Liberals in illiberalism: Civil society survival in hybrid democratic regimes

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Submission date: 11 January 2021

Word count: 8665

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Course: Political Science - International Organisation (MSc)

Abstract

This research aims to identify the mobilizing strategies of progressive civil society organizations in hybrid democratic regimes. This phenomenon is shown through the single case study of Hungary where two types of civil society organizations are discussed. The qualitative method using content analysis and interviews examines various NGOs oriented at human rights and feminist issues. The theoretical framework is derived from the concept of the closing civic space and media ownership, which influence the behaviour of the individual organizations. It is assumed that due to the pressure exerted by the government, the claims-making civil society organizations will either depoliticize or internationalize themselves. The findings reveal that both types of organizations opt for internationalization. The study also uncovers that the extent to which the civic space is closed is not equal among human rights and the feminist NGOs, where the first is subject to harsher conditions.

Keywords: hybrid regimes, democratic backsliding, Hungary, civil society, progressive organizations, closing civic space, media ownership

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1. Introduction

In the spring of 2020, the Hungarian Pécs-based Power of Humanity Foundation (Emberség Erejével Alapítvány) applied for a European Union-funded Erasmus+ competition intending to translate their award-winning board game to Spanish, Italian, Croatian and English language. Even though their programme reached the highest score and thus managed to far exceed the others in the competition, they were ultimately excluded. The Hungarian Tempus Public Foundation (Tempus Közalapítvány) responsible for the allocation of European funds requested a document proving that the organization is not supported by foreign sponsors which the Foundation refused to provide (Horváth, 2020a).

The Transparency Law[1] adopted in 2017 states that all organisations receiving support from the other Member States or third countries of more than HUF 500 000 (approximately €1,400) over the period of 12 months have to register with the Hungarian courts as 'organisations in receipt of support from abroad'. In a press release on 18 June 2020, the Court of Justice of the European Union stressed that this law does not comply with EU law as it discriminates against organisations receiving support from abroad, which may even result in penalties and possibly leading to the dissolution of the organisations (Court of Justice of the European Union, 2020). The European Commission expressed the same concerns in its 2020 Rule of Law Report stating that "[c]ivil society remains under pressure, especially when taking a critical stance towards the Government" (European Commission, 2020: 19). It is therefore particularly interesting to observe the survival mechanisms of the third sector promoting progressive policies and Western values, which are in contradiction with the values represented by conservative democratic regimes, where a phenomenon of a "democratic backsliding" is

[1] A külföldről támogatott szervezetek átláthatóságáról szóló 2017. évi LXXVI. törvény (Law No. LXXVI of 2017 on the Transparency of Organisations which receive Support from Abroad)

strongly present. Therefore, this master thesis investigates and tries to answer the following research question:

How do progressive civil society organizations mobilize in hybrid democratic regimes?

Over the last ten years, there has been an increasing trend of democratic regression which is to some extent visible in many Central and Eastern European states, out of which Hungary and Poland emerged as the two most problematic cases (Dawson and Hanley, 2019). This study aims to approach the question of the third sector's mobilization strategies from the perspective of Hungary. Moreover, it aims to provide incentives for further study as there are many similarities between Hungary and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

There are multiple reasons why the study of this particular case constitutes relevance in the realm of contemporary political science. Firstly, democratic backsliding is an ever-present and growing phenomenon not only in Hungary and Poland but all across Central and Eastern Europe. There is an emerging type of political regime among post-Communist Eurasia, Africa and South America, which on the surface acts like a democracy, but in its characteristics resembles a more authoritarian regime (Adamski 2019: 623). Secondly, it is important to understand then what role, if any, does public opinion and civil society organizations have on policy-making in this hybrid political regime. Thirdly, progressive topics such as climate change, reproductive or LGBTQ+ rights are widely discussed all around the globe. Excluding these topics from the public conversation is highly discriminatory and may have serious anti-democratic consequences. Moreover, topics such as climate change affect the whole world and can only be solved through worldwide cooperation.

This thesis is structured as follows. First, the literature review will provide a brief outline of civil society strategies and its challenges from the standpoint of both developed and

developing countries. Even if these two perspectives offer valuable information, they do not necessarily apply to hybrid regimes. Hence, the theoretical framework will analyze the struggle of the third sector in such regimes where although democracy is the primary driving force they do not fit all the requirements of consolidated or liberal democracies as they show signs of an authoritarian rule. This chapter will also outline the theory on which the research is based, and which involves the concept of the closing civic space and media ownership, which influence the behaviour of the individual organizations. It is going to be expected that due to these factors, the claims-making civil society organizations will either depoliticize or internationalize themselves. The assumptions deriving from the theories are then going to be assessed through an in-depth case study. The reason behind choosing this method together with the specific relevance of the case study of Hungary and methods of data collection are going to be referred to in the chapter on the research design. The analysis is then going to focus on the situation of progressive topics in Hungary. The two sections will be divided based on the type of the organizations, starting with those oriented at human rights, followed by feminist NGOs. The research is going to focus on what strategies they use for their mobilization, building on the theories developed in chapter two. Ultimately, the conclusion is going to summarize the findings, which imply that claims-making civil society organizations tend to choose the strategy of internationalization.

2. Civil Society in Developed and Developing Countries

The role of civil society organizations on the implementation of progressive policies is a widely studied subject. In the past twenty years, stakeholder and specifically civic engagement has become a vital method in the western part of the world in achieving the implementation of progressive policies (Aldred and Jacobs 2000; Kallis et al. 2009; Mochizuki et al. 2002; Salgado et al. 2009; Jackson et al. 2012). The involvement of the third sector has shown to bridge the gap between the government and the citizens by increasing public awareness, highlight local concerns, provide new options and it also enhances the credibility of public policies. Moreover, involving stakeholders in the process of policy formation is shown to aid policymakers understand other actor's needs and expectations and it also ensures that they are going to consent to the new policies, because they share common responsibilities for the decisions (Dryzek 2001; Elster 1998; Dietz 2013; Fischhoff 2013). The third sector's influence on policy-making is usually approached from two perspectives: it either focuses on civic engagement in developed or in developing circumstances. This chapter will elaborate on these two camps.

In the liberal democracies of the western world, a new form of deliberative policymaking is on the rise, which serves to connect and integrate the public in governmental affairs. (Dodge 2009; Dodge 2014; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). It mainly allows for the creation of a forum, which brings together groups sharing different perspectives on an issue and thus influences the shaping of the policy and decision-making process. The role of civil society, in this case, is gathering the public to shape these forums and ultimately making it possible for the voices of the mass to be heard in the public sphere. A way of achieving this is through the creation of storylines which also contributes to the creation of a broader discourse (Dodge 2014). There is a wide array of scholars researching civil society influence in deliberative

democracies (Dryzek 2000; Levine and Nierras 2007; Hendriks 2006) among which most acknowledge the positive aspects of advocacy as they make a unique contribution by involving the general public in the debate (Fischer 2006; Dodge 2010).

Malone and Pasternak (2005) in their book *Defending the Environment: Civil Society Strategies to Enforce International Environmental Law* laid out some of the tools used by civil society organizations to make themselves heard by the decision-makers. These include both written and oral documents directed to different regional, domestic or international courts, committees or commissions. Their strategies range from writing petitions, letter requests, written statements, oral statements or critiquing national reports. These are then assessed by the decision-makers, who tend to listen to the common public opinion (Dür and Mateo 2014: 1205). They either use it to reinforce their position or to win the upcoming elections and if citizens' wishes keep consistently getting ignored, the decision-makers are eventually going to be substituted. According to Dür and Mateo (2014), not all public interest is going to gain the attention of competent individuals. In order for a successful outcome, the issue at hand is desired to be a highly salient topic. Moreover, it is also common that certain segments are going to get more attention than others and thus the policy is going to have higher chances to be implemented. This can be due to the popularity of the people who support the issue (Gilens 2012). Overall, western liberal democratic regimes show a willingness to incorporate the third sector representing the common public opinion into governmental affairs. This shows signs of strong cooperation, ultimately leading to a positive impact on the adoption of new policies.

In the case of the developing countries, the presence of strong and significant civil society organizations during the implementation process is met with mixed emotions (Cisneros et al. 2020). One perspective regarding the presence of nonprofits in implementing progressive policies views it as a sign of government failure. As Weisbrod (1986) points out, the third sector, in this case, serves to fill the gap between government officials and the mass public.

The cause of this gap is then a particular discrepancy in values and needs between the two parties stemming from a majority voting system. This is also supported by the study carried out by Lu (2017), which centres around the argument that, in circumstances where the public need is misaligned with the median voter preferences, the third sector is going to try to make up for this gap by introducing more organizations representing people's needs, which is otherwise ignored by the government.

On the other hand, Salamon (1987) advocates for the interdependence thesis in developing countries, which suggests that the government and the third sector make up for each other's shortcomings by cooperating and forming alliances. Even though it is proven that both the interdependence thesis and the government failure occur in developing settings, Lu and Xu (2018) suggest, that the relationship between civil societies and government activities is based on cooperation rather than rivalry and hostility in most of the cases. Furthermore, many scholars agree that the individual networks formed by different types of civil society organisations are crucial to improving policy implementation (Bogason and Toonen 1998; O'Toole 2000). Consequently, it is significantly harder for the third sector to operate in circumstances where governments face many challenges.

While there is extensive literature on the work of civil society organizations, they are usually addressed from two perspectives- either from the point of view of developed or developing countries. There is, however little research done on the functioning of civic actors in countries that do not entirely fall into these two categories. These include countries in Central and Eastern Europe, which are overshadowed by democratic backsliding and where progress is surely present, but it is not as advanced as in Western European countries. This perspective is going to be addressed in the theoretical framework where the position of civil society in hybrid regimes is going to be explained together with a set of assumptions for the research.

3. Civil Society in Hybrid Democratic Regimes

The aim of this thesis is to research how the progressive public makes their voices heard in the illiberal democratic countries, hence the specific research question is: How do progressive civil society organizations mobilize in hybrid democratic regimes? Since the main focus of the thesis is on the third sector in a specific (non)democratic regime, it is advisable to take a look at the big picture and first define the concept of civil society organizations, and in particular a special case of claims-making civil society organizations, which will be addressed in the first section. The next section focuses on democratic backsliding and hybrid democracies which are relevant in the case of Hungary. As a direct consequence of this phenomenon, the closing civic space and media ownership in connection with the third sector's success is going to be discussed. The third section is going to discuss how exactly civil society influences decision-makers all of which is going to be summarized in a series of assumptions for the research.

3.1. What is civil society?

Firstly, it is important to address what exactly civil society is, what is their role and how they exert their influence on politics. Civil society is a part of what can be called the 'public sphere'. This sphere can be seen as an arena, where three types of societies shape and define the character of regimes, which include political society, economic society and civil society. While the first two refer to elite actors whose primary goal is to gain power and profit, civil society consists of ordinary citizens whose participation in various groups and organizations depend on their interests and personal values (Morjé Howard 2003). As shown in Figure 1, Toepler et al. (2020) identify between three types of civil society organizations present in authoritarian settings, which include those supporting the regime, namely independent service-providing Non-profit organizations and NGOs representing the same values of the government. This

thesis will focus on the third type, which is the heavily repressed claims-making non-governmental organizations, which "serve the value guardian role through advocacy and social change by pushing largely liberal, Western values and right-based agendas" (Toepler et al. 2020, 651).

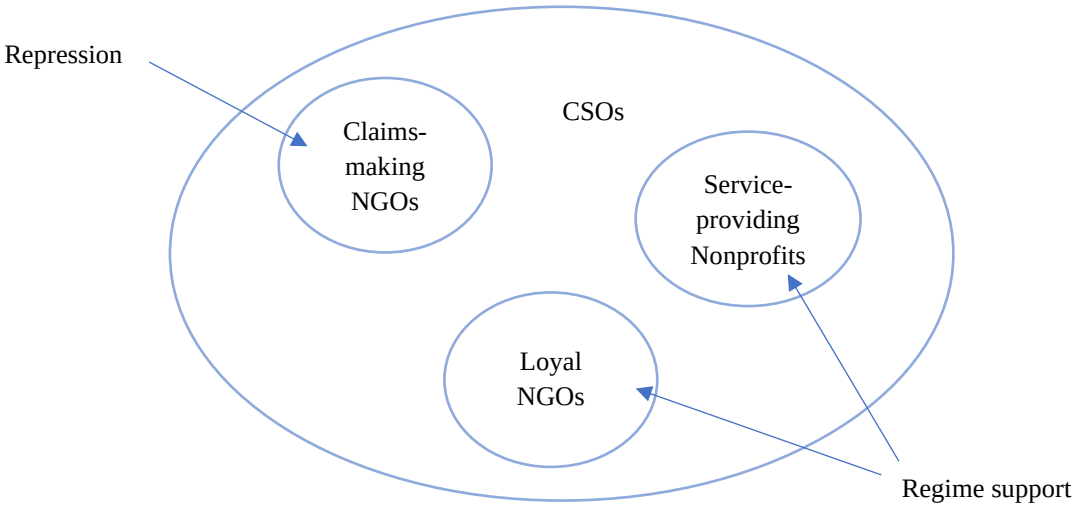

Figure 1 Types of civil society in an authoritarian setting (Toepler et al. 2020, 651)

There is a consensus among scholars that civil society is a powerful tool of democratization (Morjé Howard 2003, Diamond 1996, Skocpol 1999, Putnam 2001). It does not only contribute to a vibrant and healthy democratic system, but a weaker civil society can be a sign of problematic democratic regimes (Morjé Howard 2003). Skocpol's institutionalist perspective explains the role of civil society as a direct source of public influence, thus promoting the individual's and society's needs (Skocpol 1999). This can mean either defending citizens against the implementation of unwanted or unpopular laws or on the other hand, providing additional information, viewpoints or exerting pressure on political leaders to implement favourable policies. Therefore, the democratizing attribute of civil society constitutes an issue in those countries where an open society is not widely appreciated.

3.2. The position of civil society in hybrid regimes

Civil society organizations are going to be assessed in the context of post-Soviet countries in Central Europe, taking the example of Hungary, which shows significant signs of democratic backsliding, a phenomenon defined by Dresden and Howard (2015) as increasing oppression and decreasing political competition. This phenomenon can occur in many different countries and different regime types, but this thesis is going to approach it from the standpoint of hybrid regimes, which in Levitsky and Way's (2010) conceptualization are competitive authoritarian regimes, showing signs of a democratic regime, but some of the circumstances resemble authoritarianism. Democratic backsliding in the European Union can be influenced by two factors, which include universal populistic sentiments and membership in the EU (Adamski 2019). The post-Soviet regime countries may have a sense of political, economic and cultural alienation in the new globalized and technologically-advanced world, which undermine their traditional values and bring a new progressive wave, that they are not prepared for. As a consequence, they choose a populistic leader, who serves as the saviour of the nation, rejecting the pluralism which western democracy entails. This then goes hand-in-hand with a shift away from European ideologies of globalization, which the hybrid regimes systematically criticize or even refuse to comply with universal European laws.

Civil society is first and foremost seen as a tool for democratization in transition countries of the post-Soviet regimes in Central Europe (Quigley 1997; Ishkanian 2007) as its core value is making the public included in governmental affairs and the policy-formation process, thus supporting Western democratic values. Therefore, a common phenomenon is unfolding in hybrid regimes, which Toepler et al. refer to as a "closing civic space" (2020: 649). In this case, the government decreases the funding of the local third sector, and may also introduce legal restrictions to further reduce the power of these "liberal" organizations. Much of this regulation is then aimed at foreign funding of these groups (Bromley et al. 2019).

Consequently, civil society organizations are not only cut off from financial support, but their access to information and global discourse is also restricted (Toepler et al. 2020). This in many cases has a detrimental effect on the functioning of these groups, which are forced to halt their activities as they no longer have the resources to be able to function.

One other way of achieving the silencing of civil societies is through media ownership. An open and independent media is a key requisite for a consolidated democracy as it provides different perspectives on the state's politics and can lead to the uncovering of certain frauds or corruption occurring in the state (Institute of World Policy 2012). This freedom of speech is heavily attacked in certain countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where among the most prominent examples are Poland and Hungary. In order to restrict and oppress unwanted liberal influence or to simply control the media market, virtually all media platforms are owned and governed by the state. In essence, this privatization of media by the leading parties creates a deepening gap of cleavages between the urban and the rural areas. The prior is where citizens may have access to more critical media sources, whereas rural areas are generally more likely to be restricted to those owned by the government (Bermeo 2016; Knott 2018). This means, that even if civil society organizations promoting progressive policies whose space has been limited or "closed" choose to project their messages via social media, it is going to be harder for their voices to be heard outside the more liberal-leaning urban areas.

3.3. Expectations

Deriving from the aforementioned theories, it is possible to determine certain assumptions on what strategies do claims-making civil society organizations adapt to ensure their survival in illiberal democracies. Although it is frequently argued that civil society strength matters, in the case of hybrid regimes the institutional setting is one of the most crucial aspects of the third sector's success. Even if the actors are organized, but the government restricts their powers by

decreasing their funding or controlling the media, they lose their power and chances of success are heavily reduced. Essentially, there are two strategies which civil society organizations can implement under the circumstances caused by hybrid regimes. These include renouncing the aforementioned financial support from the other Member states or third countries, which potentially entails compliance with domestic restrictions at the expense of the size and the scope of the organization. This frequently also leads to its de facto de-politicization (Toepler et al. 2020). Internalization is the next strategy which involves formally closing down the organization on the domestic ground, moving the offices abroad and shifting the core advocacy work into the virtual sphere (Moser and Skripchenko 2018). Although the literature only mentions these two specific alternatives, it is expected that in the case of the Hungarian civil society organizations analyzed in this thesis, the outcomes are going to be varied. There might be some aspects of these two strategies present or they may occur in other variations. The next section will look at what data is going to be gathered and how exactly these assumptions are going to be measured.

4. Research design

As discussed in previous sections, this master thesis aims to identify the strategies civil society organizations adopt in those Central European countries, which show considerable signs of democratic backsliding. Among others, Hungary and Poland stand out as the clearest examples of this phenomenon, where the level of democracy is heavily affected by the "illiberal" type of governing. The next section will explain why an in-depth case study of Hungary serves as the best choice to study this phenomenon. Furthermore, the specific relevance, issue of generalizability and the research design's rationale of this case selection will be elaborated upon. A subsection will be devoted to the methods of data collection and analysis also outlining which civil society organizations are going to be studied in depth during the empirical part.

4.1. Case selection logic

There are multiple reasons why the case studies of Hungary constitute relevance for the study of third sector influence. Hungary is the perfect example of a country which fulfils the criteria of a hybrid regime. Orbán, who secured his position for over a decade is a true populist leader as he advocates for the traditional Hungarian values. He managed to strengthen the nation's pride to the point, that the members of the society have to ask themselves whether they are on the side of their country and leader or on the side of Brussel's bureaucracy and the philanthropist George Soros. Orbán's Hungary can thus be defined as an "illiberal democracy",[2] which as previously discussed, strongly resembles an authoritarian regime (Wilkin 2018). Even though Poland would have been equally sufficient case selections, but the specific choice of Hungary was justified by the author's ability to speak the language, which

[2] A term revived by Orbán himself expressed during a speech given on 25 July 2014 at Băile Tuşnad, Romania (Orbán 2014: 18:22)

enables easier access to data. Ultimately, the outcome of the research will point to certain instances which can also be observed in the case of Poland and potentially also in other Central and Eastern European states where democratic backsliding is a present issue. As a result, possible explanations may be derived and implemented in cases with similar attributes.

In order to effectively research civil society strategies in this case, the qualitative research method was considered as the best possible option as its main goal is to explore social reality. This method is frequently used to describe certain social phenomena, explain why people behave the way they do in certain situations or explore certain aspects of social life (Leavy 2014: 2). Furthermore, since the research question addresses one phenomenon, it was logical to choose a single case study as the primary aim as it entails "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and in its real-world context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident" (Yin 2018: 34).

In the present case, the hybridity of the Hungarian regime has been identified as the independent variable. The intervening variables then are the difference in the institutional setting and the heavily centralized media ownership which shape the circumstances for the civil society where the illiberal democracy closes the space for civic engagement. The overall assumption is that this then leads to alternative survival mechanisms on the part of the civil society organizations which include either depoliticization or internationalization as shown in figure 2.

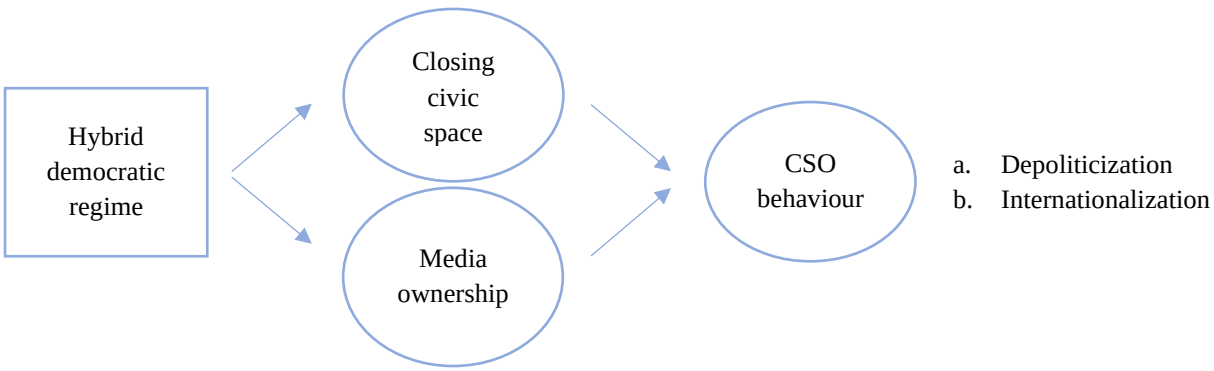

Figure 2. Theoretical mechanism

4.2. Data collection and analysis

In order to assess these assumptions, various forms of data are going to be collected and analyzed. Among primary sources are going to be official government statements, NGO reports and social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter) relating to the topic of the research. Secondary data is going to be retrieved from newspaper and scholarly articles accessed through Leiden University's database which are going to be assessed through content analysis. Additional supporting material is going to be gained through individual semi-structured interviews with representatives from the two main civil society organizations - The Power of Humanity Foundation and NANE representing the two types of NGOs examined in this thesis. A detailed list of organizations discussed in the empirical part can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview and analysis subjects

Type of CSO	Name	Name in English	Interviewee	Date of Interview
Human Rights	A Magyar Helsinki Bizottság	The Hungarian Helsinki Committee	-	-
	Emberség Erejével Alapítvány	Power of Humanity Foundation	András Nyirati (President, Program Director)	17 December 2020
	Társaság a Szabadságjogokért	The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union	-	-
Feminist	Nők a Nőkért Együtt az Erőszak Ellen (NANE)	Women for Women Together Against Violence Association	Zsófia Balogh (activist)	22 December 2020
	Patriarchátust Ellenzők Társasága (PATENT Egyesület)	Society Against Patriarchy (PATENT Association)	-	-

5. Analysis

The following sections focus on the analysis of the data in relation to the central research question of the thesis, which is: How do progressive civil society organizations mobilize in hybrid democratic regimes? Since Hungary was chosen as the case study, this section maps the situation of progressive civil society organizations in this environment. The sections have been divided based on the type of the organizations, starting with those oriented at human rights, followed by feminist NGOs. Each section starts with a general introduction to the background, how the government approaches the liberal topics which the organizations are dealing with and what the relationship is between the government and the specific NGOs. Deriving from the theoretical background, special attention will be given to the state of the civic space, and the inclusion of the organizations in the media, as well as how these two aspects influence the organizations' mobilizing strategies.

5.1. At war with the government

The relationship between independent civil society organizations promoting human rights and the Hungarian government has turned critical over the past few years. This tension has been intensified especially after the Transparency Law from 2017 was deemed unlawful by both the Court of Justice of the European Union (2020) and the European Commission (2020). Despite the growing concerns by these institutions, as of December 2020, Hungary has not yet made any steps towards complying with the judgement (The Hungarian Helsinki Committee 2020b).

In a statement on 19 June 2020, Orbán expressed in a state radio that "all Hungarians will know about every and each forint worth of funding sent here from abroad for political purposes" (Than 2020). This claim was also supported by the Hungarian Minister of Justice, Judit Varga, who tweeted that:

> "The #CJEU confirmed today that requiring #transparency of #NGO funding is a legitimate purpose. Interestingly enough, while the #EU aims at establishing a transparency register, the HU rules are criticized. #HU Gov will continue to ensure transparency in line with the judgement" (Varga, 2020).

The reason behind this adamant stance stems from the government's conflict with Hungarian-born U.S. billionaire George Soros who is believed to be interfering with Hungary's domestic affairs. He is accused of exerting his power through funding organizations promoting liberal values which are then used for political meddling. Soros responded to these allegations that they are pure lies and Hungary is only trying to find an external public enemy to diffuse the attention from domestic issues (Than, 2020). The government's controversial beliefs extend to the international courts as well. According to Orbán the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union was a result of the liberal imperialists' network, who want to impose progressive ideals on countries with different standards (Than, 2020).

According to Stefánia Kapronczay, the executive director of the human rights organization Társaság a Szabadságjogokért (The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union) what these organizations do is, however, far from the government's beliefs. She expressed that the anti-civil Transparency Law of 2017 is not really about the NGOs themselves, but about the thousands of citizens they represent, whose interests they stand for and whose voice they speak out. It is also about those citizens who are critical of any public authority and as a consequence, they do not get meaningful responses, only personal attacks (Társaság a Szabadságjogokért, 2020b).

Many organisations have taken the government's unlawful proceedings as their personal quest to defend democracy in the country. Out of those, two organizations emerge, who have been closely working together over the course of the years. The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union promotes itself as a human rights organization which is "working for everybody being informed about their human rights and empowered to enforce it against the

undue interference by those in position of public power" (Társaság a Szabadságjogokért, 2020a). Its partner is The Hungarian Helsinki Committee, which is a "watchdog organization that protects human dignity and the rule of law through legal and public advocacy methods" (The Hungarian Helsinki Committee 2020a). Both have been monitoring the advancements of the Transparency Law and Hungary's response. Upon acknowledging the government's unwillingness to comply with the European courts' ruling, they compiled a policy brief offering three recommendations to the European Commission on the future handling of the case. These include: ensuring that the law is abolished; guaranteeing a strict approach to compliance in case Hungary proposes amendments; and setting a deadline to carry out the tasks (Civil Liberties Union For Europe et al. 2020).

The issue at hand is two-fold for both organizations. They are not only fighting for the rights of foreign-founded NGOs, but also for themselves. Stemming from their critical stance towards the government and as a consequence of the Transparency Law, they do not get any financial support from the state. In its 2019 annual report, The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union noted that they received "0 HUF public funds […] from the Hungarian government" (Társaság a Szabadságjogokért 2019: 5). They are instead sponsored by international donors like the Soros-owned Open Society Foundation or the Media Legal Defence Initiative. Among the supporters are also independent domestic initiatives, such as Polgár Foundation for Equal Chances and MagNet Magyar Közösségi Bank (MagNet Hungarian Community Bank) (Társaság a Szabadságjogokért 2020c).

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee is equally transparent in disclosing its yearly income and expenditures. The 2019 annual report reveals that the majority (45,75%) of the organization's income comes from private foundations, out of which 18,87% is attributed to the Open Society Foundation. Out of the overall donations, 24,45% comes from the European

Commission and further 15,08% is granted from three different United Nations funds (The Hungarian Helsinki Committee 2019, 24).

Apart from assisting citizens whose rights have been violated, working together with the European courts and cooperating with domestic human rights organizations, they also openly support smaller local NGOs. As a result, they helped to bring the case of the Power of Humanity Organization, which has been unjustly affected by the Transparency Law, to the Court of Justice of the European Union. This NGO is primarily focusing on a developmental approach to achieve a "livable world for all, where human rights, equal opportunities and democracy prevails" (Emberség Erejével Alapítvány 2020b).

Since its foundation in 2006 the Pécs-based organization experienced a rather smooth functioning as it had been relatively "uninteresting" for the government due to its size and location (A. Nyirati, personal communication, December 17 2020). The NGO suddenly caused a stir when it engaged in a project sponsored by the Soros-funded Open Society Foundation. Over-night various media outlets started reporting on the billionaire's plan to expand its power outside the urban capital (Szurovecz 2017). There have been various approaches to the issue where independent media opted for non-confrontational rhetoric, but the government-friendly news focused on creating tension. Another issue arose, when the presidency of FIDESZ in Pécs requested its citizens, enterprises and organizations to not rent any properties to the Power of Humanity Foundation (TH.B. 2017). As Nyirati reports, seeing how the civic space was closing in front of them, they had two options. Instead of choosing a perhaps easier way of withdrawal and depoliticization, the organization decided to take up the challenge and fight for themselves and for democracy (A. Nyirati, personal communication, December 17 2020).

Promoting their educational programmes and games in state schools has become equally problematic. There have been multiple occasions when the Tankerület[3] prohibited them

[3] Tankerület is a governmental agency congregating state schools

from reaching out to the schools in their district. At the end of 2019, the NGO organized a three-day event - Emberség játék kavalkád (Humanity game cavalcade), where students could try out various games designed by the foundation. This also featured a game involving an LGBTQ+ family, which the Tankerület deemed deeply inappropriate and stated that they "do not recommend for students to take part in such events which endanger their healthy mental development" (A. Nyirati, personal communication, December 17 2020). Consequently, four schools belonging to the Tankerület withdrew their application.

To avoid such happening again, a recent strategy involves hosting workshops for social workers who work side by side teachers in schools and kindergartens. During the workshops, social workers learn how to implement and teach the game in schools about invisible racism developed by the organization. Other strategies involve approaching independent schools which are more 'open-minded' and willing to cooperate. They are also trying to reach out to a wider public through social media platforms while acknowledging the importance of providing their followers with high-quality content. Regarding the income, the NGO does not accept any funds from the government, instead relies on financial support from international private organizations, private donations and crowdfunding (Emberség Erejével Alapítvány 2020a).

5.2. Survival in unfavourable conditions

Civil society organizations whose main agenda is fighting the violence against women and advocating for women's reproductive rights have always been in a disadvantageous position in Hungary. The situation has perhaps even deteriorated since the Fidesz-led government started intensively campaigning for traditional family values and exclaimed 2018 as the year of the families (Balogh, personal communication, 22 December 2020). This program involved a series of events, lectures, conferences aimed at new parents and families and it also promoted the advantages of childcare.

The government's conservative approach has also manifested in their rejection of the Istanbul Convention's ratification, which is specifically directed at the elimination of all forms of domestic

violence against women (Horváth, 2020b). The government fears that the convention would introduce a destructive approach to gender and give immigrants asylum on a gender basis. As Zsolt Semjén, the director of the Christian Democratic People's Party KDNP exclaimed: "what we agree with the left-liberals is that we both want to prevent domestic violence. The difference is that we want to end the violence and they - on the pretext of this - the family (KDNP, 2020). According to Júlia Spronz, a member of the PATENT Association, these are completely contrived excuses. According to her, it is simply that there is no political will to stop violence against women, and the government is only at the level of words against domestic violence, and it would have been exactly the Istanbul Convention that could have put all this into practice (Fődi, 2020).

The PATENT Association arose as one of the two key civil society organizations advocating for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Their main goal as an NGO is offering legal help and psychological aid to those affected by any form of domestic violence or to women whose reproductive rights have been undermined. Promoting themselves as an organization supporting "solidarity among women and the principles of feminism", they do not accept any financial support from the Hungarian government and instead, they are funded mostly by international associations including Open Society Foundations, Global Fund for Women or the EEA Norway Grants (PATENT Egyesület, 2020).

Its closest partner, the NANE Association is aiming at combating violence committed against women and children since its establishment in 1994. The financial support of the Association comes mainly from international sources; the EU Phare and the Daphne program, international foundations and the Open Society Institute have been the organization's biggest supporters over the last 20 years. Added to this in recent years they have accepted smaller grants from the National Civil Fund Program and from the Norwegian Civil Support Fund. The Association reports, that it does not receive permanent or temporary state support at all and it rarely wins in the announced tenders. Other sources of revenue include 1% from the citizen's tax; financial support from the Magyar Telekom (mobile phone operator) for their helpline; or projects involving, for instance, an exhibition in partnership with Avon in 2009. Currently, they are working together with Vodafone (mobile phone operator) who is supporting a pilot

project to introduce an alarm device. Further assistance happens on the basis of volunteer work (NANE Egyesület 2015).

Despite the government's open hostile rhetoric about the organizations representing liberal values and condemning them for accepting financial support from abroad, especially from the Open Society Foundations, it does not entirely silence NANE. There are even initiatives on the side of the government to invite the organization to various workshops to make proposals and amendments concerning women's rights. It is, however, disputed to what extent the government is willing to listen to NANE's suggestions. As Balogh notes, there is an overall sentiment, that the organization's presence is purely representative (Balogh, personal communication, 22 December 2020). The conditions in which these workgroups happen are highly unfavourable for the organization and are meant to make their task much harder. For instance, there is a very limited time to hand in their recommendations, frequently only one or two days, out of which none ever passes.

Even though the available civic space is restricted for NANE, the media's approach to the organization is not entirely antagonistic. Surely, there are instances when upon certain cases the conservative media portrays the NGO as an objectionable association lacking morality. This negative stigmatization happened recently when the organization signed a petition which advocates for performing safe abortion practices in hospitals during the pandemic. The conservative media outlet Vasárnap regarded this petition as yet another immoral left-liberal lobbying and reported that "unfortunately" NANE and the PATENT Association are also supporting this "outrageous" request (vasarnap.hu, 2020). In spite of it, Balogh notes, that these incidents are rare and do not affect the organization gravely. The fact that they also receive funds from the Open Society Foundation does not seem to have any further negative influence, given the association's already disadvantageous position as feminist issues have never been favoured by the government. Regardless, the organization still manages to function without the government's major interference. They prefer using social media platforms to educate the public about domestic violence and they also get approached by independent radio and TV outlets (Balogh, personal communication, 22 December 2020).

Further strategies involve dividing their duties into three categories. The organization's main goal is offering personal assistance to victims of domestic violence. Individual assistance is provided mainly through helplines operated by the staff and volunteers of the Association. Secondly, on the community level, NANE focuses on educating the public about domestic violence, the effects of domestic violence on children, sexual harassment, sexual violence, prostitution, human trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence and discrimination. It also aims at cooperating with professional groups, participate in the activities of such groups and publicize the resolutions formulated by the groups. Thirdly, on the societal level, the organization's goals include the publication of academic sources or the organization of social awareness movements wither independently or together with other associations. Further mobilizing strategies involve lobbying for more effective action against violence against women, with a view to improving legislation and enforcement, as well as professional procedures and the development of the care system. Finally, as part of their monitoring activities, the organization regularly prepares reports and reviews for various international organizations (UN, EU, Council of Europe) on the implementation of women's rights, in particular violence against women, and the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) and other international conventions on the implementation and fulfilment of obligations by the state. (NANE Egyesület 2015).

6. Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the mobilizing strategies of progressive civil society organizations in hybrid democratic regimes. This phenomenon was shown through the single case study of Hungary where two types of civil society organization were chosen. The qualitative method using content analysis and interviews examined various NGOs from human rights and feminist specializations. The theoretical framework was derived from the concept of the closing civic space and media ownership, which influence the behaviour of the individual organizations. As a consequence, it was assumed that due to the pressure exerted by the government, the claims-making civil society organizations will either depoliticize or internationalize themselves.

The results indicate that claims-making progressive civil society organizations operate in closing civic spaces and their access to the media is also limited. The government frequently tries to complicate their existence, by for example, excluding them from receiving funds, where the Transparency Law is one of its strategies and the government-friendly or conservative media outlets tend to be hostile towards liberal issues. In line with the expectations, both human rights and feminist NGOs choose the strategy of internationalization over depoliticization.

The research provides new insight into the relationship between the type of civil society organization and the hybrid government. It can be noted that the level of the closing civic space is not equal among human rights and the feminist NGOs, where the first is subject to harsher conditions. This might be due to the fact, that human rights initiatives heavily criticize the government and are actively pushing for the normalization of “liberal values” such as the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, whereas feminist associations tend to focus more on pushing the agenda of domestic violence and reproductive rights to the forefront, without scrutinizing the state or the level of democracy in the country. Consequently, there is a slight

willingness from the side of the government to include such organizations in the overall discussion, even though ultimately their opinions are rarely taken seriously. On the other hand, human rights initiatives face an almost entirely closed civic space where it is exceptionally difficult to operate.

It is important to acknowledge, that it is beyond the scope of the study to reflect on the case of other progressive civil society organizations in Hungary. Further research is also required to establish whether the closing civic space together with the media ownership influencing the behaviour of progressive organizations is a factor in other hybrid democratic regimes. To better understand the implications of these results, future studies could involve a wider array of progressive organizations, such as those dealing with the LGBTQ+ matters, environmental issues or legalization of narcotics. Analyzing other post-communist countries in East and Central Europe or countries in Africa or South America demonstrating signs of democratic backsliding could also positively impact the research on civil society mobilization strategies.

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