

NGOs as Instrument of Democracy

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Abstract

The idea of constitutional democracy primarily involves freedom of dialogue between the power or its representatives and the civilians, the citizens expressing the reality of the political events in a state of law. From another perspective, the constitutional democracy may suggest a form of power manipulation in the interest of citizens, by means of nongovernmental bodies or other various forms, such as media or other entities that can act as "characters" having a contribution to the flexibility of the state government. What is new in the contemporary society is not the existence of the pressure groups, but the significance of these groups, their representatives, and the dominance formula in the public life.

Keywords: non-profit organizations, democracy, civil society.

Introduction

Starting from the idea that people consist of various social and interests group formed based on material, cultural, professional and economic grounds, we admit that these entities play their own role in the political life, not only of a state, but they are spread over large areas. Designed and structured differently, regardless of their organization, the group interest always won in the political life, affecting both the legislative and the executive bodies. Since pluralistic democracy requires pluralistic information, knowledge limits power.

NGOs aim is to sense a deliberate disruption of the normal flow of legislation through an abuse or through the indifference of public authority bodies, at the expense of group interests, in order to meet their benefits. Therefore, "the theme" of NGOs is quite varied, and the main form of appeal is the mass media.

Starting from this premise, in a democratic society the role of these organizations is important and their activity intensifies the political participation to governing. In the phases of initiative of the contemporary democracy, the NGO was considered an important tool for the development of social economic reform, having the quality of an attorney for the public (Ewa Les, 1996).

The NGOs, as private institutionalized structures, can act either as informal groups or as legal person, being independent of any public authority. While not seeking any access to political power, nor making profit, the NGOs are a flexible tool in handling the civil society towards addressing some issues to the public, in order to lead to clear and accurate information of the citizens (Lester Salomon, 1992).

The frantic participation to national and international political events, and the quality of information of the civil society, in particular situations or facts, entitle these organizations the right to intervene or to bring forward a certain decision signaled indirectly by civil society.

2. The criteria for identification of the NGOs

To consider themselves indirectly a political power, the NGOs function as structured entities. They can prove a certain institutionalized organizational structure, feature internal mechanisms of decision, create, and respect their operating rules and procedures in their activity. Most often, these institutions operate as legal entities, but their operation is possible without having legal status. One of the key elements is that the NGOs should be private, meaning that they are separate institutions from the public authorities, which does not exclude the public funding, since they are based on free enterprise.

They are bodies based on the ground of non-distribution of the profit, they can generate revenue, respectively get "profit" from their activities, which cannot be distributed to its members, but only used to achieve the stated objectives. They are able to self-govern and have the ability to take decisions on the internal work or establish relationships with other institutions independently. Furthermore, public authorities do not dominate their management structures. Their actions are generally based on voluntary activities, which does not exclude hiring staff. The main identifier, and thus, the sure influence of these organizations in the political game of democracy is that they serve public purposes or contribute to the public welfare and the good of civil society.

3. The NGO the fifth power or the power of the powerless

The role of the NGOs in solving some international economic and social problems has shown that these non-profit bodies are widely involved in "directing" the democratic life in the civil society. Recent studies have classified non-profit organizations as among the top five decision-making powers of the civil society. Their influence and activity regarding certain commercial products through product or manufacturing companies boycott on the commercial market, has showed that public opinion in the civil society can be influenced and manipulated in the desired direction.

It is known that most Americans and Europeans say they are willing to buy and even pay more for the products that are manufactured in a "socially responsible" manner. In addition, a third of the Americans and a half of the Europeans try to avoid buying certain product brands of companies that are boycotted by the NGOs.

Actually, there are known measures that allow the business environment to have a better relationship with these non-profit organizations, thus correlation leading to economic development are sought and desired. The solution can also apply usefully to government institutions.

One of the major policies permits famous corporations turn to NGOs to promote and support opinions as to increase economic activity in underdeveloped states, which is achieved through the activity of local NGOs. We can appreciate that, compared to the governmental institutions, the NGOs actually play the role of pressure groups, meant to create an action tool on the power, composed of representatives of the group that use the latent strength of the whole group to determine a specific reaction of the power (Dan Claudiu Dănișor, 2007). These pressure tools are named lobby.

What is new in the contemporary society is not the existence of pressure groups, but the significance of these groups and the meaning of their existence. If, during the past, the interests were grouped and formalized to represent a barrier in front of the public authorities, today, in a certain way, they represent the power itself. The public power often describes the procedural route to be followed. The pressure group, regardless of its structure, is the one that describes the public decision. It actually exercises a power of fact in the framework described by the power of right (A. Mathiot, 1952).

The Romanian non-profit sector is still struggling for affirmation and it does not have the size and the strength as in the western states. The voice of the Romanian public opinion is quite shy, and the civil society does not find the decision position for social and political events. Romanians do not have yet the social activism that characterizes the western states, the social awareness raised by NGOs is weaker. Another trend that we have noticed is that the public relations practitioners fail to advise the managers or the prospective representatives of power during the elections to seek correlations with non-profit organizations.

Civil society in Romania is limited to information, a feature of NGOs, but fails to move to the next stage of action, subsequent to information. The involvement of the NGOs in the civil society's development would create substantial steps towards supporting the economic and social activities of the local community. To demonstrate the social responsibility by facilitating the NGOs as a source of information on the needs and concerns of the community lead to the creation of a democratic climate between the government and the civil society. Due to the strong impact of the NGOs on the public opinion, companies, commercial agents, and even governments perceive them as potential adversaries either on environmental issues, social and child protection or even on human rights. In this respect, the NGOs have indirectly the quality of justice. The perseverance of information of the public opinion may bring forward or influence certain social or economic measures of the competent authorities.

We can mention here the actions of the non-governmental organizations "Alburnul Maior" and Asociatia Aurarilor that initiated an incisive campaign regarding the issue of Rosia Montana. The contract stipulates that the Romanian state give exploitation rights of this Romanian gold mine to a Western mining company at the cost of the local community. The actions of the non-governmental body led to the suspension of the project execution and initiated its revaluation, the main argument regarding the ecological calamity caused by the gold extraction.

Such actions should be more prominent in the civil society in order to attract audiences in the dialogue between the decision and the competence factors. It is necessary that NGOs signals trigger both attitudinal and behavioral reactions. Although still in its early stages, the Romanian society must prepare for initiating a dialogue between the authority, the legislative and executive competence, and the community, the civil society that will benefit from the measures implemented by the political power. The value of measures will be assessed based on the dialogue between the public opinion and the political power.

4. The civil society and the NGOs in democracy

In common language, the civil society is a group of people linked by social, commercial, and production reports (Dictionary of the Romanian Language, 2000). In the politic dictionary, Tamas Sergiu states, "the formation of the civil society is the result of a spontaneous and creative movement of the citizens who voluntarily establish various forms of political, economic, and cultural association. The citizens of a civil society enter a network of social relationships, voluntarily participating in the activity of a multiplicity of associations and organizations (...)"(Sergiu Tamas, 1993). The civil society organizations are autonomous and in constant relation with the state, representing a variety of power centers. From another point of view, we can affirm the existence of a non-state.

A real democratic society needs time and a functioning democracy is achieved when the state has the necessary tools needed to exercise it. In this context, the civil society acts as a regulating mechanism to the exercise power. The existence of non-governmental organizations in the countries with older democracies, as well as in the countries with a fragile democracy, prove that the civil society needs tools or mechanisms to correct not only the attitude of some politicians who fail to properly exercise the power, but also the participation in classifying decisions taken against the community.

The civil society's reactions to the administrative or social policies that run counter to the interests of the local community appear as media campaigns or protest messages. Since such policies are short-term compared to the state institutional bodies, the appearance of non-profit organizations such as associations, NGOs, professional associations, unions is necessary, in order to maintain democracy. The civil society, through these bodies, is directly involved in the state governance, in the implementation of some measures regarding the economic and social development, and social protection (A. Popescu, I. Diaconu, 2009). The collaboration of the two entities, one of the state authorities - institutionalized state bodies such as parliament, government, local and central authorities, and non-profit organizations like NGOs consolidate the democracy development.

5. Conclusions

The role of NGOs, in general, is to represent the interests of all of their members to participate to the process of public decision-making and contribute to it by their knowledge (know-how), consultations, and recommendations. Their actions must remain subordinate to general interest, for the equitable benefit of all members, and even of those of the same condition that are not members, or for the personal interest of the members, but not for the individual material profit. The defining goal requires the active involvement of citizens, issue that the NGOs can accomplish because of the specific positioning in the social life.

The NGOs have the ability to maintain stability, the state of equilibrium between the government and the citizens by creating a permanent link between them, ensuring the credibility of functioning to the democratic mechanisms.

The social stability is achieved by the flow of information from the government to the citizens, and by providing a feedback relationship, so that the citizens know the intention of the governors, and the governors accept the community's need. We conclude by stating that the nonprofit organizations actually govern the civil society in the sense of modeling dialogue between power and the people.

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