
ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP
AND
THE NONGOVERNMENTAL
SECTOR IN
SLOVAKIA

Trends and Perspectives

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION: SLOVAKIA AT THE JUNCTURE OF TWO EPOCHS.....	7
1.1. Slovakia as a “work in progress”: lagging behind, survival and catching up	8
1.2. The legacy of discontinuity	11
1.3. “Story with a fairytale ending”	13
1.4. Historical milestone: autocratic and democratic regimes rule for equal amounts of time	14
2. NONGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR: A PLURALITY OF FORMS AND FUNCTIONS	17
2.1. The renewal of civil society after November 1989	17
2.1.1. Predecessors of change: “islands of positive deviation”	17
2.1.2. Explosion in formation of NGOs	17
2.2. Turbulence of the 1990s	19
2.3. Turning point after 1998: the end of unity within the sector.....	22
2.3.1. The voice of citizens has not disappeared from the public arena (1998 - 2002)	23
2.3.2. The third sector looks for a new face (2002 - 2006)	24
2.3.3. Challenges of the nongovernmental sector’s “Europeanization”	25
2.3.4. NGOs’ struggle for improving the quality of democracy.....	27
2.4. Challenges after the 2006 elections	28
2.5. The third sector’s modes of contributing to cultural change	29
3. ACTIVE CITIZENS AND THE NONGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR SEEK PARTNERS	33
3.1. Lasting dilemmas of civil society	33
3.2. Seeking partnership between the state and the third sector	37

3.2.1. Arguments in favor of the partnership.....	37
3.2.2. The reality of insufficient cooperation	38
3.2.3. An attempt at a more equal partnership after the 2010 elections	40
3.2.4. Challenges of financing the third sector	42
3.3. The role of the business sector.....	43
4. CURRENT STATE OF THE NONGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR: TRENDS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS.....	49
4.1 The NGO sector in numbers	49
4.2.Pluses and minuses of tax assignation	52
4.3.Public image of the third sector.....	55
4.4.Active participation in civic campaigns and initiatives.....	57
4.5.Contribution of volunteerism	58
4.6.New forms of giving and fundraising	60
4.6.1. Establishment of the Coalition for the support of individual giving.....	61
4.6.2. Giving portals.....	62
4.7. Challenges of watchdogs, advocacy NGOs and think tanks.....	63
4.8.Creation and dissemination of social innovations.....	64
4.9.Recent trends in civic participation	67
5. IN CONCLUSION: NETWORKS THAT CONNECT	73

1. INTRODUCTION: SLOVAKIA AT THE JUNCTURE OF TWO EPOCHS

As a part of civil society, the third sector (nonprofit or nongovernmental sector) in Slovakia has gone through several phases of development since November 1989. A law passed in 1990 generated an upsurge in the process of association and formation of NGOs, the gradual creation of self-governing structures and the establishment of a third sector steering committee called the Gremium of the Third Sector. The second half of the 1990s was a more problematic time when a semi-authoritarian regime attempted to limit the sector's independence. Nongovernmental organizations, however, joined with other civil society actors to engage in a battle over the democratic character of the state and contributed to the victory of democratic forces.

Over the last 20 years, the third sector has developed into a phenomenon of diverse function: it has created an intellectual foundation for societal reforms; supported checks and balances against the use of power by the elites; defended the interests of various groups of citizens; provided forums for previously unheard voices; offered useful services; participated in resolving environmental, social and health issues; and reacted to the needs of the villages, towns, communities and regions in Slovakia. Thousands of small organizations, initiatives, associations and volunteer groups have demonstrated their usefulness and undertaken work that no one else could do.

During recent years, in particular after the entry into the European Union, NGOs in Slovakia have been battling with insufficient financial resources and looking for ways to increase their sustainability. The Slovak civic sector's potential to contribute to positive change in society and to improve the quality of life is great, but for it to be more fully realized, the sector needs partners and allies.

This study maps the key milestones, successes and dilemmas of the nongovernmental sector; summarizes information on its influence on society and its democratic transformation; marks past and ongoing points of critical importance; identifies possible trends in the sector's

development; and lays out a vision for the future that would allow for greater realization of the potential of active citizenship.

1.1. SLOVAKIA AS A “WORK IN PROGRESS”: LAGGING BEHIND, SURVIVAL AND CATCHING UP

When contemplating the character of current civil society, we cannot get around the historical heritage, which has influenced its formation. A remarkable picture looms before our eyes. It is actually a series of “mental maps” of the country, which illustrate Slovakia and its inhabitants as a Joycean “work in progress”.

For a thousand years until the end of World War I, Slovakia was a part of the Hungarian Kingdom. For centuries, along with the ethnic Hungarians and many other nations, it was also a part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. For more than seven decades of the 20th century, Slovakia belonged to the Czechoslovak state. All of its key stimuli for development of its culture occurred in a Central European context, whether it was Hungary, Austria-Hungary, or Czechoslovakia. Thus, Slovakia belonged to the Latin cultural sphere for a thousand years. This sphere was the Central European space with its own heritage of Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, and Classicism; with the heritage of Catholicism and Protestantism rooted in the foundations of the national culture; and, finally, also with a modest heritage of the beginnings of democracy in Slovakia.

However, other traces and layers of the past can be found in Slovakia as well: the heritage of authoritarianism, nationalism and provincialism. Slovakia is one of few European countries that have experienced all three major regimes in the twentieth century: parliamentary democracy with a capitalist economy; an authoritarian, fascist-like regime during World War II as well as an uprising against it; and finally, all forms of socialism, whether it be the Stalinist, reform (1968) or neo-Stalinist “normalization” version. And Slovakia not only experienced them, but also participated in creating them.

Similarly to Poland when it lost its national independence or to the Czech lands, which existed within the Austrian Empire without their own statehood, in Slovakia too there have been cultural and educational associations and societies, which sought to enhance the Slovaks’ national awareness.

In the revolutionary years of 1848-49, the first Slovak political program was formulated by a young generation of leaders led by Ľudovít Štúr. Their program *The Demands of the Slovak Nation* called not only for the recognition of and autonomy for the Slovaks in the Kingdom of Hungary, but also for the abolition of feudalism, political reforms and universal suffrage. However, the leaders of the Magyar Revolution were not prepared to make any concessions to Slovak requirements and eventually, the Habsburgs crushed both the Magyar desires and Slovak political demands. In 1861, Slovak political leaders declared *The Memorandum of the Slovak Nation* calling for territorial autonomy, but it also failed to achieve its objectives. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867, another attempt followed. This was the so-called *New School*, promoting cooperation with the Magyars and abandoning the idea of territorial autonomy in exchange for linguistic and educational rights. However, the Hungarian political elite was fully dedicated to its goal of creating a united nation-state, and instead of allowing more room for Slovak demands, systematic Magyarization followed.

While this does not mean that various civic institutions and activities, especially on the grass-roots level – such as cooperatives, farmers' associations, reading circles, Sunday schools, temperance societies, self-help groups, amateur theaters, choirs, village ensembles – were not present, their modus operandi was limited and strictly controlled by authorities.

Face to face with difficult economic conditions, as well as barriers to national and political development, adaptation was a central principle of existence. Those who sought to enter public life and be successful respected the powers that be at the time, the strength of the establishment and the state authorities. Political opportunism flourished and the **concept of survival** became engrained as a practical imperative. This concept, in fact, has been present in Slovak history for many decades.

During the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, a rapid growth of associations took place in the Hungarian Kingdom.¹ However, as the historian Elena Mannová commented, at

¹ While in 1862, there were only 565 associations in the Hungarian Kingdom, in 1878 their number increased to 3,995, with 673 thousand members. See *Dejiny štátu a práva na území Československa v období kapitalizmu I, 1848-1918 [History of State and Law on the Territory of Czechoslovakia in the Period of Capitalism I, 1848-1918]*. Bratislava, SAV (Publishing House of Slovak Academy of Sciences) 1971, p. 218.

the same time, in the Slovak part of the Hungarian state, the urban bourgeoisie as a carrier of civic culture and one of the pillars of civil society was weakly anchored. It developed in an agrarian environment or in small towns marked by an “anti-capitalist mentality”. The Slovak urban bourgeoisie paid dearly for the Hungarian Kingdom’s assimilation policy and its development was also blocked by religious differences: “Individual periods were too short for institutions to take root in the culture or for traditions to develop over generations. The result was a continually repetitive syndrome of the ‘first generation intelligentsia’, as well as the ‘first generation citizens’, who had to continually reinforce their own identity.”²

In comparison with the Czech part of the monarchy Slovakia had an essentially worse starting position for civil society. Although the Czechs were also absorbed into the Habsburg Empire, they nevertheless achieved more success in the second half of the 19th century. Thanks to gradual national and political emancipation, they had the opportunity to organize themselves at the grass roots level and conduct activities as free citizens in towns and villages. The Czech bourgeoisie grew in strength, built up Czech industry and undertook capitalistic modernization. One element of support to the Czech national community was local governments, where followers of the Czech national movement asserted themselves. Gradually, activities by unions and associations gathered momentum. The Czechs also built their own schools – elementary, secondary and even institutions of higher education. And all of this activity was recorded and commented on by Czech print media.³

Slovaks simply did not have such conditions, in spite of the fact that Ludovít Štúr, the key figure of the Slovak national revival, paid attention not only to political aspects of Slovak development, but also to its civic dimensions, to activism and “small work” in particular, both practically and theoretically.⁴

2 See Bútorá, M.: Sila a slabosť mimovládneho sektora na Slovensku: kritická reflexia [Strengths and Weaknesses of the Non-Governmental Sector in Slovakia: A Critical Perspective]. In: Plichtová, J. (Ed.): *Občianstvo, participácia a deliberácia na Slovensku: teória a realita* [Citizenship, Participation and Deliberation in Slovakia. Theory and Reality]. Bratislava, Veda 2010, pp. 571 – 583.

3 *ibid.*

4 According to historian Norbert Duka-Zólyomi, thanks to the efforts of Štúr and his numerous colleagues, in mid-40-ties of the 19th century, there were up to 500 temperance unions and associations on the territory of Slovakia. As for his intellectual contribution, in the years 1845 – 1946 Štúr authored three studies about the importance of civic associating for the good of the society. His language and reasoning resembled that of Alexis de Tocqueville. See Bútorá, M.: *Mne sa to nemôže*

Nonetheless, the idea of democratization or even the idea of civil society as linked to democratic modernization in society did not gain favor in those times in Slovakia. Thus, Slovakia remained in a disadvantaged situation of **lagging behind**.

After the first Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 was established, the situation changed. All citizens acquired civic and political rights, and associational activities flourished. Between the two world wars, more than 16 thousand associations of all types existed in Slovakia. The cultural explosion resulted in numerous Slovak books, newspapers, magazines, new music, and new pieces of visual art. New educational, physical education, religious, and drama organizations were emerging. "These literally thousands of associations," writes historian Ľubomír Lipták, "not only worked in culture and education, but also drew people into public activities; they taught them democracy step by step". A Slovak middle class began to form. "*Residents* of Slovakia were becoming *citizens*".⁵ In the Slovak consciousness and political discourse, the concept of **catching up** took hold.

1.2. THE LEGACY OF DISCONTINUITY

The formation of civil society in Slovakia has certain deficiencies. This is a result of country's late modernization, experienced mostly under state-sponsored socialism. Moreover, Slovakia was late in the creation of a national society and in building its own state.

Throughout the entire 20th century, marked discontinuity took place. Hundreds of thousands of people left the country or were forced to change their identity for numerous reasons. Assimilations, migrations, exiles, deportations and compulsory transfers have been a part of the Central European and Slovak "political menu". These processes influenced the fates not only of ordinary people, but also of domestic elites, who were repeatedly subverted, uprooted or liquidated. Imprints of times past remain in the country today: ruptures, breaks, exoduses, tectonic shifts and personal, family or institutional cataclysms are present in the collective memory. In the language of psychotherapy, there is a well-known term

stať. Sociologické kapitoly z alkoholizmu [It Cannot Happen to Me. Sociological Chapters in Alcoholism]. Martin, Osveta 1989.

5 Lipták, Ľ.: Slovensko medzi dvoma vojnami [Slovakia Between the Two World Wars] In: Marsina, R. – Čičaj, V. – Kováč, D. – Lipták, Ľ.: *Slovenské dejiny [The Slovak History]*. Martin, Matica slovenská 1992, pp. 221 – 242.

for this: “unresolved issues”. Hundreds of thousands of people have such unsettled accounts with previous regimes.

Thus, the above-mentioned favorable period of the first Czechoslovak Republic of 1918–1938, which despite its problems had brought a general improvement in Slovakia, was followed by several decades of authoritarian regimes that ruined most of the fruits of these first generations of Slovaks who lived in democracy. Lipták recalled a Slovak politician living in exile who had described Slovakia as a country of generations with amputated arms: “Again and again, new generations come and immerse themselves in work and creation, but before they reach real fruition they are pushed aside from their work and their arms are ‘amputated’”.⁶

Under socialism, Slovakia experienced growth in the number of educated people, in its standard of living, in industrialization and urbanization. However, this progress was obtained at the price of suppression of human and civil rights and destruction of traditional societal structures. Phenomena such as tolerance, non-violent approaches, respect for minorities, the benign exercise of power and a successful and educated middle class were simply not among those embodying the spirit of the times.

Coping with nationalism presents a further challenge for Slovakia. According to Ernest Gellner, communism devastated civil society and when nationalism, which reemerged after the fall of communism with great speed, reared its head, it had very few opponents on the political scene. However, as the Czech sociologist Miloslav Petrušek has pointed out, the idea of civil society is principally non-nationalistic. This does not mean, that it is necessarily “non-national”: “Where else but within the framework of a national society and a sovereign national state, can one build a civil society today?”⁷

For Slovakia, this translates into the task of finding a balance between two poles – the “civic” and the “national” – without pitting them against one another. It is all the more needed since the Slovak Republic is a state with a large proportion of minorities.

With all the discontinuity and breaks and given this legacy from the past, it was actually remarkable that after 1989, a lively civil society

6 Lipták, L.: *Odtaté ruky [Amputated Arms]*. In: *Storočie dlhšie ako sto rokov [A Century Longer than One Hundred Years]*. Bratislava, Kalligram 1999.

7 Petrušek, M.: *Občanská společnost [Civil Society]*. In: Petrušek, M.: *Společnosti pozdní doby [Societies of the Late Modern Age]*. Praha, Sociologické nakladatelství 2006, pp. 224 – 232.

pulsated within the country. Its actors contributed to the richness of society with volunteer activities, as well as outstanding ideas for mobilizing activity of others. They managed not only to interest and motivate the broader public, but also to offer comprehensible, widely acceptable concepts of freedom and solidarity that were in line with democratic modernization. Along with this, civil society actors engaged in an activism that broke down both the prevailing decades-long ethos of civic helplessness and subjection to the powers that be, as well as the tendency toward exclusive promotion of individual interests over care for the public good.

1.3. “STORY WITH A FAIRYTALE ENDING”

Supporters of a democratic Slovakia sometimes describe its development as a story about the transformation of an “ugly duckling” into a beautiful swan. Over the last twenty years, a battle was fought here over freedom and democracy and over far-reaching societal reform. The country has deserved the image as a reformer, respected by representatives of international economic institutions and European politicians. After the change of the regime, Slovakia also experienced an explosion of civic activism. Thanks to this, a colorful palette of civic organizations emerged; new themes from environment to human rights were added to the traditional concept of charity and help to people in need. Moreover, new ways of organizing also developed, from training centers to steering committees (gremia) and common platforms. Nongovernmental organizations were significant participants in the common fight with the authoritarian practices of Mečiarism (policies of Slovak Prime Minister Vladimir Mečiar) in the mid-1990s. Many of them not only shined a critical mirror at state power, but they also came to the table with new alternatives and solutions, helped to secure citizens’ free access to information and assisted in the struggle for Slovakia’s membership in key international organizations.

Slovak historian Roman Holec called country’s development in the 20th century a successful story with a fairytale ending: “The Slovaks started from nothing, obtained an independent state, and then became members of the European Union and NATO”.⁸

A slightly more neutral and perhaps more appropriate title is one that British political scientist Karen Henderson chose for her book – Slovakia:

⁸ Terenzani, M.: A Common but Contentious History. In: *The Slovak Spectator*, Dec. 13-19, 2010.

The Escape from Invisibility.⁹ In the new millennium, Slovakia is no longer an invisible country. It is a multi-layered society, which has its strong and weak points. Whether we tend toward one metaphor or the other, a part of this new visibility of contemporary Slovakia is its civil society, the arena where people come together to achieve something positive to their lives and the lives of others – those ranks of anonymous co-creators as well as publicly known leaders without whom their homeland would not be where it is after the last twenty years.

1.4. HISTORICAL MILESTONE: AUTOCRATIC AND DEMOCRATIC REGIMES RULE FOR EQUAL AMOUNTS OF TIME

Over the past period of less than a century – more precisely from the founding of the first Czechoslovak Republic in the fall of 1918 until now – Slovakia has undergone unusually dramatic development. Six models of state government, three political systems and within them, several regimes have alternately taken hold on its territory. At the moment of this study's completion – the beginning of 2012 – the ratio of nondemocratic to democratic regimes has almost evened out. For approximately one half of this period the inhabitants of Slovakia lived under authoritarian, at times even totalitarian conditions, and spent the other half, by contrast, in times of greater freedom.

Along with political opportunism, during this entire period there were also efforts to radically change the situation and eliminate the previous line of development. Encyclopedist, historian, and archeologist Štefan Janšák saw in Slovak history a “whole series of beginnings without endings”. According to him, the law of “excited Slovak beginnings, sluggish and disoriented continuation and sad, painful endings somewhere in a blind alley” is regularly repeated.¹⁰

Development of civil society and its institutions have always been squeezed between two poles over the course of modern Slovak history. There has been a balance and tension between: 1) stubborn efforts to **survive** under difficult circumstances (“hunkering down”, choosing the “lesser of two evils”, nurturing and pursuing of moral relativism), and then, 2) **catching up** as quickly as possible when the opportunity presented itself – in better case, with a reform-minded leadership, in worse case,

9 Henderson, K.: *Slovakia: The Escape from Invisibility*. New York, Routledge 2002.

10 Janšák, Š.: *Život dr. Pavla Blahu [The Life of Dr. Pavol Blaho]*. Trnava, Spolok sv. Vojtecha 1947.

with inappropriate steps (Lipták: rebellious oppositional behavior, radical negation).

And it will be the quality and development of this civil society that will co-decide which direction and in favor of which regime the pendulum that measures the coming decade of Slovakia will swing.

2. NONGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR: A PLURALITY OF FORMS AND FUNCTIONS

2.1. THE RENEWAL OF CIVIL SOCIETY AFTER NOVEMBER 1989

2.1.1. PREDECESSORS OF CHANGE: “ISLANDS OF POSITIVE DEVIATION”

At the threshold of a new era, in addition to the challenges that stood before Slovak society – to renew democracy and the market economy, find a new cultural identity and solve the issues of statehood – another challenge appeared: revitalizing civil society. The Czechoslovak and Slovak November 1989 events were to a significant extent the work of civic movements and initiatives resisting the communist regime. For a short time, they also became the key organizers of societal change. These “islands of positive deviation”, as Slovak sociologists called them before 1989, intensified their activities in the second half of the 1980s. In Slovakia, two groups in particular – environmental activists supported by a part of the artistic and social science community and members of the secret church (catholic activists) – entered into an open confrontation with the powers that be. Many personalities from this environment became political leaders both of the revolution and of the post-November changes.

The last sentence of the first proclamation from November 20, 1989 by the Public Against Violence movement (*Verejnosc' proti násiliu – VPN*), the main protagonist of the nonviolent revolution read: “As citizens let us take matters into our own hands!” This had an electrifying effect on inhabitants. Representatives of VPN clearly formulated their ideas on the meaning of active citizenship – the sensitivity toward situations where citizens’ interests are violated, as well as the courage to “take a stand against any power that has the tendency to metastasize at the expense of others”.¹¹

2.1.2. EXPLOSION IN FORMATION OF NGOS

Right after November 1989, three demanding tasks became evident: first, to create a modern, pluralistic society instead of a dictatorship; second,

¹¹ Zajac, P. – Bútorá, M.: Zrodil sa občan [A Citizen Was Born]. In: *Verejnosc'*, č. 1/1989.

to transform a state-run economy into an effective market economy; and finally, to organize the cohabitation of Czechs and Slovaks in a common state. Each of these tasks could have employed an entire generation, but they had to be addressed simultaneously.

As early as March 1990, the Federal Parliament approved a law on the freedom of association, a law on the right of assembly and a law on the right to petition. This trio of laws provided a kick-start to the process of democratization and the flourishing of association. Modern political parties and free trade unions were founded and many voluntary associations and groups sprang into existence, as well as free media. Artists, journalists, businesspeople and human rights activists formed new organizations. Various ad hoc initiatives, both local and national, were born. Self-help, mutually beneficial groups and associations also emerged.

Unions and organizations that had been suppressed by the previous regime also began to reappear, including Christian associations and church organizations working in social services. Alongside them, organizations that had existed in the previous regime under the so-called National Front (e.g. the Slovak Union of Women or the Slovak Union of Disabled People) continued their work as well. Some of them ratcheted down their activities, others transformed. Most of the older associations and organizations were traditionally linked to subsidies from the state budget and had an extensive membership base. Newly founded organizations searched for funds from various sources including the foreign ones. “Older” organizations often held onto their traditional activities, while the “newer” ones introduced innovative concepts for solving problems.

At the beginning of the 1990s, there were already several thousand associations, foundations and other nonprofit organizations operating in Slovakia. In October 1991, the first Slovakia-wide conference of nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations (NGOs) was held and became an important milestone in the history of voluntary association. Participants agreed on the need for better information exchange and also insisted on improvements in the tax and legislative conditions for the fast-growing third sector. The latter became a demand of almost every subsequent Stupava conference, named after the town of Stupava where it was held.

In 1994, the group bringing together NGOs, the **Gremium of the Third Sector** (G3S) was established and gained the status of a partner to the government. At first, it included four key areas: 1) humanitarian work and charity; 2) education, culture and youth; 3) environment; 4) human

rights and minorities. The number and configuration of these sections later changed according to emerging needs and activities. The Gremium set itself the goal of becoming the defender of nongovernmental organizations in the fight to improve legislative and tax conditions and inform the public on the sector's activities. SAIA – Service Center of the Third Sector, which also published the magazine *Non-Profit* provided service to the G3S. Later, this role was shared with the internet-based civic daily *ChangeNet* (www.changenet.sk) and the print magazine *Efekt* published by the First Slovak Nonprofit Service Center. Along with the Gremium, other platforms and NGO associations emerged, including The Slovak Youth Council, Ekoforum, Domovina, SocioFórum and many others.

The Gremium proved itself during a time of growing pressure on the third sector from an authoritarian state. When this pressure dissipated, however, its role as representative of the nongovernmental sector also became less important. Alongside the G3S, other ad hoc groups and new platforms sought a public voice. However, before political conditions developed into a relatively normal dialogue between the state and civil society, the Slovak nongovernmental sector had to go through a difficult struggle with state powers.

2.2. TURBULENCE OF THE 1990S

The G3S' most critical period was its dispute with the government of Vladimír Mečiar. An unscrupulous politician with autocratic inclinations, Mečiar built his popularity and power on promises that he would solve the country's problems if only he were allowed to rule as an uncontested leader. After his victory in the 1994 elections, he created a parliamentary alliance with radical rightist nationalists from the Slovak National Party and with extreme anti-reform leftists from the Union of the Workers of Slovakia (ZRS). An open confrontation with President Michal Kováč, violations of the constitution, obstruction of the May 1997 referendum on direct presidential elections, and the exclusion of the parliamentary opposition from oversight of government performance – all served to undermine democratic checks and balances. As a result, the state administration became politicized, the government openly interfered with state-run television and radio, the sizeable Hungarian minority was ostracized and privatization turned cronyist.

This anti-democratic style of governance, soon dubbed “Mečiarism”, left its imprint on political culture. A “winner takes all” majoritarianism,

an unwillingness to seek consensus, disrespect for minority opinions and labeling of critics as “enemies”, “anti-Slovak” or “anti-state” spread across the country. Political elites were highly polarized, sharp divisions reached deep into families. The country fell behind its neighbors, failing to meet the criteria for integration into the European Union and NATO.

The tendency to limit the space for civic organizations to operate appeared in 1996 when the government decided to pass its version of a law on foundations. According to NGOs, the law would have introduced excessive bureaucracy, created artificial barriers to establishing a foundation and unduly increased the state’s power over the foundation registration process. For this reason, the G3S stood up against this discriminatory legislation with a campaign called *Third Sector SOS*. Although the government managed to pass the law anyway, the campaign had great significance for the self-confidence of the NGOs and became one of the most important examples of their public engagement.

This dispute constituted the clash of two principles: the principle of self-regulation and independence, the most important “child” of November 1989, and the principle of centralization and etatism, “the descendant” of the previous regime. By joining the campaign, NGOs “came out of the shadows” and publicly identified themselves with others. The campaign meant “a solidification of civil society” and was a test of maturity.¹²

In 1995 and 1996, sporadic attacks against some representatives of civic organizations grew into systematic crusades.¹³ In June 1995, the Minister of Finance issued an order for an overall audit of how resources were being used by foundations. At the end of July 1995, the Minister of Environment instructed his staff not to participate in events organized

12 Bútorá, M. – Fialová, Z. – Demeš, P.: *Kampaň „Tretí sektor SOS“* [The “Third Sector SOS” Campaign]. Bratislava, S.P.A.C.E. 1997.

13 For a more detailed explanation, see Bútorá, M. – Košťálová, K. – Demeš, P. – Bútorová, Z.: *Tretí sektor, dobrovoľníctvo a mimovládne organizácie na Slovensku: 1995 – jar 1996* [Third Sector, Volunteering and Non-governmental Nonprofit Organizations in Slovakia: 1995 – Spring 1996]. In: Bútorá, M. – Hunčík, P. (Eds.): *Slovensko 1995. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti [Slovakia 1995. A Global Report on the State of Society]*. Bratislava, Sándor Márai Foundation 1996, pp. 185 – 217; Bútorá, M. – Demeš, P.: *Nonprofit Organizations and the Non-Governmental Sector*. In: Bútorá, M. – Skladony, T.W. (Eds.): *Slovakia 1996 – 1997. A Global Report on the State of Society*. Bratislava, Institute for Public Affairs 1998, pp. 189 – 200.

by NGOs. In May 1996 in the Slovak parliament, a report was given by the Slovak Information Service head Ivan Lexa. Among other things, the report said: "Developments in Slovakia are much more significantly influenced by various transnational and international institutions, foundations, foreign interest groups and lobbies. Among these we have also noticed activities that are not in accordance with Slovakia's national interest".

However, the government's authoritarian behavior also had unintended positive impacts. Citizens began to pay greater attention to the issues of democracy. If during the first years of post-communist transformation people were most concerned with living standards, social vulnerability, unemployment, health care and crime, after 1994 democracy and the rule of law became increasingly important. The anti-Mečiarist base expanded.

There was a great response when theater people and other artists organized a protest movement called *Open Forum Let's Save Culture* (*Otvorené fórum Zachráňme kultúru*). Gradually, a broad front of protesting artists, students and academic intelligentsia emerged. In November 1996, protests by the cultural community grew into a large meeting in Bratislava organized jointly with the political opposition. Further meetings were held in 18 cities and towns. Widespread support for citizens' protests before the 1998 elections testified to the fact that a significant part of the population did not approve of the government's efforts to concentrate its power and liquidate society's self-governing mechanisms.

A consolidated platform of NGOs launched the civic campaign known as OK '98 (*Občianska kampaň '98*) to increase citizens' awareness about the elections, encourage them to vote and guarantee a fair ballot through independent civic supervision. The campaign helped to mobilize the electorate and contributed to a record 84 percent turnout. Dozens of NGOs organized educational projects, cultural events, concerts, discussion forums and issued publications, video clips and films. Hundreds of volunteers across the country attracted thousands of concerned citizens to election-related events. Thanks to massive public mobilization and civic activities, as well as cooperation between democrats in different parties, Mečiar was defeated and a broad coalition of pro-democratic forces came to power.

NGOs thus became one of the actors in the struggle for a democratic Slovakia. They included not only active citizens, but also top experts

from various fields – economists, sociologists, political scientists and lawyers. At the end of the 1990s, the think tanks began to profile themselves as independent civic institutions providing expert review of the developments in the country and bringing public policy recommendations. Regular public opinion surveys were carried out and published by independent media. Key themes included defense of democracy, the need for reforms and guiding Slovakia in a Euro-Atlantic direction. Thanks to collaboration with researchers, journalists and civic activists, the third sector began to build a knowledge base both on its activities and on how it was perceived by the broader public.

Developments in Slovakia in the 1990s differed from those in the other Visegrad Four countries, in the Baltic countries and Slovenia. Attempts by the government powers to limit the space for civic organizations went beyond tolerable limits and together with other violations of democratic principles pushed Slovakia off the standard track of transformation.

The nongovernmental sector mobilized and began to cooperate with other elements of civil society (independent media, opposition political parties, trade unions, some representatives of the church), with whom they created a pre-election coalition for effecting democratic change. Due to this involvement, the public image of the entire third sector was sometimes reduced to its political role.

2.3. TURNING POINT AFTER 1998: THE END OF UNITY WITHIN THE SECTOR

The 1998 elections brought a turning point where the state went from opponent to potential partner of NGOs. At the same time, the previous period of unity in the third sector came to an end and differences in opinions and interests among civic organizations became deeper. Some NGO leaders left for the state institutions. It was important for the NGOs not to lose their independent, critical outlook on the political scene and not to give up pointing out abuses of power and cases of cronyism. They had to continue calling attention to issues of transparency in the public sector and become a support base for the preparation of reforms and their implementation. The search for ways to create domestic sources of financing for NGOs' operations, which would replace dwindling foreign sources, also came to the forefront.

2.3.1. THE VOICE OF CITIZENS HAS NOT DISAPPEARED FROM THE PUBLIC ARENA (1998 - 2002)

NGOs have remained active and visible in public life, aiming at building a responsible citizenship, providing services, preserving diversity, testing social innovations, monitoring and controlling those in power, promoting democratic governance and critically reflecting on the country's social, political and economic problems.

NGOs implemented a large number of **advocacy initiatives**. For example, an initiative to reform the public administration structures (*For a Real Reform of Public Administration- 2000*); an initiative to achieve changes in the conduct of civil military service (2000); a polemic on highway construction (2000 - 2002); an initiative for improving waste management (*For a Good Law on Waste Management - 2001*); initiatives focused on increasing public sensitivity to violence against women (*Every Fifth Woman* campaign - 2002) and inter-ethnic tolerance (*Racism is Your Problem Too - 2001*); the *Otherness* initiative against the discrimination of sexual minorities (2001) and finally, the initiative for a civic ombudsman (2001).

Civil society organizations have regularly constructed broader alliances and carried out joint campaigns. Perhaps the most important successful example was the 2000 nationwide campaign *for a good Freedom of Information Act* called *What Is Not Secret is Public*, supported by over 120 NGOs and bringing together over 100 thousand members. Thanks to it, Slovak citizens obtained one of the best laws in Europe, which obligates state administration officials to provide information.

After 1998, NGOs began to search more intensively for a role at the local level. This trend translated into the establishment of **community foundations** and community associations. Community foundations are an example of a social innovation that leads to mobilization of private and public sources of financing with a focus on raising the quality of life according to the priorities of the inhabitants. Today, there are eight community foundations operating in Slovakia, which are established hotbeds of activism and, at the same time, centers of mobilization for financial resources from citizens, companies and the public sector in their communities. In 2010, their assets represented more than two million Euros and they made 349 thousand Euros in grants to local initiatives. Their specific area is support for small, voluntary initiatives, and their strength is in their flexibility and grounding in the community.

Gradually, Slovak NGOs underwent the process of “Europeanization”: they began, to a larger extent, provide social, health and educational services both at the local and regional level. More often than before, they became a contractor of the state. However, their activities hit bureaucratic barriers, and had to cope with the unreformed health, social insurance and public administration systems.

Since 2000, NGOs became involved also in the international development assistance and humanitarian aid (Kosovo and East Africa), and support for democratization processes (Serbia, Kosovo, Ukraine, Belarus, Cuba, etc.).

The overall climate in society, however, began to differ from the euphoria experienced after the 1998 elections; the feelings of fatigue, skepticism and disenchantment prevailed. Corruption scandals, political fragmentation and a half-baked character of some reforms – these and other things caused a “bad mood”, a malaise among citizens. However, in spite of a certain disappointment with politics, many people realized that the 2002 elections were critical for Slovakia’s Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations. NGOs came with several pre-election initiatives (e.g. *It’s Not All the Same to Us*; *Save Your Vote*; *Rock the Vote 02*; *Let’s Do It!*; *Second Step*; and *The Freedom of Choice*). Their goals were above all “to raise informed voter participation as a key to Slovakia’s accession to NATO and the EU”.¹⁴

In the end, voter participation reached 70.1%, a drop of 14.3% as compared to 1998. Without NGO activities, however, the turnout, especially among first-time voters, would probably have been even lower.¹⁵ In 2002, citizens gave a mandate to a government of democratic continuity, which brought to fruition Slovakia’s integration into NATO and the European Union in 2004.

2.3.2. THE THIRD SECTOR LOOKS FOR A NEW FACE (2002 – 2006)

Positive political conditions after the 2002 elections in Slovakia allowed for reforms that changed the quality of the economic environment. Although

14 Novotný, P. – Forgács, D. – Velšic, M.: *Non-Governmental Organizations and the 2002 Elections*. In: Mesežnikov, G. – Gyárfášová, O. – Kollár, M. – Nicholson, T. (Eds.): *Slovak Elections 2002. Results, Implications, Context*. Bratislava, Institute for Public Affairs 2003, pp. 195 – 214.

15 Before the next parliamentary elections in 2006, the NGOs did not carry out any get-out-the-vote campaign and the voter turnout decreased to 54,7%.

not all reforms were pushed through successfully, they did contribute to kick-starting economic growth. At the same time, however, some serious problems remained. Above all, the sought-after improvements in rule of law were not achieved. It was apparent that the governing coalition could hand the next cabinet a country “in an incomparably improved state from the point of view of economics and foreign policy, but from the point of view of morality of power, only slightly better”.¹⁶

With regard to a long-term perspective, it is possible to distinguish between three historical cycles. In the mid-1980s Slovakia was a country of unreformed communism, with a heritage of socialist modernization and without any future as a dignified civilization. Ten years later, in the mid-1990s, the political situation had changed, but success was threatened by authoritarian tendencies. Over the next decade, the country progressed significantly in the direction of democratic modernization. However, citizens’ disappointment with the lack of morality in the public sphere remained widespread.

2.3.3. CHALLENGES OF THE NONGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR’S “EUROPEANIZATION”

It was positive from the point of view of the nongovernmental sector that the state had gradually eliminated existing deformations in legislation. Institutional development of the nonprofit sector had become standard and legal changes now took place in cooperation with the sector. A partial improvement was also seen in how public funds were distributed. Procedures for obtaining subsidies and grants became more transparent and the criteria and rules of the entire process became clearer. The degree of competitiveness also increased; the once standard distribution set in advance to benefit “traditional” organizations no longer prevailed, but one now had to submit project proposals.

The share of public sources in NGOs’ income from 2002 – 2005 increased, partially because of the newly created tax assignment mechanism. The European structural funds also contributed to the increase in the share of public funds in 2005. At the same time, however, many organizations felt the downside of such assistance – an increase in bureaucracy and administrative difficulties in the process. Many NGOs

¹⁶ See Procházka, R. – Földesová, A. – Kalavský, M. – Orosz, L.: Rule of Law, Legislation and Application of Law. In: Mesežnikov, G. - Kollár, M. (Eds.): *Slovakia 2004. A Global Report on the State of Society*. Bratislava, Institute for Public Affairs 2004, pp. 130 – 148.

working in social services protested the rules for financial management of projects. When their conditions were not accepted, 17 NGO platforms stopped preparing programming for EU funds for the 2007 - 2013 period at the end of 2005.

European funds began to cause other problems as well. With the changing structure of accessible funding sources for NGOs, the larger NGOs grew stronger because of their greater administrative capacity and more effective use of new sources. Smaller initiatives became threatened, however, including hundreds of continually emerging and often ad hoc islands of civic engagement. In the past, there had been small grant programs financed from abroad available to them. These, however, began to dry up.

It seemed obvious that domestic foundations could be helpful and it did happen to a certain extent, thanks to some corporate and independent foundations. The foundation segment in Slovakia, however, was very young and accumulated its assets only gradually and on a very modest scale. An important role belonged to corporate foundations, which used grant schemes inspired by foreign programs functioning in Slovakia in the 1990s.

Many organizations working in civic advocacy, control of power and public policy think tanks found themselves in serious difficulty. Despite their contribution to the strengthening of democracy and quality of life, they were not able to find enough domestic supporters. Moreover, for many, access to public funds remained blocked, whether it was because they rejected the conditions of funding or because they wanted to maintain their financial independence. Funds covering direct costs of civic advocacy initiatives being implemented voluntarily were the main missing piece. Funds for longer-term infrastructure were also insufficient.

A persistent problem for NGOs was obtaining funds to finance administrative (overhead) costs. In previous years, organizations had covered these costs with large grants from foreign foundations. Now, in an effort to maintain their existence, the majority of them had to apply for projects that they might not have taken on otherwise. Such projects did not necessarily reflect the actual goals and needs for which these NGOs were set up.

Slovak NGOs also faced the dilemma of a continuing Europeanization of their work. Advocacy activities became less expected of them and greater emphasis was placed on providing services, which were financed by the

state or local governments. Thus, NGOs had less room for activities where their contribution could be unique – that is, for creating and influencing public policy.

2.3.4. NGOS' STRUGGLE FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY

This did not mean, however, that the third sector gave up their endeavor to strengthen the quality of democracy. As an example, we can mention activities to revitalize the Tatra Mountains, which were devastated by a windstorm in November 2004. In addition to dealing with immediate problems and waves of solidarity in which citizens and firms were engaged through fund drives and practical assistance, a public discussion was started on the renewal of the damaged land area. Both environmental NGOs and the expert and lay publics joined in the discussion. The way in which the government committee for renewal and development of the High Tatras was installed, as well as its decision to give precedence to economic aspects over environmental protection evoked dissatisfaction in part of the public. The latter reacted by announcing a new civic initiative called *Lightning over the Tatras*. In December 2004, this initiative turned into the Our Tatras Nongovernmental Committee, which brought together interested parties from the environmental protection, expert, artistic, academic and student segments of the population and took a stand against the “technocratic arrogance” of government representatives. The dispute continued into subsequent years.

The theme of protecting the environment also resonated in the form of protecting urban green and undeveloped spaces. Emerging pressures caused by economic development clashed with citizens' interest in preserving the character of the country and its quality of life. These confrontations played out in many towns and in protected areas as well. NGOs and civic initiatives created a customary counterweight to interest groups and provided space for the voice of citizens in the decision making process.

One of this period's successes was the resolution of a dispute involving the firing of five employees at Mondi Business Paper, a transnational paper company in Ružomberok. The Charter 77 Foundation provided the employees with pro bono legal assistance. The case, which at first glance looked like just a dispute between employees and their employer, had great significance for citizens' rights to freedom of speech and freedom

to form trade unions. After the District Court in Ružomberok found that the reasons for dismissal were unfounded, the employer agreed with the former employees on an out-of-court settlement.

In 2005, there was also progress in the use of the law on free access to information, which became a key instrument of civic engagement. Many disputes were also ongoing between NGOs and the state or local governments over access to contracts on the sale of state property, to documents on investment stimulation packages for foreign firms and to contracts on rental or management of public infrastructure. In many of these cases, the courts ruled in favor of the NGOs in the end.

2.4. CHALLENGES AFTER THE 2006 ELECTIONS

In the years that followed, the Slovak third sector maintained its diversity. NGOs continued their useful work in many areas and numerous volunteers joined in. Confirmation of citizens' interest in publicly beneficial and other civic activities also emerged as new organizations, often active outside of Bratislava and other large cities, were born. NGO operations were, however, threatened in 2006 when the governing coalition attempted to enact new legislation that would significantly limit the conditions for their work. Proposals submitted by the new Ministry of Finance of the new government headed by Robert Fico (elected in the 2006 parliamentary elections) aimed to abolish tax assignation for legal entities and raise the minimum assignation from taxes paid by physical persons to 250 Slovak crowns. These proposals came at a time when there was no broader agreement on methods or amounts of support for NGOs from public funding sources.

NGOs objected to this thrust and began to look for allies in an effort to find another, friendlier solution. On the one hand, for NGOs this kind of mobilization meant using up part of their capacity and energy to fight off threatening damage; on the other hand, it paradoxically generated a stronger third sector as a whole. First, individual segments of the third sector that had not joined as a united whole for a long time – since the second half of the 1990s – were forced to cooperate intensively in the name of a common interest. Second, thanks to the civic campaign *People to People*, NGOs managed to raise interest among the public in preserving the 2% tax assignation, and took on the profile of a useful and difficult-to-replace force. The dispute between the civic sector and representatives of the Slovak Ministry of Finance was widely publicized. Thanks to this, a discussion began not only about the future of the third

sector and convenient ways to support it via public funds, but also about the importance of civil society in general.

The Book of 2% containing descriptions of NGOs' diverse activities was an important part of the campaign. Assembled from more than 90 stories about how useful activities can be supported through the 2% tax assignation, it was delivered by representatives of the campaign to all 150 members of parliament before their session in December 2006. In the end, active citizens won their dispute and the attempt of the government was unsuccessful.¹⁷

The *People to People* campaign was not just about the 2% itself, but also about the entire approach of the government toward civic activism and the mission of civil society. Although the government had declared in its program that it "considers the third sector an important pillar of society and a part of a free civil society" and that it would "carry on a dialogue with individual segments and platforms of civil society as partners", in reality, it behaved differently. While NGO representatives had judged the previous Dzurinda government's attitude as "above all passive", the government of Robert Fico took active steps, which the sector perceived as "regressive".

2.5. THE THIRD SECTOR'S MODES OF CONTRIBUTING TO CULTURAL CHANGE

We will conclude this part with the assertion that the fruits of association and philanthropy raised the quality of life in Slovakia. NGOs created, disseminated and reproduced three kinds of specific wealth in society: cognitive wealth; a wealth of practical experience; and wealth of pro-social patterns of behavior. They used several modes of contributing to cultural change and democratic modernization of their country.

A. A part of the sector took on the profile of **control of power** and became an **important bulwark against authoritarian tendencies** in 1993 - 1998. This was a veritable Copernican mental revolution in a country soaked in fear and civic helplessness with a long history of subjection to the power that be. After 1998, civic organizations continued to carry out their control of power, advocacy and opinion making functions, and this line of thought is still alive today. Moreover, third sector organizations demonstrated their ability to mobilize citizens.

17 <http://www.cpf.sk/sk/kampan-ludia-ludom/>

- B. Another part of the third sector demonstrated its expert potential by becoming **a source of alternative approaches to public policy**. The creation of alternative proposals together with critical review of existing “official” state policies increases competition in the “market of ideas” or the “public policy market”, enables a more qualified public debate and also a more informed choice of political decisions.
- C. A further segment of the third sector established itself as **a service provider**. These activities were not just a supplement to state care, but often offered another, better alternative as well. NGOs brought competition to the field of service provision, which was not very present in public services in general. The element of competition contributed to balancing the tendencies towards corporatism and, thus, also to the search for an optimal version of public policies.
- D. Nongovernmental organizations have been also a **well of innovation**, a kind of **“experimentation laboratory”**. They work with a certain “social risk capital”, which allows them to test new approaches on a small scale. There have been dozens of innovations developed and piloted by nongovernmental organizations in Slovakia. Among others, these included: Roma teaching assistants in schools; agencies for home-based care; self-help groups for women recovering from breast cancer operations; alternative schools; hospices; re-socialization centers for individuals with addictions; micro-lending programs for women in disadvantaged environments; mothers’ centers, specialized labor agencies for disadvantaged social groups, for example citizens with health-related disabilities; a network of village leaders; community foundations and their programs; crisis centers for abused women; a caroling event called Good News organized by the eRKO Movement of Christian Children’s Societies, which encourages children to think about the poor in developing countries; alternative Slovak language textbooks for children from ethnic Hungarian families; environmental organizations dealing with waste issues; the MEMORY ambulant rehabilitation center, which provides services to people with Alzheimer’s Disease; a free advocacy and legal advisory office for citizens provided by the Charter 77 Foundation; and many others.
- E. And finally, some nongovernmental organizations began to **engage in humanitarian projects and democratic change outside the borders of Slovakia**. Foreign development assistance was a relatively new field for the Slovak nongovernmental sector. The transformation from an aid recipient country to a donor country happened very quickly. Furthermore, it happened at a time when Slovakia itself still had many social problems and still needed the help and solidarity

of richer parts of Europe. Nonetheless, the ability to think of others, to feel responsible for their fate and for the resolution of global issues represents a sprout of a new mental orientation overcoming provincialism as well as feelings of geopolitical insignificance and smallness.

3. ACTIVE CITIZENS AND THE NONGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR SEEK PARTNERS

3.1. LASTING DILEMMAS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Very soon after November 1989, it became clear that the free association of citizens is neither the only, nor the decisive way to structure a new system in society. To the forefront, along with participative democracy, came representative democracy and rule of law, from party competition in free elections to an independent judiciary. The economic environment was reorganized with a colorful spectrum of market-supporting institutions. Themes for public debate were also determined by turbulently developing media. Gradually, state organs became the key organizers of life.

In an extensive comparative study appropriately entitled the *Splendor and Misery of Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (2009), Egle Verseckaite documents that civil society as a notion is irrefutably linked to democratization: although the role of civil society in the fall of communism is mostly recognized, the question of its contribution to democratic consolidation generates much controversy.¹⁸

The concept of civil society actually has many interpretations depending on the cultural, political and geographical environment in which it is used.¹⁹ It is often defined as the space between family, market, and state, where civic culture develops and where various institutions, organizations and individuals operate. According to one of the simplest notions, civil society is the sphere of relationships, processes and spaces, which allow people to work together for the benefit of positive change in society. Nonetheless, this “positive societal change” and the role of civil society in achieving it is understood differently by various people, depending on their own beliefs

18 Verseckaite, E. (2009). *The Splendor and Misery of Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association 67th Annual National Conference, The Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, IL, Apr 02, 2009. http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p360495_index.html

19 Bútorá, M.: Občianska spoločnosť na Slovensku: kontexty, problémy a výzvy [Civil Society in Slovakia: Contexts, Problems, and Challenges]. In: Plichtová..., 2010, pp. 83 - 105.

and convictions, on social environment in which they live and their position in that society, their life experience, desires and plans.

In the last third of the 20th century, civil society and the development of the nonprofit, voluntary or third sector was attractive for various schools of thought. For *liberals*, free functioning of individuals and independent civic associations was a part of inherent natural rights. For people of *social-democratic orientation*, a vibrant civil society meant both significant civic participation and strengthening of solidarity as a part of solving social conflicts. *Conservatives* perceived a strong third sector and civic organizations as a tool for limiting the role of the state. As a spin-off of a strengthened civil society, the *Christian-oriented parties* promised fulfillment of the principle of subsidiarity, which delegates responsibility for solving social problems to the lowest level possible. *Communitarians* saw in civil society the hope for strengthening a societal model where the interests of individuals would not prevail, but where one remembers the greater whole, the community and the integration of the community in society.

Obviously, contemplations of civil society have a much older tradition in Western thought drawing on Aristotle and Cicero through Locke, Kant and Hegel, as well as Gramsci. The newer line of thinking is associated with Ernest Gellner, Ralph Dahrendorf and Robert Putnam. In their comprehensive work, the political scientists Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato present a renewed interest in civil society in the context of European thought in the 20th century.²⁰ Here they note contributions by Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Niklas Luhmann, Jürgen Habermas and Ronald Dworkin, while perceiving the sphere of civil society as promising ground for democratization.

Issues related to the third sector and civil society have been attracting the attention of western scholars as well as politicians and theorists in post-communist countries for several decades. In *Problems of Democratic Transformation and Consolidation*, one of the major contributions to the study on transformations in Southern Europe, South America and post-communist Europe, sociologist Juan L. Linz and comparative political scientist Alfred Stepan saw the existence of a lively civil society as one of the key five arenas which are decisive for the success of democratic consolidation (together with autonomous political society, rule of law, usable state and state machinery and an economic society). They understood it as an arena “where self-organizing groups, movements and individuals, relatively autonomous from the state, attempt to articulate values, create associations and solidarities, and advance their interests”.²¹

20 Cohen, J. L. - Arato, A.: *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge (Mass.) and London, MIT Press 1992.

21 Linz, J. - Stepan, A.: *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern*

In contrast, some advocates of representative democracy are concerned about the involvement in politics of the nonpolitical entities of a civil society because they see the Tocquevillian “dense web of associations” as a possible threat to the smooth and equitable functioning of modern states and markets alike (Mancur Olson) and they fear that civic associations could weaken political parties. In this respect, a too “abundant” or “thick” civil society could paradoxically work as a burden for a liberal democratic state. These critics see associations as jeopardizing democracy because they “intermediate and represent a partial interest (professional, group) and not a general, aggregated and political interest”.

In Central Europe, two prominent politicians have represented those two contrasting views. The first of them, the late president of the Czech Republic Václav Havel was convinced that democracy can be improved not only when the interests of people are promoted by political parties, but also when they are promoted by nonpolitical units of a civil society: he considered a flourishing third sector as an indispensable part of a mature civil society, even as an indicator of its maturity. Václav Klaus, the current Czech president, has been a strong critic of what he called “NGOism” and “*humanrightism*”, and an advocate of political parties.

The growth of the uncountable number of nongovernmental organizations, the boom in associating and voluntary activity is among the greatest social innovations of the last decades of the twentieth century. Two leading theoreticians, Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheier, spoke of the third sector as a “new global force”, Jessica Mathews wrote about a “power shift” in favor of non-state actors. This quickly growing universe included the most diverse collections of people: groups of neighbors, interest groups, professional groups, groups providing services, advocacy groups, groups of a religious or secular character. British authors Geoff Mulgan and Charles Landry designated the third sector as “the other invisible hand,” (beside the “invisible hand of the market”): while several of the most traditional groupings in the United Kingdom may have suffered a decline in membership (scouts, some religious organizations), the growing force and numbers of other, newer groups, for example, in the sphere of environment protection, human and civil rights, has been surprising. The robustness and growth of this phenomenon has fascinated social scientists – even as it has occasionally created headaches for politicians. The “associational revolution” has reflected the desire and effort of millions of people around the world to participate in something meaningful that may bring benefits to themselves

Europe, South America and Post Communist Europe. Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press 1996.

but that usually serves to the common good as well, something beyond individual fates or horizons.²²

With later developments, however, this excitement waned a bit. At the beginning of the 21st century, it was once again confirmed that not all forms of association serve the public interest, and that freedom of association can also be misused for acts against society. There also exist non-state actors who use violence – terrorists and their networks.

Civil society also has its darker side. From the past, we can point to the Weimar Republic and pre-Hitlerian Germany where civic activism, among other factors (such as the weakness of political institutions), contributed to the rejection and fall of parliamentary democracy. Extensive association doesn't necessarily lead to stable democracy, as was also confirmed in the case of Italian fascism.²³ To these examples other authors have added those of racist, anti-black movements in the U.S. and of the mafia operating in various countries. In other words, civil society does not consist "only of noble causes and earnest, well-intentioned actors"; it is "a bewildering array of the good, the bad, and the outright bizarre".²⁴

In this sense, in contrast to civil society, we often talk about uncivil civil society, that is, about the association of individuals who comprise a more "indecent," "uncivilized" component of civil society. In the past, these included movements, unions and streams that tended toward militant ideologies, such as Nazism, fascism and communism. Today, those who continue these traditions focus on installing order with a strong hand and suppressing otherness. They reject other ethnic groups, foreigners and members of religious and sexual minorities. Often they are similar to each other, even if they exist in different countries.

It was along these lines that an expert panel that participated in preparing the *Study on Trends in the Development of Civil Society in Slovakia* ²⁵

22 See more on it: Bútorá, M.: Civil Society: The International Context and the Case of Slovakia. In: Meier-Dallach, H. – Juchler, J. (Eds.): *Postsocialist Transformations and Civil Society in a Globalizing World*. New York, Nova Science Publishers 2001, pp. 3-32.

23 Kwon, H.-K. (2004). Associations, Civic Norms, and Democracy: Revisiting the Italian Case. In: *Theory and Society*, 33, 135 – 166.

24 Carothers, T.: Civil Society. In: *Foreign Policy*, 117, 1999, 18 – 29. "Recognizing that people in any society associate and work together to advance nefarious as well as worthy ends is critical to demystifying the concept of civil society." The author quotes a comment by David Rieff: if one limits civil society to those actors who pursue high-minded aims, the concept becomes "a theological notion, not a political or sociological one". Rieff, D. The False Dawn of Civil Society. *The Nation*, February 22, 1999).

25 Bútorá, M. – Bútorová, Z. – Strečanský, B. – Ondrušek, D. – Mesežnikov, G.: *Štúdiá trendov vývoja občianskej spoločnosti na Slovensku [Study on Trends in the*

(2011) asserted the risk of activating radical or extremist individuals or groups that use new communication technology and social networks for communication and mobilization. This risk is increasing, especially given the influence of the deep economic crisis, a worsening social situation among the population and a long-term failure of attempts to resolve serious social problems (for example, the Roma question).

3.2. SEEKING PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE THIRD SECTOR

3.2.1. ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF THE PARTNERSHIP

While the above mentioned experts agreed that NGOs can achieve greater effectiveness than the state and offer less expensive solutions in several areas, it is still not clear which model of relationships between the state and the third sector has been established in the Slovak Republic. Using a well-known conceptual framework conceived by Adil Najam (so-called four C's of third sector-government relations – cooperation, confrontation, complementarity and co-optation²⁶), we can say that Slovakia is a country where during the last two decades, mutual interactions have taken many forms. Among them, cooperation and complementarity have proved to be more favorable for the improvement of the quality of life and well-being of the inhabitants than other forms.

For example, in the case of marginalized Roma communities, a partnership between the state and NGOs could mean greater impact of public policies because the state itself lacks sufficient capacity for their implementation. In the area of environment, NGOs and volunteers often replace or supplement the state and local governments. Their activities save the state millions and create lasting values. Similarly, NGOs know how to provide environmental education to the population, especially in schools.

Development of Civil Society in Slovakia]. Bratislava, Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic 2011.

26 Najam, A.: The Four C's of Government-Third Sector Relations: Cooperation, Confrontation, Complementarity, Co-optation. In: *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, Volume 10, Issue 4, pp. 375-396, Summer 2000. See the brief summary at <http://csrc.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/4-cs-of-ngo-government-relations0001.pdf>

In social services, the productiveness of the partnership between the central or local government and NGOs is evident. In case of services offered by NGOs the state saves capital resources on equipment and construction of needed social facilities, it does not finance preparation and employee education, and in most cases, does not even finance the start-up phase of service provision. Nor does it finance repair of buildings and facilities or service expansion.

Since there are important societal problems that the state deals with insufficiently or unsystematically (for example, the status of minorities and disadvantaged groups; gender inequality; various types of discrimination; social integration of migrants, etc.), greater participation by NGOs in addressing these problems would be needed.

Civic associations can carry out a control function and thereby contribute to the creation of effective policies and better economic management by the state. Preventive measures adopted thanks to NGOs have saved the state and local government uncountable sums of money.

The NGOs often not only perform an economic function, but also accumulate social capital, thereby strengthening the cohesion of society – which usually applies to a lesser extent for activities conducted by state administration.

3.2.2. THE REALITY OF INSUFFICIENT COOPERATION

In Slovakia, the partnership between the state and the nongovernmental sector does not work well enough to take full advantage of the potential of free, active and responsible citizens. A research carried out by the Center for Philanthropy²⁷ has shown how third sector leaders understand the workings of the civic sphere. They consider it important for NGOs to “fill the gaps” and meet the needs of society and individuals (including certain experimentation and testing of innovations). They believe that NGOs should serve as a kind of civic control that provides a critical feedback for state power. They think it is essential for NGOs to help various disadvantaged groups and to strengthen the voices of those who would otherwise not be heard. They suppose it is necessary to achieve mutually beneficial cooperation with the public and business sectors in serving citizens, while

27 Strečanský, B.: „We and They” – Slovakia. In: Nicholson, T. (ed.): *“We and they”. NGOs’ Influence on Decision Making Processes in the Visegrad Group Countries*. Bratislava, The Sasakawa Peace Foundation/ The Sasakawa Central Europe Fund and Center for Philanthropy 2008, pp. 71 – 101.

respecting the principles of true partnership. In contrast with these beliefs, state representatives sometimes show a tendency to shape the nonprofit sector only into a provider of services with the support of public financing.

The sustainability of NGOs in Slovakia has been hindered for a long time because of the absence of a reliable tool for institutional support of NGOs through public financing that would be independent from the political sphere.

When referring to the problematic relationship between the state and civil society, we do not want to say that a complete absence of disagreement is optimal. Exchanges of opinion and disputes in the public arena are natural - however, **equal position of the partners** is of crucial importance. This equality was repeatedly violated by limitations on legitimate civic participation. With regard to participation in decision making, weakened rights of the public are at odds with customary practice in the EU. Critics representing NGO sector have pointed out that the government of Robert Fico (2006 - 2010) acted, in principle, only when Slovakia risked losing large sums of money. For example, when twenty Slovak environmental NGOs submitted a complaint to the European Commission regarding violation of the right of public participation in decision making essential to environmental protection, the European Commission began an inquiry on Slovakia in 2008. Under pressure of a potential loss of several billion Euros from EU funds, the Slovak parliament amended the corresponding law so that citizens and civic initiatives, associations and organizations could also express their views on the environmental impact of policies.

However, the tendency of the state to limit civic participation has not disappeared with the change of the government in July 2010. The signatory countries of the Aarhus Convention that met at the end of June 2011 in Kishinev, Moldova, stated that Slovakia violated the rights of the public regarding the dispute on the completion of the Mochovce nuclear power plant. They responded to a complaint initiated by Greenpeace Slovakia, VIA IURIS and other Slovak and Austrian NGOs alleging that Slovakia's Nuclear Supervisory Authority did not allow them to take part in the certification process regarding the third and fourth nuclear blocks in Mochovce.²⁸ Improvements in compliance with the Aarhus Convention that

28 In their *Alternative report on the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in Slovakia*, the legal experts from the civic association VIA IURIS stated that many parts of the official report submitted by the Slovak Government "are unclear and confused, some information is incomplete, untrue, and the text of the report is not clearly arranged. (...) We are submitting the Alternative report also due to deficiencies of the process of the NIR preparation, mainly concerning the public participation". (http://www.viaiuris.sk/stranka_data/subory/analyzy/20110510-viaiuris-alternative-report-aarhus.pdf)

imply a better access to information and public participation in decision making remain a challenge for Slovakia in the future.

Another example from the era 2006 – 2010 was violation of the principle of equality of nonpublic and public social service providers. Through an amendment to the law on social services from 2008, service providers from the state or public sector got precedence over nonprofit organizations. SocioFórum, an independent platform of social nonprofit organizations, stated that citizens were seeking NGO-based services, but public institutions were not ordering these services. Their complaint about this discrimination was reviewed by the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic and, in May 2010, the court deemed it justified. In practice the court's ruling means that those who require social services will again be able to choose the provider they prefer and not be subject to a contrary decision by a local or regional government.²⁹

3.2.3. AN ATTEMPT AT A MORE EQUAL PARTNERSHIP AFTER THE 2010 ELECTIONS

The government that entered office in July 2010 declared its readiness to take the voice of citizens seriously into account. Represented primarily by Prime Minister Iveta Radičová, its first steps were promising. Several personalities from the NGO sector joined the government.

In its program declaration *Civic Responsibility and Cooperation*, the new ruling coalition emphasized citizens' participation in public affairs – the cooperation of public administration bodies with the nonprofit sector, charity, or strengthening the volunteer sector. Simultaneously, it promised to “strengthen the respect for human rights principles in activities carried out by the government and state organs”.³⁰ The road to fulfillment of these intentions was not easy, however, and the fall of the government followed by the early elections in March 2012 interrupted the work of Radičová's cabinet.

Before the 2010 elections, official cooperation between the government and the nongovernmental sector played out in the Council of the

²⁹Social Services Act unconstitutional. *Slovak Spectator*, 24 May 2010 (http://spectator.sme.sk/articles/view/38962/3/social_services_act_unconstitutional.html).

³⁰*Programové vyhlásenie Vlády SR na obdobie rokov 2010 – 2014 [Programme Declaration of the Slovak Government for 2010 – 2014]* (<http://www.government.gov.sk/programove-vyhlasenie-vlady-sr-na-obdobie-rokov-2010-2014/>).

Government of the Slovak Republic for Nongovernmental Organizations, whose members included representatives of the third sector in addition to those of the state. Although the Council did not meet regularly, NGOs did use it for discussing important problems. For example, it served them during the period when they struggled to prevent the approval of the legislation on associations proposed by the Ministry of Interior or the approval of the modification of the 2% tax assignment mechanism proposed by the Ministry of Finance.

After Radičová's government came to power, the Council of the Government for NGOs was dissolved and a more broadly conceived Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality was established. This new institution was meant to integrate the agendas of the previously existing advisory bodies and assure that the state's partners gain a stronger influence. It encompassed eight independent committees, including the Committee for Nongovernmental Organizations, whose chairperson became the **Plenipotentiary of the Government for the Development of Civil Society**, a completely new post established on Premier Radičová's initiative.

There was no consensus among NGO leaders on the usefulness of such function. Some of them were skeptical or even critical, while many others supported the idea. In one of his first interviews, the new plenipotentiary Filip Vagač emphasized that the current relationship between the state and the third sector is not clearly defined, while the sector as whole is "very undernourished, many organizations cannot perform the basic functions for which they were founded and the state does not use the potential of what citizens offer". The government entrusted him with preparing a conception of civil society development.³¹ One of his first tasks was to contribute to the approval of a law on volunteering, which was passed by the parliament in October 2011 and has inserted volunteering into the legislative system and enabled a 3% tax assignment, exemption from several kinds of local tax and elimination of VAT for provision of free services, as well as other provisions that should support the development of volunteering in Slovakia.

After the premature end of the Radičová government, it is uncertain what the future of the position of the plenipotentiary will be and to what extent this office will have a chance to contribute to civil society development in Slovakia. One thing is for sure: if the new government strengthens the role of the state, it will be important that the third

31 On February 22, 2012, the conception was approved by the Slovak government.

sector not be underestimated. In any case, the new government will be subject to control by the NGOs. It will also have to respect the increasing demands for active participation of citizens in decision making.

Moreover, the third sector will have to cope with a gradual departure of a strong generation of leaders who have had significant influence in society over the last two decades. It is uncertain to what degree new initiatives and new personalities will establish themselves in the current commercialized media environment. The success of NGOs will also depend on their ability to maintain and cultivate a common space for public debate and subsequent joint action, given the significantly fragmented communication of virtual communities and social networks.

3.2.4. CHALLENGES OF FINANCING THE THIRD SECTOR

One of the reasons of a poor economic condition of NGOs in Slovakia is the absence of a politically independent mechanism of financing the third sector from public sources. The problem of financing NGOs from public sources concerns first and foremost limited amount of resources that flow to the third sector either indirectly, through the 2% of taxes, or directly, via donations from ministry budgets and from the EU funds. NGOs obtain resources also from other types of public funds (for example from the Anti-Drug Fund), as well as from the lottery (especially sports-focused NGOs).

However, the problem does not have only a quantitative dimension. Often the actual distribution of public resources is problematic. For a long time, NGOs have complained about bureaucratic practices, formalism and unequal status within contractual relationships. Under the Fico government (2006 - 2010), the media reported one scandal after another; criticism on the management of EU funds came from the European Union as well.

The tax assignment mechanism presents a different type of problem. NGO representatives do not consider it ideal, but since no other alternative model is available in Slovakia (e.g. tax write-offs for charitable gifts), they appreciate the current one. They realize that 2% of taxes are the only funds from public sources that allow flexibility of use, arrive on time and can be counted on.

Another unfavorable circumstance for the nonprofit sector has been the stagnation in the share of private financial sources during the last three

years. Needless to say, these funds are of key importance for maintaining independence of the sector's activities.

On the other hand, the development in giving has been somewhat more positive. According to the Slovak Donors Forum up to 950 public fund drives were carried out during the period 2000 – 2010. Of these, 61 were conducted in 2006, while 156 in 2010.³² The Ministry of Interior has records of all public fundraising drives since 2000³³ and the First Slovak Nonprofit Service Center provides on its web portal an up-to-date list of drives organized.³⁴

3.3. THE ROLE OF THE BUSINESS SECTOR

The business sector in Slovakia has become a more significant partner for the nonprofit sphere after the basic business conditions were improved and after essential reforms in the macroeconomic sphere were enacted, i.e. after 1998 and, in particular, upon Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004.

It should be said that companies played an important role as sponsors and supporters of charity, culture and education even before 1998. However, they fulfilled their role in an unclear environment without open communication and the financial support for NGOs was largely intuitive and nontransparent.

A change came only with the beginning of the new millennium when, hand in hand with political and economic reforms, the first partnerships between nonprofit organizations and companies on a local, and above all a national level, began to form. Several initiatives to develop relationships between the business and nonprofit spheres emerged. Examples of this include: the *Via Bona – Prize for Corporate Philanthropy and Social*

³² For example, the public fund drive known as *The Children's Hour*, run by the Foundation for Children of Slovakia has become a household word for the public. Several high quality elements come together for the preparation of this drive: volunteer enthusiasm; a high level of professionalism both in the organization and in the identification of children's and young people's needs; a very accessible, easy-to-understand and effective way of collecting financial resources; clear rules and transparency in the distribution of funds through a grant program; and finally, good skills in approaching the media and the public and generating interest in the issues of children and youth.

³³ http://www.vs.sk/vz/Skripty/vz_frame.htm

³⁴ http://www.1snsc.sk/Aktualne_verejne_zbierky

Responsibility of Companies, awarded out by Pontis Foundation since 1998; establishment of new organizations devoted to developing relations with companies - e.g. Center for Philanthropy (1999); development of a study on inter-sectoral cooperation (PANET, 2001); the theme of ethics in business addressed by Integra Foundation; formation of the Business Leaders Forum (2004); the *Top Corporate Philanthropist Award* launched by the Slovak Donors Forum in 2005; and research on social responsibility of companies conducted by Integra Foundation, Pontis Foundation, World Bank, and Business Leaders Forum.

The business sector experienced a significant moment of motivation to become engaged in a “social mission” in 2003 with the passing of an amended law on income tax. The law expanded the opportunity for devoting a part of income tax to include legal entities as well. This had a significant impact on the already intensifying community engagement of companies. As a direct consequence of this step, the number of foundations established by firms themselves grew rapidly. While only 23 corporate foundations were founded in years 1990 – 2001, from 2002 to 2007 another 58 were established, with many of them carrying the name of their mother company and operating as de facto subsidiaries.³⁵ Today, there are around 90 of them, accounting for 20% of all foundations.³⁶

After 2004, many companies assigned 2% of their taxes to foundations, which they themselves had established. In the case of large companies, these were significant sums of money, which their foundations distributed in the form of grants to hundreds of recipients. This fact created resentment among nonprofit organizations and among many politicians and public officials who had expected the assignments to be used directly for the benefit of existing nonprofit organizations. To illustrate: in 2009, seven out of ten of the largest recipients of 2% tax payments were corporate foundations or foundations connected to companies. These seven recipients alone received more than 9.5 million Euros, which represented 17% of all assigned resources.³⁷ A similar situation was repeated in 2010 as well.

Objections to this system are, however, mitigated by the fact that the role of corporate foundations and corporate philanthropy in general has grown stronger in terms of supporting public benefit activities and

35 *Správa o stave firemných nadácií. Analýza údajov za rok 2007* [A Report on the State of Corporate Foundations. 2007 Data Analysis]. Bratislava, Slovak Donors Forum 2008.

36 A survey conducted by the Center for Philanthropy in Bratislava.

37 www.rozhodni.sk

the nonprofit sphere in general. In 2010, these foundations gave out 12 million Euros in grants and contributions, that is, 85% of their total annual revenues. The share represented by their grant making as compared with total grant making by the foundation sector in Slovakia represents 37%.³⁸ Moreover, these larger foundations distributed resources received via transparent mechanisms through grant programs to various public benefit-oriented recipients who are, to a large extent, NGOs operating in the areas of education, health, culture and social assistance.

Simultaneously, the concept of **corporate social responsibility** gradually took hold in the business environment. This trend was endorsed by mother companies of foreign investors operating in Slovakia but also by systematic pressure from public and international institutions (the European Commission, UNDP and the World Bank) on the business sphere.

However, a study by the UNDP Bratislava Regional Center for Europe and the CIS in 2007 on the progress of socially responsible entrepreneurship in Slovakia warned that the concept of corporate social responsibility remains little known. A recent survey conducted in 2011 by the consulting firm Price Waterhouse Coopers and the Slovak edition of *Forbes Magazine*, in which 406 top corporate representatives from various business areas participated, showed that only 1% of them perceived corporate social responsibility programs as a source of competitive advantage that could help them attain growth.³⁹

In Slovakia, the usual interpretation of socially responsible companies is limited to corporate philanthropy, which is easier to communicate to the public.⁴⁰ Social responsibility, however, includes not only money-giving activities by firms, but also the maintenance of responsible relationships with their employees, clients, the environment and community over and above any framework of obligations stipulated by law. It is quite probable that if tax assignation by legal entities did not exist, stronger and more interesting activities in corporate social responsibility would develop. On the other hand, thanks to the tax assignation, numerous relationships between companies and nonprofit organizations were established, enabling companies to participate more actively in public benefit activities and to support civil society.

38 A survey conducted by the Center for Philanthropy in Bratislava.

39 http://www.pwc.com/sk/sk/slovensky-pohlad/assets/Slovensky_CEO_prieskum_2011.pdf

40 Gallová-Kriglerová, E. – Kerestešová, Z. – Kollár, M. – Vašečka, M.: *Východisková štúdia o uplatňovaní spoločensky zodpovedného podnikania na Slovensku*. [Baseline Study on Corporate Social Responsibility Practices in Slovakia]. Bratislava, UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS 2007.

In addition to these two intersections of the business and nonprofit spheres – corporate philanthropy and corporate social responsibility – there is one other form that remains in its infancy in Slovakia – **social entrepreneurship**. So far, the development of the latter has been significantly influenced by the opportunity to spend contributions from public sources, especially from EU funds, to support work integration. Social entrepreneurship was put in a negative light due to a corruption scandal concerning eight pilot social enterprises supported by the Fico government. When the European Commission conducted an audit in 2010 and found unauthorized cronyism, 10 million Euros had to be paid in penalties from Slovakia's state budget. Currently, of the original eight social enterprises, only four operate. Due to this scandal the public perceives social enterprises mainly in the context of cronyism and does not realize that they have broader functions reaching beyond work integration. These functions range from development of employment to the development of the service sector (tourism), of social services and of social potential.⁴¹

Obviously, there are also positive examples in Slovakia – for example, sheltered workshops or a community theater connected with a daytime activity center for people with mental disabilities (Theater from the Passage in Banská Bystrica). So far, however, there has been no massive expansion of such activities. As of November 2011, there were 61 items in the register of social enterprises, of which eight were NGOs and 29 were businesses. The remainder consisted of municipalities and community organizations.

To sum up, social enterprises have not yet found an appropriate place for themselves in Slovakia, which would reflect authentic needs and will of various actors – communities, NGOs and firms – their ambition to implement commercial activities and achieve economic independence, but at the same time to reach a clearly defined social goal.

In the global context, one of the new approaches in the area of combining business and social goals is **venture philanthropy**. This is defined as the provision of support by investing resources in promising business ideas put forth by nonprofit organizations whose priority is to achieve social goals in an economically effective way using tools and methods typical for the business sphere. In Slovakia, this type of philanthropy is still in

41 Lubelcová, G.: *Možnosti a príležitosti etablovania sociálnej ekonomiky a sociálneho podnikania v sociálnej politike v SR [Possibilities and Opportunities for Establishing Social Economics and Social Entrepreneurship in the Social Policy in the Slovak Republic]*. Bratislava, Department of Sociology FFUK 2007 (www.upsvarno.sk/data/files/125.doc).

its infancy. Its development requires a new generation of successful businesspeople who will look for paths leading from business success to activities aimed at reaching significant social goals.

4. CURRENT STATE OF THE NONGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR: TRENDS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS

4.1. THE NGO SECTOR IN NUMBERS

In the third sector in Slovakia today there are 40 different platforms, federations and ad hoc coalitions of NGOs, associated on the basis of common social or regional interests.

An important part of the infrastructure of the third sector are organizations providing services to NGOs (for example, educational, advisory, legal and information services). The magazine *Efekt* (www.casopisefekt.sk), published by the First Slovak Nonprofit Service Center (1SNSC), is a specialized periodical on the nonprofit sector. 1SNSC also manages an Internet portal (www.1snsc.sk), which provides information on economic and legal issues pertaining to the nonprofit sector, as well as another portal, www.rozhodni.sk on the 2% tax assignment.

The civic associations Citizen, Democracy and Accountability (www.oad.sk) and Charter 77 Foundation (www.charta77.sk) work in the area of legal advisory services, raising legal awareness and defending citizens' interests. VIA IURIS - a center for protection of citizens' rights and legal assistance from Banská Bystrica - focuses on public control of power and eliminating corruption (www.viaiuris.sk).

The consulting and advisory association Friends of the Earth - CEPA works in the area of environmental protection, balanced regional development and strengthening citizens' participation in decision making. It manages a webpage on the EU funds (www.eufondy.org) designed to provide information and to check that funds are used transparently and for the purpose they were intended.

In the area of education of nonprofit organizations, the Center for Education of Nonprofit Organizations (www.cvno.sk) is active. Partners for Democratic Change - Slovakia (www.pdcs.sk) provides professional education, consulting, training, and mediation and facilitation services.

Table 1

Number of NGOs between 2002 and 2010, breakdown by legal status

Legal status	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Civic associations	20,803	20,575	23,789	23,622	27,906	27,416	29,096	29,772	31,523
Societies of entrepreneurs						154	156	158	159
Trade unions and employee associations						995	1368	1932	2012
Associations with confirmed function						226	224	222	220
<i>Civic associations total</i>						28,791	30,706	32,084	33,914
Non-investment funds	345	440	513	493	555	552	533	546	557
Nonprofit organizations providing public benefit services	215	397	831	845	1,365	1,514	1,378	1347	1408
Foundations	553	249	305	276	475	362	386	397	404
International NGOs represented in Slovakia			122	115	152	150	158	155	151
Associations of legal entities					952	232	903	929	975
Total	21,916	21,661	25,560	25,351	31,405	31,601	34,064	35,458	37,409

Source: Register and records of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (<http://portal.ives.sk/registre/start.do>).

The web portal www.partnerstva.sk provides information on cooperation among the public, private and nonprofit sectors. In the field of organized philanthropy, the Donor's Forum (www.donorsforum.sk), Business Leaders Forum (www.blf.sk) and the Center for Philanthropy (www.cpf.sk) provide information and communication support.

Information on civic initiatives and attitudes of civic leaders towards current issues can be found also in an Internet civic daily called Changenet (www.changenet.sk). The civic association Voices (www.voices.sk) also contributes to informing the wider public on nonprofit organizations. Under the project *Ideas Count*, short films on ideas that help improve the quality of life are posted on the Sme.sk media server.

Table 1 offers quantitative data on the development of the number of NGOs in Slovakia according to their legal status from 2002 - 2010.

Growth in the number of some NGOs over the last three years might be stimulated by the opportunity to get support via the 2% tax assignation. At the same time, it is important to mention what are the prevailing purposes for which civic associations strive to gain support in the form of 2% of taxes. Of more than 10,000 organizations registered in 2011 on the List of Recipients of 2% of taxes, more than four-fifths are devoted to sports activities, support for schools and education, people with health problems, culture and recreation.

According to the Center for Philanthropy, in 2010, 404 foundations gave out grants and gifts with a total value of 32.8 million Euros, which is 2.2 million more than in the previous year. Forty-seven of the largest grant making foundations shared up to 91% of the total sum given for public benefit activities or for help to the needy. For several years, the largest grant making foundations in Slovakia have been Habitat for Humanity International Foundation, Pázmány Péter Foundation and SPP (Slovak Gas Industry) Foundation. Foundations use the following sources to finance their activities: money from the 2% tax assignation of physical persons and legal entities (14.1 million Euros); funds from private companies; from individual donors (mostly from public fundraising drives); from foreign donors; from other foundations; funds from public sources, above all from the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic; and to a lesser extent income generated from their own activities.

In 2010, foundations in Slovakia held 66.4 million Euros in assets. One of their basic missions is giving grants for implementation of activities for the public benefit. Many foundations provide grants via open grant programs for which anyone who fulfills the criteria can apply. The growth

in the number of foundations since 2008 may be caused by the decision of many business entities to establish their own foundations.

Since almost every active organization registers on the List of Recipients of 2%, this document is useful for estimating the number of really functioning NGOs. Based on Table 1, we can distinguish four main categories - civic associations, foundations, nonprofit organizations providing public benefit services and non-investment funds. As of June 30, 2011, there were 10,052 organizations recorded on the List. Therefore, it can be estimated that at least 30% of the 33,892 registered organizations are active NGOs. This corresponds with the state of the NGO sector in Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary.

In addition to these main legal forms of NGOs, there are church-affiliated organizations. They are registered with the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. On May 17, 2011, there were 18 churches and religious societies registered as well as and 33 central bodies. The total number of organized units of the 18 registered churches and religious societies reached 2,547. There were also 303 orders, special facilities and associations. Altogether, there were a total of 2,883 church-affiliated legal entities registered.

In 2011, the total number of registered organizations of all types in the Slovak Republic (NGOs and church-affiliated) exceeded 40 thousand for the first time (there were 40,292 of them). This fact documents willingness and readiness of people in Slovakia to associate.

The nonprofit sector is gradually becoming an economic factor as well, as it provides job opportunities for people. The first estimates were made in 2002 when the NGOs accounted for 2% of employment in the service sector. They employed about 23,000 people on a full-time basis and almost 61,000 people working on contract. Besides, 92,000 volunteers worked in NGOs as well. In 2007, these numbers were significantly higher - according to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, as many as 35,891 people were employed full-time in the nonprofit sector, 89,844 on contract and the number of volunteers had reached 286,741. There are no newer data available yet.

4.2. PLUSES AND MINUSES OF TAX ASSIGNATION

Useful information about the financial situation of NGOs is data on 1% or 2% of taxes assigned by physical persons or legal entities for the registered NGOs (Table 2).

Table 2

Total assigned 2% income tax assignment for NGOs in Slovakia in 2002 – 2011 (in Euros)

Year	Sum assigned by physical persons (PP)	Sum assigned by legal entities (LE)	Total assigned sum by PP and LE	Total year-on-year change
2002			3,381,863	
2003			3,221,992	-4.73%
2004	9,159,000	18,896,000	28,054,604	770.72%
2005	10,371,000	20,525,000	30,896,237	10.13%
2006	11,713,000	25,629,000	37,342,140	20.86%
2007	12,819,000	29,306,000	42,125,093	12.81%
2008	15,036,000	34,144,000	49,180,451	16.75%
2009	17,684,000	37,496,000	55,180,237	12.20%
2010	15,553,000	28,592,000	44,146,478	-20.00%
2011	16,503,000	25,092,000	41,595,000	-5.77%

Note: In 2002 – 2003, only physical persons assigned 1% of taxes.

Source: Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, 2011.

Currently, tax assignment is a key instrument of the decentralized support for the nonprofit sector from public sources in Slovakia and is popular both among its recipients (in 2011, more than 10,000 NGOs registered and this number grows annually), and among its providers (according to unofficial data, this mechanism is used by more than 50% of physical persons and more than 90% of legal entities).

The income from the 2% tax assignment for civic associations and nonprofit organizations shows a downward trend since 2009, which is caused by both the global economic and financial crisis (difference between 2009 and 2010) and the decrease in the assignment percentage from 2% to 1.5% (difference between 2010 and 2011).

Similarly to previous years, in 2010 the largest amount of money came from legal entities' assignment. Of the 10 most successful organizations, six foundations carry the names of their founders (legal entities). Alongside Pontis Foundation, a majority of the largest recipients are foundations linked to important corporations, as well as nonprofit organizations providing help to sick people and fighting against cancer.

According to findings by the market research agency TNS SK, in March 2010, among the most popular fields that legal entities sought to support with their 2% were children, youth and education (26.5%), as well as protection and support for health (17%).

Although the Council of the Government for Nongovernmental Organizations under the Fico government decided to gradually reduce tax assignment by legal entities in June 2009, through intensive lobbying, nongovernmental organizations managed by the end of 2011 to prevent this negative change. As a result, **the current model for assignment of 2% will remain in place until 2013**. Parliament reacted to the call from key nonprofit platforms, which criticized the economic situation of the third sector and recommended preserving the current legal status. NGOs argued that if the law gradually lowering the tax assignment percentage were passed, they would receive 6.5 million Euros less. In the following period, they emphasized, one can expect negative social impacts of economic crisis and an increased burden on the social safety net: "In this safety net, nonprofit organizations are irreplaceable because they provide their services more effectively, put an emphasis on innovative approaches to the target groups and work where neither the state nor the local governments reach." A reduction of the amount of money from the assignment mechanism would amount to such a financial loss, that NGOs' very existence would be

threatened. This would mean that the social safety net itself would be substantially weakened in a society undergoing a moment of deep crisis. Parliament accepted this call.

4.3. PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

Although NGOs perform diverse useful functions in society, the public as a whole has a reserved attitude toward the third sector. At the beginning of the 21st century, about two-fifths of citizens of Slovakia considered it trustworthy. In the decade that followed, the credibility of the nonprofit sector in the eyes of the public stagnated after a temporary increase at about 41%. At the same time, the share of people distrusting NGOs increased slightly, reaching 45-47% during the last three years.

As Table 3 illustrates, the attitudes of the public toward the third sector are less positive than toward local self-governments, but significantly more positive than toward political parties. As for the trustworthiness of the government and parliament, it is usually influenced by their actual political configuration, and over the last decade has been generally lower.

According to numerous research studies, the positive image of NGOs is linked to their activities in charity and assistance to people in need. By contrast, negative associations are based mainly on suspicions of non-transparency in the handling of funds and of self-seeking motives of some individuals working in NGOs.

How does the public perceive the usefulness of NGOs involved in specific areas? According to repeated surveys⁴², the public considers *most useful* (with more than 3/4 of respondents giving a prevailingly positive answer) NGOs that provide social services to people in

42 Bútorová, Z.: Mimovládne organizácie očami verejnosti [Nongovernmental Organizations in Public Perception]. In: Strečanský, B. (ed.): *Kvadrátúra kruhu alebo otázka spôsobu? K niektorým otázkam roly verejných zdrojov v podpore občianskeho hlasu vo verejnej politike na Slovensku 1995 – 2007* [Squaring the Circle or a Question of Method? On some Questions of the Role of Public Sources in Support of Civic Voice in Public Policy in Slovakia 1995 – 2007]. Banská Bystrica, Nadácia Ekopolis 2008, pp. 27 – 40; Bútorová, Z.: Mimovládne organizácie a dobročinnosť vo svetle verejnej mienky [NGOs and Charity in Public Perception]. In: Majchrák, J. – Strečanský, B. – Bútorová, M. (Eds.): *Keď ľahostajnosť nie je odpoveď. Príbeh občianskeho združovania na Slovensku po páde komunizmu* [When Indifference Is not the Answer. The Story of Civic Associating in Slovakia after the Fall of Communism]. Bratislava, Institute for Public Affairs 2004, pp. 145 – 182.

Table 3

Development of trust in selected institutions in Slovakia (% trusting : % not trusting in 2003 – 2011)

	XI. 03	XI. 04	XI. 05	XI. 06	XI. 07	XI. 08	II. 10	XI. 10	IX. 11
Local self-governments	56 : 38	56 : 39	54 : 41	58 : 27	55: 39*	60 : 36	-	51 : 43	-
NGOs	42 : 40	-	49 : 39	47 : 38	40 : 43	47 : 41	42 : 45	41 : 47	41 : 47
Parliament	24 : 72	32 : 66	24 : 73	50 : 45	44 : 52	42 : 56	40 : 56	32 : 63	31 : 66
Government of the Slovak Republic	19 : 79	29 : 69	21 : 77	54 : 42	45 : 51	48 : 50	42 : 54	33 : 62	29 : 67
Political Parties	11 : 83	16 : 80	11 : 84	24 : 69	22 : 72	19 : 78	19 : 76	21 : 72	-

* Data from August 2007.

- Data not available.

Source: Institute for Public Affairs, 2004 – 2007, 2010 – 2011; COPART-KVSBK/IVO, 2008.

need and that work in health. After them follow: NGOs focused on environment protection; NGOs dealing with community development; NGOs focusing on revealing corruption in the public sector; NGOs dealing with women's issues and promotion of their rights; and NGOs defending the rights of citizens against the state and private property owners.

At the second level of usefulness (with a 2/3 to 3/4 share of positive opinions) there are: NGOs working against racism, ethnic and other intolerance; NGOs acting as watchdogs over the state administration, local governments and court system; NGOs monitoring political party financing and publicly criticizing problems that are revealed; NGOs participating in political decision making by organizing citizens' initiatives and pushing for citizens' interests; and NGOs providing humanitarian assistance and supporting democracy in other countries.

And finally, there is a third level of NGOs that enjoy a 50% positive evaluation. Respondents placed into this category think tanks providing expert analysis of public policy issues and offering new, nontraditional solutions, as well as NGOs striving to morally and socially support the Roma community.

Data from 2005 further showed that 71% of respondents knew of at least one NGO. On the top of the list of most visible NGOs were organizations that have managed to achieve a robust media presence and focus on traditional charity, especially in health or assistance to children. However, NGOs working on environmental protection issues, had also become highly visible at that time. Currently, one can hypothetically assume higher visibility of several watchdog NGOs - for example Alliance Fair-Play and Transparency International, advocacy NGOs (VIA IURIS, Animal Freedom, People Against Racism, civic association Citizen, Democracy and Accountability - ODZ) and think tanks (Institute for Public Affairs - IVO, Slovak Governance Institute - SGI and the Institute of Economic and Social Studies - INESS).

4.4. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC CAMPAIGNS AND INITIATIVES

The phenomena of social networks and new media (e.g. Facebook) are becoming more and more important in mobilizing citizens' activism. During the period 2004 - 2011, more than 200 campaigns, calls, petitions, initiatives, declarations and public reviews of proposed legislation appeared

on the website of the internet-based civic daily www.changenet.sk. They were supported by tens of thousands of citizens. The ranks of signatories usually include prominent personalities of public life, civic activists and representatives of NGOs, experts from various fields and professions, members of local governments and other politicians; as well as many ordinary citizens. The Internet provides space for a useful public discussion.

Campaigns and initiatives and controversies concern various topics: public policies and issues of democracy; the rule of law and implementation of justice; social and economic problems; public administration and local government; the position of minorities and human rights; nationalist threats; protection of environment and cultural heritage; situation in media, as well as the human resource policies of public institutions. They encourage review of the problems and often call to action as well. The reviews strive to achieve change in proposed legislation and usually have a solid level of expertise.

The most successful was an environmental campaign launched by a coalition of groups led by the active Slovak branch of Greenpeace. The campaign demanded that the country's local communities have a say on uranium mining projects in their areas. In Slovakia, any petition obtaining 100,000 signatures must be discussed by the national parliament. This petition garnered 113,000 signatures and was delivered to the parliament in September 2009. In March 2010, the campaign achieved its goal: Slovak legislators agreed on legal changes to geological and mining laws to grant local communities, municipal and regional authorities more powers to stop or limit geological research on uranium deposits and uranium mining. This was not only a huge achievement for the Slovak environmental movement and an inspiration for similar groups around the world, but a strong example of effective action for Slovakia's civil society as a whole.

The initiative was a textbook example of effective concurrence of numerous factors: a "strong" theme; qualified preparation and systematic work; knowledge of legal and administrative norms and regulations; the ability to find allies and offer them meaningful benefit (for the Association of Towns and Villages and the Union of Towns this meant the prospect of strengthened competencies for towns and villages); an attractive campaign; the internationalization of the controversy; and intensive cooperation with the media.

4.5. CONTRIBUTION OF VOLUNTEERISM

Important information on the increase of citizens' engagement in public activities has been presented in a study entitled *Volunteering*

in Slovakia which was based on a survey conducted by the Center for Volunteering together with other centers and universities on a representative sample of the population.⁴³ According to this survey, 27.5% of citizens over the age of 15 participate in formal volunteer activities carried out for a specific organization. As many as 47.1% engage in informal, spontaneous volunteer activities outside their family, which are not organized by any NGO.

Today, social assistance is the area where volunteering is most common (23%), followed by the environment (15%), and arts and culture (12%). Approximately 10% of volunteers are active in sports (11%), religious and church activities (10%) and children's and youth-oriented organizations (10%). Other volunteer activities include support for charity, giving and volunteering (9%); education and research (7%); humanitarian aid and prevention of natural disasters (6%); health care (5%); professional organizations, chambers, unions and trade unions (4.5%); community and housing development (4.5%); politics (4%); and advocacy for the rights and interests of various groups (3%).

Comparisons with the results of previous surveys by the Institute for Public Affairs⁴⁴ shows that **volunteering in the social and environmental spheres, as well as culture, has increased**. The total public support for giving and volunteering is growing, probably also due to the campaigns in support of such behavior carried out in the recent years. Managed or organized volunteering is on the rise, especially in social service facilities managed by nonprofit organizations.

International cooperation and trends in other countries stimulate the development of volunteering in Slovakia, too. An increasing number of firms engage their employees in corporate volunteering.

One of the many initiatives in corporate volunteering is represented by the Engage group, which brings together companies interested in public engagement in the community. Pontis Foundation helps prepare the weekend event *Our Town*, in which 60 companies and more than 5,000 volunteers have participated since 2007. Together they worked a total of 18,589 hours, the equivalent of 10 person-years of work. In 2011, activities were carried out in Bratislava, Košice, Galanta and Žilina. Company

43 Brozmanová-Gregorová, A. - Matulayová, T. - Mračková, A. - Vavrinčíková, L. - Vlašičová, J.: *Dobrovoľníctvo na Slovensku - výskumné reflexie [Volunteering in Slovakia - Reflections on a Survey]*. Centrum dobrovoľníctva, Banská Bystrica, Univerzita Mateja Bela Banská Bystrica, C.A.R.D.O., Prešovské dobrovoľnícke centrum, Prešovská univerzita 2011 (a manuscript).

44 See Bútorová..., 2004.

employees, as well as the broader public joined in, giving their own time and labor.

In 2010, the Pontis Foundation launched the *Helping Heads* program with the Engage group, which is devoted to a more complex kind of volunteer help from companies – advisory services and transfer of know-how. Employees from the firms involved give their business knowledge, experience and skills to selected nonprofit organizations.

4.6. NEW FORMS OF GIVING AND FUNDRAISING

In Slovakia, the tradition of mutual help goes back ages, especially within one's circles of relatives, neighbors and friends. Various surveys have confirmed that more than half of the country's inhabitants help someone over the course of the year – whether it be materially or financially. Many organizations and individuals engage in philanthropy, giving and helping others.⁴⁵

An important role in education, networking, infrastructure and transfer of know-how in the area of fundraising belongs to the Slovak Fundraising Center, which was established in 2009 through an initiative by experts from PANET, PDCS, Greenpeace Slovakia, WellGiving and the Center for Philanthropy. It works together with partner organizations abroad (České centrum fundraisingu, Polskie Stowarzyszenie Fundraisingu, Resource Alliance and others). In 2010, it became an observer in the European Fundraising Association. Every year it organizes a Slovak-Czech conference on fundraising and engages fundraisers from nonprofit organizations through the Club of Professional Fundraisers.

⁴⁵For more information see the websites of the following organizations: Centrum pre filantropiu n.o. (www.cpf.sk); 1. slovenské neziskové servisné centrum (www.1snsc.sk); Komunitná nadácia Bratislava (www.knb.sk); Slovenská katolícka charita (www.charita.sk); Komunitná nadácia Banská Bystrica (www.knzm.sk); Nadácia pre deti Slovenska (www.nds.sk); Dobrý anjel (www.dobryanjel.sk); Nadácia Pontis (www.nadaciapontis.sk); Nadácia Socia (www.socia.sk); Nadácia Ekopolis (www.ekopolis.sk); Nadácia Orange (www.nadaciaorange.sk); Nadácia Tatra banky (www.nadaciatatrabanky.sk); Nadácia SPP (www.nadaciaspp.sk); Dakujeme.sk (www.dakujeme.sk); Fórum donorov (www.donorsforum.sk); Karpatská nadácia (www.karpatskanadacia.sk); Človek v ohrození o.z. (www.clovekvohrozeni.sk); Dobrovolnictvo.sk (www.dobrovolnictvo.sk), portál Ľudia ľuďom (www.ludialudom.sk).

4.6.1. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COALITION FOR THE SUPPORT OF INDIVIDUAL GIVING

Financial sustainability is a long-term problem in the Slovak nonprofit sector. State-based sources (for example, in the form of subsidies) have a problematic character, both in terms of their predictability and their bureaucratic nature. Besides the 2% assignation, the funding opportunities that remain for nongovernmental organizations are only corporate financing and foreign sources. Of the latter, however, some are gradually disappearing. Others, especially the European ones that are managed by Slovak administrative bodies, are burdened with inconvenient conditions for grant making and bureaucratic barriers. Private financing sources from local foundations are not sufficient to cover the needs of the expanding third sector.

For this reason, the attention of the third sector naturally turns to other forms and opportunities for financing. Individual giving is perhaps the cleanest form of support to NGOs by the public. Today, there are already organizations in Slovakia which receive more and more income through gifts from individual supporters. In general, the volume of individual contributions to nonprofit organizations has grown in recent years.⁴⁶

Despite this positive trend, the extent of individual giving in Slovakia is lagging behind the Czech Republic in terms of focus, as well as volume. Both a reason for and a consequence of this situation is that this form of fundraising often has no appropriate place in NGO financing strategies. The costs associated with applying for grants are still lower than those associated with fundraising from individuals. The latter, however, is crucial for effectively functioning organizations because it creates

⁴⁶An example of an outstanding giving initiative is the *Dobry anjel* (Good Angel) project. It provides financial assistance to families with children where the father, mother or one of the children suffers from cancer or another serious disease, which has put the family in need financially. From its launch in September 2006 until the end of 2010 the project collected more than 9 million Euros from more than 85,000 contributors. The initiative was established by businessmen Andrej Kiska and Igor Brossmann, who had personal experience with cancer. They not only contributed their own money to the collection, but also their innovativeness and managerial know-how, as well as their full energy and human capital. Money that is collected over a month is given in the full amount and in equal parts to those who are ill on the first business day of the following month. On the website, every donor can see addresses and get information about the life stories of the people to whom the system delivers their contribution. People in need can themselves register with cooperating health workers, whose number had reached 1,130 by the end of 2010.

a basic framework of legitimacy for their efforts in public. Even today, organizations are receiving money through collections, ad hoc gifts, direct mail campaigns and the 2% tax assignment. These are, however, one-off, primarily anonymous contributions. Only a small percentage of individual gifts come via regular payments. This is also because in Slovakia, for a long time, there were no appropriate instruments for making modern, regular payments that are routinely used in most EU countries and elsewhere. Even the few new mechanisms, such as mobile donations (giving via mobile text message), enable only a one-off, anonymous kind of support with a firmly set gift sum. By contrast, NGOs in the other Visegrad countries have been taking advantage of payment instruments such as direct debit.

For this reason, in April 2011, upon the suggestion of the Center for Philanthropy, the Coalition (of NGOs) for the Support of Individual Giving was established. It was inspired by a similar project abroad. Its mission is to help develop favorable conditions for individual giving, promote the common interests of members, eliminate barriers that complicate the process of giving, and create a platform for mutual cooperation and exchange of experience in the area of fundraising from individuals. The nongovernmental organizations in the coalition seek to achieve access to instruments that would make regular giving easier. These are direct debit, regular payments via debit cards and giving through regular mobile payments. Members of the Coalition are also interested in the establishment of charitable postal rates, which would make for easier and less expensive communication between donors and recipient organizations and thus improve the information flow on NGO activities. The Coalition communicates with relevant partners from the private and public sectors – banks, mobile operators, the management of the postal service and others. In the future, it aims to address other themes connected with fundraising from individual donors, such as creating a code of fair fundraising and quality bands, which would be associated with it, as well as lowering bank fees for NGOs.

4.6.2. GIVING PORTALS

Another promising example in the field of fundraising are several on-line giving websites, which present interesting projects on the Internet and attempt to call on donors to support them. Their common feature is that they don't represent just one organization or recipient, but create a space for many different recipients from which donors can choose and support directly.

The portal dakujeme.sme.sk (thankyou.sme.sk) has been managed by the WellGiving civic association for several years. It focuses primarily on assistance to individuals in need, but is open to other recipients as well. Through this portal, 117 recipients received support in 2010. Recently, it has been developing in cooperation with the sme.sk portal.

Another good example is the dobrakrajina.sk page, run by the Pontis Foundation. Its profile is one of a donors' social network, which contributes to positive change and calls on donors to "help change this country".⁴⁷ It is a permanent fund drive. Through the Dobrá krajina project, between September 2009 and June 2011, almost 1,700 donors supported 72 projects offered by various nongovernmental organizations in a total amount of 100,000 Euros.

In 2010, the portal ludia-ludom.sk was launched. It is run by 4People as a joint project with the company SK-NIC (the administrator of Slovak top level domain registry) and the Center for Philanthropy. Its specific feature is universality and thematic openness. The portal aims to "create a space for helping all. Some people want to help people who suffer and struggle with problems that are not their fault. Others want to lend a helping hand mainly to those who could never become better, more educated or more skilled on their own, but need our support to achieve it," write the managers on the website.⁴⁸

4.7. CHALLENGES OF WATCHDOGS, ADVOCACY NGOS AND THINK TANKS

Activities in this area comprise a very small proportion of the whole nonprofit and are carried out by 150 – 200 NGOs. However, they have a crucial influence on public life. During recent years these NGOs have helped Slovakia in democratization, promotion of human rights, realization of economic reforms and improving governance, in setting agenda and framing public debate on important social problems as well as in putting into effect many social innovations.

With accession to the EU, the differences between the new and old member countries were formally erased in the areas of democratic governance and human rights. In reality, however, problems in both areas

⁴⁷ <http://www.dobrakrajina.sk/>

⁴⁸ <http://www.ludialudom.sk/InfoStranky/Filantropia.aspx>

have persisted and in some aspects have even deepened. Obviously, deficiencies in democracy and human rights are a long-term problem to which even established democracies are not immune; but the situation in the new EU countries, including Slovakia, is more serious. The level of their social capital is significantly lower, and the ability of the state to effectively eliminate these deficiencies is more limited. The public is less sensitive and therefore, less capable to put adequate pressure on the sphere of politics.

Special attention should be given to nongovernmental organizations devoted to the fight against discrimination, to monitoring the situation of traditional and new minorities, and to promoting gender equality.

An important role belongs to analytical centers or think tanks, which are providing a critical review of social and political processes and relationships, paying attention to the issues of good governance, analyzing public policies and suggesting policy recommendations. They improve the competitive environment in the creation of concepts and public policies and bring to the table ideas, concepts and proposals for strategies from which politicians can choose. The result is a larger production of quality ideas and projects. Similarly beneficial for society are other activities, like monitoring the effective use of public resources and the effective work of public administration (watchdog activities). These activities create pressure for eliminating ineffectiveness or corrupt practices in systems of public financing.

Despite their irrefutable usefulness for society, all these three types of NGOs (watchdogs, advocacy organizations and think tanks) battle to sustain themselves as well-functioning and strong institutions. They suffer from lack of funds and low demand from the state and private spheres for their products. Nor is it easy for them to be successful commercially. Some of them approach opportunities to draw on state support with caution; they apply for public resources to a lesser extent than service-providing NGOs. The topics that they address are often unpopular (e. g. public policies addressing problems of the Roma community or education on human rights). They are not very attractive for the corporate sphere; the support for projects that inherently contain conflict with the establishment is traditionally less widespread than support for charitable, social, culture or sports-related projects or other less controversial themes. Due to the economic and financial crisis, this reluctance might be even stronger.

4.8. CREATION AND DISSEMINATION OF SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Despite far from ideal external conditions, over the last 20 years the third sector in Slovakia has introduced many social innovations that address

current problems in society. This innovative space is not managed from above. The processes evolve spontaneously from the bottom up, from individuals and organizations. Many social innovations were born in the third sector because NGOs have much more direct contact with people than the institutions of public or state administration. For this reason, they are able better identify people's needs and find suitable ways to satisfy them.

An important function of NGOs is testing or piloting innovations in the social sphere. NGOs that spontaneously emerge in various environments often represent for the state a kind of probe under real conditions, which verifies some approaches and generates timely feedback. Over the last two decades, thanks to NGOs, some social innovations have been introduced and disseminated in Slovakia. Let us mention at least a few of them.

In the area of community development, a model of *community foundations* established by the community foundation Healthy City Banská Bystrica in 1994 has been developing since the mid-1990s. These are grant-making foundations operating on a specific territory and focused on improving the quality of life for the inhabitants of that community. Today, there are nine community foundations operating in Slovakia, which belong to the Association of Community Foundations of Slovakia. They reach about a quarter of Slovakia's inhabitants with their activities. This is done according to what the inhabitants themselves consider to be their quality of life and from resources, which citizens themselves provide toward this goal.⁴⁹ Foreign foundations contributed to their start-up, but today they are wholly dependent on support coming from their own communities.

Another type of social innovation is represented by *mothers' centers*. The first ones started in 1996 as initiatives of mothers in Poprad and Košice and were inspired by examples from the Czech Republic and Germany. Their founders built a unique model, which has grown exponentially since 2001. Currently, there are more than 80 mothers' centers here whose goal is to create a meaningful space for the self-realization of mothers, for raising societal recognition for motherhood and creating a friendly environment toward mothers and children in society. Mothers' centers are NGOs at the local level, supported by local resources with democratic decision making processes, a high share of volunteer work and with activities serving mothers and families.

⁴⁹http://wings-community-foundation-report.com/gsr_2010/gsr_home/home.cfm. They operate in Bratislava, Pezinok, Trenčín, Nitra, Banská Bystrica, Sabinov, Bardejov, Prešov and the Liptov region.

Another kind of social innovation is *low-threshold centers* or *youth programs*. Intenda Foundation has been developing this concept since 2003. In the beginning, the foundation supported low-threshold facilities for children and young people who were in difficult situations or in danger, and since 2009 it has been continuing with this under a program entitled *We Keep on Lowering Thresholds*. The concept of low-threshold work is also known abroad as *streetwork*. Today, the low-threshold approach is a part of the policy of social inclusion at the local government level, above all in towns and cities, as well as a part of state policy not only toward youth, but also other target groups.⁵⁰

The emerging *network of volunteer centers* can also be considered an important social innovation. Although there are only a few of them (in Banská Bystrica, Prešov and Košice), it would be a positive move to expand them to a larger number of towns so that they can create space for volunteers to do their work.⁵¹

Another type of social innovation is the *Roma community centers*. This model has been developing since the 1990s. Today, there are more than 45 of them operating in locations with Roma populations and creating a space for socially beneficial, low-threshold work. The Open Society Foundation in Bratislava has significantly helped these centers to develop. Currently, the state and local governments also rely on the concept of community centers. The Association of Community Centers brings together the staff of these centers and provides support to them.⁵²

Another type of important innovation comes from the ETP Slovakia.⁵³ This NGO developed micro-lending, savings programs and mentor programs oriented toward active individuals in Roma communities. Such programs have been implemented since the end of 1990s and currently they are producing the first results.

All these and other social innovations are calling for **massive scaling up or dissemination**. Obviously, not all of them survive the test of “reality”.

50 www.nizkoprahy.sk, www.intenda.sk

51 www.dobrovolnictvo.sk

52 www.spolocnostkc.sk

53 ETP Slovakia is a non-profit consulting and training organization that was established as a direct successor of Environmental Training Project for Central and Eastern Europe which was initiated in 1992 by U.S. Agency for International Development. As an independent entity since 1995, ETP Slovakia has cooperated with the local government, businesses and NGOs in programs that increase the sustainability of local development and improve the environment as well as provide assistance to disadvantaged individuals and families (www.etp.sk).

Some of them take root easily and expand without any need for significant external help while others need longer-term support. Still others, however, require massive support if the environment they work in has limited potential. The public sector has the opportunity to adopt innovations, but it is not always successful. Sometimes it is dragged down by low motivation, a lack of understanding among managerial staff or rigidity of management approaches. On the other hand, it can be also the uniqueness of the creators and leaders of social innovation that is not transferable, and thus a functioning model does not necessarily develop elsewhere.

4.9. RECENT TRENDS IN CIVIC PARTICIPATION

At the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the fall of communism, experts have discussed to what extent Slovakia – similarly to other countries in the region – has experienced the trend of weakening civic participation, which is most significantly demonstrated by falling rates of voter participation. Research results presented in the above-mentioned collective monograph *Citizenship, Participation and Deliberation in Slovakia...* (2010), as well as findings included in the *Study on Trends in the Development of Civil Society in Slovakia* (2011) suggest that such generalizations do not hold.

On the one hand, comparative data from representative sociological surveys conducted between 1994 and 2008 indicate that during this period, the ranks of active citizens engaging in public affairs did not expand, but rather contracted. This means that citizens delegated responsibility for solving social issues more and more to politicians, state officials and business; and exercised their control function, articulated their interests and pushed for their own demands to a lesser extent. This problematic trend has been caused by numerous circumstances.

First: the decline in civic participation is probably a consequence of a mental shift generated by the onset of a market economy – a growing individualism and weakening interest in the problems of others. This trend manifests itself in new forms of sophisticated consumerism by people who are well-off, but also in the effort to concentrate all energy on making both ends meet by those struggling with poverty and social insecurity.

Second: the decline in civic participation can be caused by the dampening effect of forgetting. Since the fall of communism, twenty-two years have passed, and since the victory over Vladimir Mečiar's authoritarian style of governance, more than a decade has elapsed as well. Moreover, after Slovakia's accession to the European Union and

NATO, a feeling of relief has spread among a part of citizens – a feeling of “we made it” and for this reason it is not necessary to fear a basic threat to democracy.

Third: the weakening potential of civic participation in Slovakia is also a consequence of an overall decrease in social trust, which is the lubricant of people’s willingness to associate and cooperate with the goal of solving their problems and improving the quality of their lives.

Fourth: some people put off participation because they realize what a major effort is needed to change their conditions and how rarely this kind of effort is crowned with success. The organizers of diverse protests, campaigns, and mass legislative reviews could tell us more about their frustration.

Fifth: the withering interest in participation can be explained by the unintended effect of the opening of Slovakia to the world. Ambitious and self-confident people, especially the younger ones, now have a choice: join a fight to improve the situation in Slovakia, or look for different options – for example, for a study stay or working career abroad. Obviously, these decisions are less fateful today than they were before the fall of communism when going abroad meant emigrating. Yet, their short-term effects should not be underestimated. In addition to brain drain, they cause shrinking of the ranks of citizens who have the potential to contribute to improving Slovakia’s quality of life.

The combination of all these factors creates hotbed for a lowered capacity of individuals to engage in public life. Since they will probably be present in the near future, we cannot rely on an automatic reversion of this negative trend with the passage of time or a generational shift.⁵⁴

On the other hand, however, developments in the last few years showed that **the declining trend in civic participation is not irreversible**. As for election behavior, significant reactive potential exists in society. In periods when the power elites tended toward authoritarianism, the citizens have repeatedly exhibited a growing conviction that “no one else will do it for us” and for this reason, it would be counterproductive to stay on the sidelines. We can point to the mobilization of citizens before the parliamentary elections in 2010 as an example. Through the Internet, several spontaneous initiatives emerged, which called especially upon

54 Bútorová, Z.: Verejná mienka: zdroj pohybu, sila zotrvačnosti [Public Opinion: the Source of Movement, the Power of Inertia]. In: Bútorá, M. – Mesežnikov, G. – Kollár, M. – Bútorová, Z. (Eds.): *Kde sme? Mentálne mapy Slovenska [Where Are We. Mental Maps of Slovakia]*. Bratislava, Institute for Public Affairs 2010, pp. 303 – 335.

young people to use their right to vote. This engagement by citizens in web discussions thus generated not only a willingness to communicate, but also influenced the decision by some of the discussers to take part in the elections. The result was an increase in voter turnout in 2010 as compared with the previous elections of 2006.

Obviously, civic participation cannot be reduced to election participation. It can have various forms including joining public debates; participating in demonstrations, strikes, boycotts or rallies; charitable collections and petitions; engaging in solving local problems, working for a political party; etc. We also have to take into account various spheres of public life in which citizen participation appears.

Recently, Slovakia witnessed the mobilization of some professional associations and organizations, which decided to use collective protests for advocating their rights and demands (e.g. nurses, doctors, and teachers). By the beginning of 2012, another type of public protests emerged – public rallies organized by young people criticizing the corruption of politicians, the intertwining of business and politics, and the inadequacy of the institutions of representative democracy. They called for more transparency and cleanliness in politics and public life, as well for strengthening the elements of direct democracy in the political system.

The *Study on Trends in the Development of Civil Society in Slovakia* (2011) mentioned earlier distinguishes between areas where civic activism has recently shown **an upswing**. Let us present at least some of them.

1. Participation by citizens in community development has increased and various forms of urban activism are developing as well.
2. Professional organizations are also entering the legislative process and are fighting for their rights and interests. At the same time, members of various professions have begun to engage more for the benefit of the public interest.
3. NGO activities continue to develop in the social sphere focused on care for seniors, on the sick and those with long-term illnesses, on hospices and crisis centers, and on “plugging up” other “holes”, which the state cannot fill and which are not attractive enough for business.
4. Formal and informal volunteering is developing, most intensively in the social and environmental spheres, as well as in culture.
5. Public support for charitable giving and volunteering is growing.

6. The use of public reviews for effecting changes in legislation has become more effective and citizens are entering urban planning processes more often.
7. Internet activism has gained momentum and, thanks to social media, new citizens have become active in public affairs.

At the same time, some **problematic trends** have emerged.

1. Internet activism does not lead only to mobilization of citizens in support of a “good” civil society. Extremist anti-democratic initiatives and groups use it as an effective tool as well.
2. The participation of Roma in solving the Roma minority’s problems has weakened. Today, the Roma voice is almost completely absent at the conceptual level of solving Roma issues and coping with problems between Roma and non-Roma inhabitants.
3. Cooperation between the state and NGOs is marked by formalism: public administration representatives invite NGOs to take part in preparing strategies, policies and legislation and in discussions and legislative review, but in the end their opinions, proposals and demands go largely ignored.
4. Fragmentation of civic initiatives and nongovernmental organizations has led to a situation where, after the dissolution of the Gremium of the Third Sector, NGOs have a weaker ability to act as an organized partner or opponent to the powers that be. Moreover, in some areas of the nonprofit sector, the generation exchange has not occurred yet; young leaders are not very visible and influential.
5. Civic participation is weakened by insufficient financing from the state and weak support from domestic “social philanthropists”. In the nongovernmental environment, the dissipation of foreign sources that occurred mainly in 2004 has not been compensated for. The EU funds remain inadequately oriented and purely managed. The concept of corporate social responsibility has appeared so far only to a limited extent, especially in transnational corporations. Moreover, a significant part of the Slovak corporate sector perceives support to NGOs more as their own PR.
6. There are justified fears that the independence of some NGOs could decrease under pressure of reduced financing and they would turn away from their original mission. Above all, the sustainability of

activities by watchdogs, advocacy NGOs and public policy think tanks is threatened.

7. A significantly negative exogenous factor is the global economic crisis, which could harmfully influence individual and corporate fundraising, as well as support for NGOs from state and EU sources. Up to now, the crisis has not been perceived as an opportunity, especially for imaginative civic initiatives and nongovernmental organizations to contribute to ordinary people's adaptation to worsened living conditions. Precisely such initiatives would deserve financial support from several sources.

5. IN CONCLUSION: NETWORKS THAT CONNECT

In our study, we've emphasized three factors.

First, Slovakia now finds itself on the border between two lines of development, which it has experienced over approximately the past 100 years. It can either continue its progress toward democracy, justice and openness as a society characterized by solidarity and inclusiveness, or it can slide back onto the opposite problematic track.

Second, the quality and development of civil society will co-determine in which direction and toward which type of regime the pendulum of the future decade will swing.

Third, over the last 22 years, the third sector, as a part of civil society, has created a uniquely rich, diverse and flexible network of forms, organizational schemes, initiatives and ideas, which have moved society forward. It has built up an intellectual foundation for societal reforms, provided a mechanism for control of power, defended the interests of various groups of citizens, offered useful services, joined in resolving environmental, social and health problems and reacted to the needs of communities, towns and regions of Slovakia. Thousands of small organizations, initiatives, clubs and volunteer groups have demonstrated their usefulness and made unique achievements.

Despite a complicated heritage of undemocratic conditions, backwardness and discontinuity, civic actors and volunteers managed to engage and motivate a broader public because they offered understandable, acceptable concepts of freedom, solidarity and activism, which were in line with democratic modernization and which broke down the prevailing ethos of civic helplessness, as well as the tendency toward preferring the promotion of individual interests instead of the public good. They have exhibited an outstanding ability to weave together meaningful activities, engage in social campaigns, find ways to help socially excluded groups, engage local elites in useful, pro-social activities in many fields and find support for all of it both at home and abroad. They have expanded social capital and improved the quality of life in Slovakia.

In order for these experiences to be passed on and their existing potential to be used, the nongovernmental organizations and the active

citizens who work in them need to develop partnership ties; strengthen their institutional infrastructure; take advantage of their civic participation opportunities in various spheres; unleash the energy hidden in both the younger and older generations; cultivate public administration staff; and educate, train and coach potential actors and carriers of positive social change.

The first sphere of useful action could be the **strengthening of active citizens** – their education, preparation, training and exercise. Since a new law on volunteering was passed by the Slovak parliament in 2011, space has opened up for cooperation of NGOs with the state, as well as for a rich array of support and donation schemes for volunteer institutions that stimulate action by citizens. Here, we should also include development of personal capacity for partnership and for civic participation, as well as strengthening the motivation and skills of individuals active in participatory processes (e.g., participation in advisory bodies and legislative processes). Finally, social campaigns that activate citizens also belong in this category.

The second category of useful action has to do with **accumulation of social capital**, which increases cohesion in society. Engaged citizens, whether joined in activist associations or working as professionals in small think tanks, should support such accumulation of social capital by participating in the creation of regional strategies of development, through a partnership dialogue with the representatives of towns, communities, churches, businesses and media. Here, we can use the experience of community organizations (including community foundations and volunteer centers), since they are closer to the people and know how to generate, guide and motivate civic activity.

The third sphere of action regards groups of inhabitants who, on the one hand, **need help and care for themselves** (they are “consumers” of care), and on the other hand **can themselves contribute as providers of help and care** (they can be “producers” of care). Such groups include seniors and women, as well as such vulnerable groups as the disabled and Roma and many others. There are, however, also “transitional” groups of citizens who have got into a crisis situation, such as unemployed young people (within the EU, Slovakia is among those countries with a high share of unemployed under the age of 25).

The fourth sphere of action is related to **education**. In Slovakia, the number of people with a higher education is growing, although it does not mean an overall increase of the quality of graduates. At the same time, there are some secondary schools and universities or at least programs of study, which can be considered “centers of excellence”. Here, nongovernmental organizations have a broad space for activities and possible partnerships,

whether it is contributing to the teaching about the purpose and meaning of civil society, or motivating students to active citizenship. A special theme here is engagement of students in discussion and projects at the European level.

The fifth sphere of action encompasses support for proven forms and searching for new forms of public **discussion** and **deliberation** on crucial social problems and trends in the society. Such endeavor could include television and radio programs moderated by civic experts and activists; public civic fora; regional roundtables; traveling “debate clubs”, etc.

All of these activities require understanding on the part of public officials and support from public and state sources for the sustainability, cultivation and development of the nonprofit sector. Moreover, there is an especially important role for business, the corporate sector, for strategically thinking, enlightened businesspeople and financiers.

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