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## INTRODUCTION

Vojvodina is the northern province of the Republic of Serbia, situated on the area of 21.500 km<sup>2</sup>, with the population of two million and one hundred inhabitants. It is a specific geographic, historical, social, economic and cultural region which – according to the all these dimensions – belongs to the Central-European region.

This region has been a cultural melting pot with a great number of nations settling here ever since the prehistoric times. The earliest material evidence on people's presence originates from the Palaeolithic, while during the Neolithic there were already a couple of different agricultural societies. In the Bronze Age (especially in IV and III millennium BC), the area of Vojvodina became a migration centre of various peoples, and this state of diversity has remained one of main features of the region to the present day. Furthermore, a special framework for co-living of different nations and cultures has been created on this territory. This shared framework has comprised all the features of this special – Vojvodinian – identity for a long time.

The contemporary concept of cultural identity started to develop after the World War II, and it has been especially fostered by international organizations – primarily the United Nations – as well as the processes of liberation in the countries of the so-called Third World from colonial dependency. While trying to minimize the contradictions arisen from the struggle of the newly formed countries of Africa and Asia for preserving specific cultural identity within global civilization developments, a newly-created attitude emerged – that “particularity is a consequence of universality, as every nation tends to stress their own particularity within the same system of reference, in the same time preserving the essence of the values recognized in each culture” (Galiun 1985: 211).

Through the struggle for preserving national and ethnic identity, people also became aware of the importance of regional identity. In Europe, regional identity came into focus exactly through the processes of European integration, which – all the way since creating European Economic Community (Rome, 1957) – were focusing on gradual expanding of state sovereignty to broader associations. So today, regions are becoming more and more the new/old centres of not only cultural, but also economic and political life

of the member countries of the European Union. This makes sense, as it is the national cultures that mainly represent the universal European values, while autochthon ethnic cultures, with its specific values, are cherished and expressed exactly at the regional level. Therefore, these “values represent an obstacle for civilization uniformity and they are the guarantee of preserving cultural diversity, both within nations, and at the European, continental level. These values were suppressed for a long time, which is manifested by the fact that the adjective provincial has mainly derogative meaning although it represents the very essence of people’s culture.” (Stojković, 1993: 149) Not only national, but also regional identity can be – and it frequently is – crystallization of general values and characteristics of various ethnic groups and communities. Consequently, a specific intercultural identity is created, and this identity is most often accompanied by particular work and business ethics, the same or similar way of living, even the mentality of people. These shared characteristics are recognized as ‘own’ and they serve as a model of collective regional identification, which does not necessarily mean abandoning particular (ethnic and religious) customs and traditions. The truth is just the opposite, as it is proved by the example of Vojvodina.

In demographic and socio-cultural sense, Vojvodina is a unique multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-confessional region, not only within the state it is a part of, but also within Europe. Furthermore, it is a unique model of co-existence of different nations, different cultural patterns, traditions and confessions which, however, was not always respected, and in the last decade of the twentieth century it was even abused by autocratic regime of Slobodan Milošević. The circumstances of the primitive centralization of the state, unreasonable politics of spiting the international community (eventually spiting even NATO), isolation of the country, criminalization of the society and drastic impoverishment of citizens, accompanied by continual infringements of human and minority rights, positioned the majority of the citizens of Serbia into a very difficult situation, especially the members of national minorities.<sup>1</sup>

During the period in question, there was a kind of tendentious politics towards Vojvodina the purpose of which was to neglect and suppress its regional identity, although this identity is an important indicator of intercultural coherence in the region (Lazar, Marinković, 2001). This sense of collective regional affiliation arises from multi-ethnicity, and it is reflected in

1 As a consequence of the wars on the area of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, there was a massive inflow of refugees – mainly the Serbs from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia – the number of whom at a certain moment reached almost 300 thousand. Around 180 thousand of them permanently inhabited Vojvodina, and over 140 thousand have already acquired the citizenship of the Republic of Serbia. Furthermore, according to the census of 1991, the Province had around two million inhabitants, one fifth of which were ethnic Hungarians, and a considerable part of that population has left the country in the last fifteen years (this number is estimated to be between 50 and 70 thousand); thus there has evidently been some significant modifications in the ethnic structure of the Province.

particular ways of living and people's behaviour in the region.<sup>2</sup> Such broad collective identity does not jeopardize special group identities, as the members of various national, ethnic and religious groups generally perceive it as a common framework for preserving and exhibiting their own cultural particularities.<sup>3</sup>

The social affairs of the 90s were by no means a fertile ground for having a relatively painless transfer from one (collectivistic) system of values to another (individualistic) system – which is unavoidable in the process of transition of socialistic societies to late capitalist societies. Moreover, war environment, sanctions and NATO aggression on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (i.e. Serbia and Montenegro) destroyed all the illusions about the prospects of quick and painless restoration to the state of relative prosperity of 70s and 80s; this also shattered the outlines of the system of values which already began to emerge in the process of consolidating certain elements of the consumers' society – which had been already accepted rather broadly by the population of former SFR Yugoslavia. This was primarily evident in the most developed environments, including the Republic of Slovenia, the greatest part of the Republic of Croatia and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

The previous system of self-governing socialism – together with the values it proclaimed<sup>4</sup> – was falling apart in such a way that it destroyed the already achieved level of social differentiation (primarily professional and sub-cultural), which could have been a solid basis also for the future interest (political and economic) differentiation. As a result, even the system of values came down to be based on one of the basic existential categories (health), reduced to the basic blood-related social group (family), and the most desirable character features became those more typical for autarchic communities (honesty, trustworthiness), than for medium developed societies (Koković, Lazar, 2004). However, these values were evidently recognized as the only guarantee of some kind of formal relations in the conditions of anomic, le-

2 It is the regional affiliation that represents one of the most universal factors that influenced formation of these particularities, as it influences the general human values regarding living and working – which different ethnic groups “developed as significant, even existential values. Furthermore, there is the influence of their similar ways of living, historical relatedness and the fact that they have been directed to each other, as well as that they have in common the same objectives for future...” (Đurić, 1978: 227)

3 Furthermore, different national groups in Vojvodina have kept a certain degree of homogeneity, insisting on their ethnic identity (for more details, see Ilić, Cvejić, 1997)

4 “The problem that was especially recurrent in the society was related to valuing the work, when work was – through ideological propaganda – assigned the utmost value. Work becomes a unique cult, but accompanied by unfavourable working results: low productivity, low motivation, remarkable fluctuation (external and internal) of working force, absenteeism in work, frequent injuries at work, low exploitation of production capacities, etc. In other words, the fact is that if collectivistic motivation at work is more dominant than individualistic motivation, achievements at work are poorer”. (Božović, 1996: 72)

gally unfounded and institutionally ruined society.<sup>5</sup>

Such system of values proves that *the citizens of Vojvodina even at the end of 2002 did not perceive the Vojvodinian/Serbian society as transitional* (in the sense of the shift from planned economy and one-party system of socialism, to market economy and multiparty, parliamentary and participative democracy of late capitalism). Moreover, in our research only 2.8% of respondents were in favour of material prosperity as a universal value (Koković, Lazar, 2004), and expectancies related to this category are one of the basic features of value systems of various layers of population in transition societies.

In accordance with the state of the Serbian society in the last decade of the twentieth century, the researches from that period were primarily aimed at value orientations of the citizens of Serbia, as the focus was on the need to establish and explain their current and future political attitudes and ideological preferences. Although the value orientations were just a part of the wider system of values – the system which relies on the most general cultural patterns in a society – these surveys are very important as they proved that there was a process of re-traditionalization which, operating from the domain of political sphere, is capable of influencing other processes and fields of social life (Gredelj, 1994; Pantić, 1994, 2003). Nevertheless, political parties and their ideologies (which are actually the instrumental expressions of those value orientations), are not the main generators of value differences, but “the primary sources of those differences are in a social structure, and in the constellation of modal personality types connected to traditional culture in this region“ (Pantić, 1994: 76).

Regardless of the political sphere, our research of sociological aspects of multiculturalism and different processes of regionalization in Vojvodina confirms and reinforces the stated findings.

In opening paper Milan Tripković defines the basic terms through the starting hypothesis, the subject of the research and a wider social context in which Vojvodinian reality is perceived. In that respect, there is the difference established between multiculturalism (the objective state), multiculturalization (objective-subjective process) and multiculturalism (ideology and politics); likewise, there is the difference between regionality, regionalization and regionalism. All the above stated concepts are connected to the issue of minorities' rights, as well as the problem of integration. The author supports the thesis that multiculturalism and regionalization can be both a factor of integration and one of the causes of disintegration. Therefore, particular atten-

<sup>5</sup> See also Brdar, 2002. The author also argues that the obstruction of institutional development in Serbia is being performed also from the position of exclusive rights on “symbolic capital”, which is in the cultural sphere provided through “employment of all positive values which frequently function in the political discourse (freedom, democracy, change, progress, reform, prosperity, dignity, human rights, national honesty, emancipation, openness, tolerance, multiculturalism, diversity, etc)” (Brdar, 2002: 167).

tion is devoted to specifying potential integrative and disintegrative features of multiculturalism and regionalization. Furthermore, the author outlines certain characteristics of transition in Serbia, ascertaining that exceptionally multicultural and generally heterogeneous transition societies potentially have an additional problem compared to the societies that do not have such composition.

Dragan Koković and Žolt Lazar considers the most important factors of cherishing national affiliation and cultural identity among the largest nation and national minorities in Vojvodina. According to the survey, the most frequent factors of cherishing national affiliation are “observing tradition and customs” and “education of children in spirit of national culture”, while in the case of preserving cultural identity, the most frequent factors are “formal education” and “socialization of children in families”. Explaining the characteristic attitudes of the respondents, the authors argue that the collected data are clearly pointing to the increase of traditionalism in Vojvodinian/Serbian society, requiring further examinations and new theoretical explanations.

The aim of the paper Žolt Lazar wrote with Radivoj Stepanov is to discuss the Vojvodinian public opinion concerning the constitutional status of the northern province of the Republic of Serbia. The majority of respondents declared that the political, economical and cultural autonomy is the most acceptable solution, but there were also other views, from maintaining the current status to the independent state. According to the expressed opinions, recent discussions on regionalization and historical heritage, the authors are of the opinion that the most appropriate solution for the Republic of Serbia and Province of Voivodina is the conception of asymmetric regionalization.

Žolt Lazar’s paper is a presentation of the results of the ethnical distance measuring in Vojvodina. According to the survey, the ethnical distances in Vojvodina are quite equalized and they are grouped around the neutral attitude. Vojvodinian Serbs are more favorable partners for the majority of social contacts, and the relatively largest distance is shown toward the Roma. The ethnical distance results also discovers two very important factors for understanding the interethnic relations in Vojvodina: first, the “rational” kind of social contacts with the members of the other ethnical groups are more preferable for the majority of respondents, and second, they have very equal distances toward their own ethnical groups.

Dušan Marinković analyses social distance in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina between different social classes, stratum and socio-professional groups. This research of social distance has confirmed some of the basic sociological hypothesis on issues of social integration and solidarity, and/or disintegration and anomie, as well as the assumption of existence of certain constants in social relations and aspirations of social stratum and socio-

professional groups. Also, in certain cases the data indicate very large social distance, which may be considered as the consequence of long-term crisis, which produced deep social diversifications.

Grounded in the findings of the empirical research, Gordana Tripković's paper also presents some major theoretical and methodological premises having been elaborated in her previous studies of the problems of regionalism, identity and family solidarity. Starting from the assumption that there is no perfect analysis model for the research of the problems of regionalization and multiculturalism, i.e. that the gap between mono-cultural and multicultural epistemology is almost insurmountable, it is stressed that there is the possibility of misinterpreting regionalisation by neglecting a family, its role and importance in transition society. Contemplating the researched attitudes toward the refugees in Vojvodina, her paper also brings some valuable observations on identity and solidarity.

In closing paper Valentina Sokolovska explains the construction of the sample and the demographics of respondents. She also presents selected findings of the survey concerning the issues of territorial organization of Serbia, regionalization, appreciation of diversity and views on human rights.

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