about this in Hungarian. In issue 1993, No. 3. of *Antropológia Műhely* of Csíkszereda and later on in the periodical 2000 published in Hungary, a relevant essay

ety away from the rural-urban context. Claude Karnooh, the famous French anthropologist, points out in an interview that the archaic mentality among Romanians is not only present in the rural population but also exists in the urban environment.[72] The masses of people who were forced to move from villages to cities due to forced industrialisation under the communist regime lost their roots and identity. Furthermore, rural attitudes can also be witnessed in the peak of the country's leadership: "there has always been something peasant-like in the leadership of the country".[73]

The data of a sociological survey conducted between 1990 and 1991 and published in 1993 give us a more detailed picture of the mental stereotypes and attitudes of post-totalitarian Romanian society.[74] According to the findings of the research, the following ten major attitudes are characteristic of Romania: 1) hostile feelings towards foreigners, i.e. the belief that Romanians have a difficult life because foreign forces are working against them; 2) a great confidence in official news channels; 3) a reduction of political action to the verbal level; 4) refraining from actual political activity; 5) an erroneous perception of the political spectrum (in not being able to distinguish between right-wing and left-wing political parties); 6) a belief in the provision of social equality; 7) a fear of social conflicts; 8) a lack of confidence in the market economy and fundamental social reforms; 9) a need for a paternalistic state; 10) a lack of confidence in social institutions, especially new political institutions. The results of this survey are echoed in other essays written later. Stelian Tanase, for example, speaks of three basic political cultures prevailing in Romanian society in the middle of the decade: firstly, there exists an autochthonous-traditional culture; secondly, we can find a statist culture;

---

appeared by Mihailescu. The Romanian anthropologist points out: "We must squeeze out our rights, everybody his or her own rights and jointly the rights of the community, from 'this other' who has the power and who is the power himself. The period of tranquillity is the one in which these bargainings preserve their status quo. Things, of course, are much more complicated, however, subordination mechanisms were more or less regenerated during the time of the several millennium-long foreign occupation and of domestic rule creating a real political habit and this is what we dared to call tribal submission or mentality of subordination." See Mihăilescu, Vintila: Hol vannak a régi barbárok? (*Where are the old barbarians?*). *2000*, 1994, No. 7, 14.

72 Karnooh, Claude: "Ar trebui reconstruite elitele rurale – interviu cu Claude Karnooh". *Sfera Politicii*, 1994, No. 15.

73 Karnooh, Claude: *Românii – tipologie și mentalități.* București: Humanitas, 1994, 25.

74 Mihăilescu, Ioan: "Stereotipuri mentale și atitudinale în România posttotalitară". *Sfera Politicii*, 1993, No. 7., 22–23.

thirdly, we can also identify a kind of liberal political culture.[75] According to Tanase, both in public awareness and in actual political practice the first two cultures dominate.

Is there or can there be any sense in speaking of civil society under such "basic conditions"? If we use any definition of civil society, it would become clear that with such attitudes it would be an unfounded pretension to speak of the development of civil society. It is not a mere chance that in *Polis,* a new periodical of political science launched in 1994, the idea of civil society only appeared as a utopian dream. A relevant writing gives a detailed analysis of the external and internal reasons of the "morbid mentality"[76] hindering the creation of civil society.[77] According to the author, the external reasons of the development of civil society in Romania include the rural character of the society, a strong participation of the state in social life and the vestiges of communist-type propaganda and system of education. The internal reasons embracing the mental stereotypes of the "mass" include a paternalistic, autocratic attitude, a passivity accompanied with the rejection of conflicts, an inaptitude in social participation and finally, a tendency to "magical thinking", which can be described as a kind of primitivism.[78]

From this perhaps it has already become clear what was also stated at the beginning of this section: the idea of civil society was gradually constructed in Romanian public awareness by taking the peculiarities of the actual environment into account. Civil society here, too, was a political slogan or a redeeming concept in the beginning, but Romanian intellectuals soon recognised that all that resulted from a successful transition in other Central European countries could not happen in a similar way in Romania. As in the Hungarian-language public discourses, we encounter a form of pragmatic pessimism.

Examples of the organic construction of the concept, of turning the attention to what "we have", include the essay by József D. Lőrincz published

75 Tănase, Stelian: "Trei culturi". *Sfera Politicii*, 1995, No. 28.

76 This expression was already used in the editorial of the already quoted paper *22* in its 1990, No. 1. issue.

77 Ștefan-Scalat, Laurențiu: "Societatea civilă românească – o utopie? "Popor" și elite intelectuale la începutul anilor '90". *Polis*, 1995, No. 4., 161–182.

78 It is to be noted that the author mainly relies on the book by Alina Mungiu. See Mungiu, Alina: *Românii după '89 – istoria unei neînțelegeri*. București: Humanitas, 1994.

in Romanian[79] and the essay by Toma   Mastnak,[80] which deals with the path of Slovenian civil society from opposition to power.

As a result of the 1996 parliamentary elections, the former opposition got into power. Many celebrated this as the victory of civil society or as the victory of "us" over "them", or as an implementation of consensus between "us" and "them", which seemed impossible earlier.[81] This euphoria, however, did not last long since it turned out that the politicians of "our" side were still politicians, that is they could err just like their predecessors. In fact, the proximity of the intellectual elite to the power establishment brought into the focus of attention the attitude of superiority of this social stratum.[82] Scandals around the new Romanian government generated a kind of neo-pessimism in the discourse on civil society, because these events triggered off a "separation of civil society from political parties". Civil society experienced a growing difficulty in understanding the stakes of the conflicts between the parties in the government coalition, and therefore started to fabricate conspiracy theories and explained the visible with something invisible,[83] whereas the parties in power started to treat civil society as a subordinate actor in need of instruction.[84] This new kind of disillusionment was simply called neo-pessimism, the justification of which we do not wish to challenge, but an important element of the argumentation must be pointed out. The ar-

---

79 D. Lőrincz in this essay gives an account of the debate which developed around the representation of minorities and more or less was published in the Hungarian-language media as well (we discussed it in the previous section of our essay): who can represent the Hungarian minority and those who represent it along what line of ideology construct their legitimacy? Is the Hungarian minority to be imagined as a unity or should the existence of pluralistic values be recognised? The debate naturally led to the questions of whether civil society survived more in the rural or urban environment and how civil society-like constructs can be animated or generated. Finally, the author remarks that the commitment of a minority ethnic party to liberal values is not a choice of ideology, but a direct consequence of the minority situation. See D. Lőrincz, József: "Construirea societății civile: pe baze naționale sau științifice – o polemică în cultura maghiară din România". *Polis*, 1994, No. 1., 123-131.

80 Mastnak, Tomaz: "Societatea civilă în Slovenia: de la opoziție la putere". *Polis*, 1994, No. 1., 102–115.

81 The antagonism between "us" and "them" also surfaced in the election campaign of 1992. For the strategy of discourse used in this campaign, see the essay Beciu, Camelia: "Reconstructia discursivă a campaniei electorale din România '92. Discursul presei". *Revista de cercetări sociale*, 1995, No. 4., 48–71.

82 Adameșteanu, Gabriela: "O trăsătura ne-europeană". *22*, 1996, No. 49.

83 Patapievici, Horia-Roman: "În căutarea motivelor crizei". *22*, 1998, No. 5.

84 Patapievici, Horia-Roman: "Partidele și societatea: un divorț". *22*, 1998, No. 7.

gumentation fully ignores the fact that a kind of civic culture is a significant accompanying feature of civil society. Here (and elsewhere in *22*) references to civil society have an emphatically intellectual character (with frequent phrases like "we, the civil society") implying that civil society means intellectuals with a Western orientation and the institutions created by them.

This emphatically intellectual character was also underlined by the Western experts of civil society of the 1990s. A comparative survey on the processes of democratisation in Central and East European countries presents two features in relation to Romania: the weakness of civil society and its intellectual character.[85] Paradoxically, in the long run, it is imaginable that this neo-pessimism and the solitude of civil society may even bear fruits. The underlined intellectual character may lose ground and political disillusionment may release an organising potential directed towards the real society. Some signs of this can be identified in relation to political events. At the time of the violent demonstration of miners transported to Bucharest in 1999, huge rallies and demonstrations were organised against the miners' coming to the capital. With regards to these demonstrations, Stelian Tanase claimed in an interview that the whole history of Romanian civil society could be divided into two periods, the one before and the one after the demonstrations in the capital, because the demonstrations were not directed against the power elite, but took place in defence of certain abstract values: the legitimacy of power and the idea of a state governed by the rule of law.[86]

In the Romanian discourse on civil society, willingness to institutionalisation can be observed together with the launching of relevant empirical research. A regular column appears in *Sfera Politicii* with the title *"Civil society"*, in which partial issues (relative to the idea of civil society) are discussed, such as the development of a stable democracy[87], the crisis of the Romanian university sphere[88] or the relation of intellectuals to politics.[89] In the periodical we can still find theoretical writings wishing to clarify the concept of civil society that revive the Central European concept of civil society already de-

85 Kaldor, Mary: Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe. 1999 ......

86 Tănase, Stelian: "În Europa de Est democrația nu este un proces ireversibil. Interviu realizat de Raluca Mărculescu". *22*, 1999, No. 9., 12–13.

87 Aranyosi, István Albert: "Drumul către democrația stabilă". *Sfera Politicii*, 1997, No. 53., 32–34.

88 Leahu: "Criza universității românești". *Sfera Politicii*, 1998, No. 56., 16–18.

89 Mungiu-Pippidi, Alina: "Intelectuali ca actori politici în Europa de Est – cazul României". *Sfera Politicii*, 1997, No. 52., 53.

scribed from several aspects in our essay[90] or analysing the possibilities of development of civil society in Romania. A relevant writing published in 1999 points out that civil society played no role whatsoever in the democratisation of the political system in Romania. It will only be able to play such a role if, within civil society, the "civic" element prevails, because a good portion of civil organisations created after 1989 not only failed to represent civic values, but were quite frequently downright anti-democratic.[91] The Romanian application of the idea described in our introductory section that not all NGOs are necessarily a part of civil society emerges here (see footnote 2).

The empirical turn that took place in Hungarian-language publications at the end of 1995 (the concrete sociological examination of civil society or organisations) can be located in the Romanian-language equivalent around 1997. Two issues of *Sfera Politicii* published reports made on the basis of empirical research. One examines the support of the non-profit sector by the population[92]. According to data about 10% of the country's population (about 1.8 million persons) were founding members of some organisation between 1989 and 1996, and 200,000 (overwhelmingly male) persons were directly involved in the creation of an NGO. It is an interesting fact, however, that the majority of persons supporting NGOs (financially and in other ways) are married women between 30 and 35 having elementary or secondary school education. Saulean finally remarks that the support of the non-profit sector shows a close correlation with the traditional mentality prevailing in Romanian society and with the economic situation. The other essay based on empirical research deals with attitudes towards the willingness to form associations.[93] According to the findings of the author, members of organisations underline the importance of government factors in addition to individual life strategies, while persons not in civil organisations (NGOs) paradoxically are for a minimum state, because they do not believe in comprehensive care exercised by the state. Though not explicitly stated by the author, who is a Romanian sociologist, this paradoxical situation indicates that

---

90 Lăzăroiu, Andra: "De la *etos* la *telos*". *Sfera Politicii*, 1997, No. 55., 40–43. and Mateescu, Oana: "Societatea civilă – o validare relativă?" *Sfera Politicii*, 1999, No. 68., 61-62.
91 Grecu, Răzvan: "Societatea civilă și democratizarea politică". *Sfera Politicii*, 1999, No. 73., 74., 33–37.
92 Șăulean, Daniel: "Susținerea de către populație a sectorului nonprofit". *Sfera Politicii*, 1997, No. 46., 20-24.
93 Șăulean, Daniel: "Filantropie și asociaționalism la români". *Sfera Politicii*, 1997, No. 51., 25–31.

NGOs are created in Romania for the very reason of formally obtaining individual advantages and even the assistance of the government in this is an expectation.[94]

In this section we have already mentioned several times that in the Romanian public discourse the development of the idea of civil society adopted a pragmatic approach. Although not a subject of our essay in a narrower sense, the discussion of civil society in alternative textbooks published in 1999 also belongs here. The definitions of civil society in these books mainly emphasise the protection of human rights and the importance of free associations and initiatives. The intellectual overtones of the definition of civil society can also be witnessed in these textbooks, because only certain well-known human rights organisations are mentioned. While in the Romanian publications the idea of civil society goes hand in hand with the idea of being Central European, this dimension is completely missing from these textbooks.[95] Treating civil society as a necessary condition for the transition into democratic social structures can be obviously interpreted as an initial positive feature. Thus, anchoring this mainly intellectual discourse (re-)discovered in the early 1990s at secondary school level may perhaps result in changes of mentality in the medium run.

In summary, we can say that the concept of civil society entered Romanian public discourse with the emphatic support of Central European authors. Initially, there were some conceptual "shots in the dark", but the mainstream of the discourse is still identifiable and is based on the works of mainly Central European authors who, with justification, can be regarded as a part of the canon of civil society (Havel, Michnik, Kuron, Konrád, Kolakowski, Haraszti, Gellner, etc.). Perhaps it is attributable to the attempts at total oppression of the Ceausescu dictatorship that the idea of civil society suddenly started to flourish in the Romanian media after 1989. The Romanian intellectual elite, however, continually controlled this intensity, thus the discourse could not penetrate into society, not even at the level of conceptual approximations. The direct consequence of this process is the weakness of civil society and its emphatically intellectual character.

---

94 If we accept the "state in the state" status of the DAHR, this motif is perhaps also valid for the Hungarian minority.

95 The authors of the text-books and a different approach to the topic can be found in one of the articles by Gabriel Andreescu. See Andreescu, Gabriel: "Rezistența, drepturile omului și soceietatea civilă în manualele de istorie de clasa a XII-a.", *22*, 1999. No. 42., 8.

Also in this discourse, the rural/urban contrast emerged, but it intertwined with analysis of the peculiarities of the Romanian mentality. The majority of authors emphasised the traditional, rural, authoritarian nature of the Romanian mentality, which has the tendency of accepting totalitarianism and a need for paternalism. Here the question emerged if it was possible at all to speak of the building of civil society. The idea of civil society in Romanian public awareness is emphatically associated with the protection of human rights and the idea of the state governed by the rule of law, which requires an intense attention to politics. (It is not by chance that in relation to political events we can often read communiqués phrased on behalf of civil society.) We can date the empirical turn in the examination of civil society to 1997. However, this pragmatic examination did not block the intention to clarify the concept itself. We can regard the regular discussion of the theme in professional periodicals, its appearance in secondary school text-books and the creation of periodicals, publications and forums dealing with this theme[96], and last but not least the registration of nearly 10,000 NGOs,[97] as a "reification" of civil society.

3. Comparative summary

The idea of civil society in Hungarian-language publications of Romania relies on several sources. Publications from Hungary play a significant role in developing the concept. Naturally, this introduces a certain type of "Central European" approach. Yet, the idea of being Central European appears in a more unified way in the Romanian public awareness and beyond its emphatically intellectual character it mainly comprises the protection of human rights and the idea of a state governed by the rule of law. In the Hungarian public awareness in Romania, the dimension of autochthonous interpretations gained more ground, therefore the concept often simply refers to the Hungarian minority or the Hungarian community. Both Hungarian and Romanian public awareness deal with the significance of civil society from the point of view of creating democratic social structures, as well as the im-

---

96 See, for example, the interactive weekly *Voluntar* which publishes the most important news about the non-profit sector or the home page of the ACCES information centre (both are accessible via the internet at http//www.fdsc.ro/ACCES).

97 This data appears in the school text-book by Ioan Scurtu and his team: Scurtu, Ioan et al.: *Istoria românilor din cele mai vechi timpuri pâna astăzi. Manual pentru clasa a XII-a*. București: Petrion, 1999.

possibility or Utopian character of the creation of civil society. There is a slight difference in the attitudes towards the latter idea. In the Hungarian-language press the recognition of this impossibility surfaced sooner than in the Romanian-language media, and the theory of the "animation of civil society" was immediately associated with it.

In Romanian public awareness, pessimism in relation to civil society was maturing gradually, which was mainly explained by the surviving rurality of Romanian society and the mentality which goes with it and which feeds it. In the Hungarian press, the village often appeared as the "hotbed" of civil society. The accumulation of pessimism in the Romanian press was broken by the 1996 election results, but after a short period of euphoria, the phenomenon called by us neo-pessimism prevailed again. The representation of civil society in the Romanian media, as seen above, is much more connected to politics than that of the Hungarian-language press. The interest-representing organisation of the Hungarian minority in Romania is also considered in relation to civil society, but actual political events do not influence reflections on the development and opportunities of civil society. A similarity at the level of the use of the concept is the use of the first person plural in both languages. However, this strategy of discourse in Hungarian indicates a unified minority- (or people- or civil society-) image of the cultural and political elite, whereas in Romanian as a counter-image of *we* there are always *they*, those in the world of power. In other words, civil society in Hungarian is phrased *for* someone or something, while in Romanian it is formulated *against* something.

In both languages of the discourse we have identified an empirical turn, the beginning of the period of the operationalisation of civil society. Besides time differences, it is an essential distinction that while Romanian research targeted the "world of associations" and examined relevant attitudes, the Hungarian studies examined institutions considered as part of the civil sphere. Naturally, it is not possible to draw far-reaching conclusions from the two research efforts, though we may still venture to say that the Romanians wanted to know "what is behind that what we have or could have", whereas the Hungarians wanted to enumerate "what we have", in other words, the community. Perhaps these operationalisations also echo the occasionally language-dependent interpretations of civil society (that is in Hungarian it is often used to mean the minority community only).