The organisational development of interest groups in Montenegro and Slovenia: Do they contribute to more inclusive democracy?

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Abstract: *Despite the joint history of Montenegro and Slovenia as republics of the former Yugoslavia, the development of the interest groups system has been different in these countries. While in Slovenia, these groups started to develop from the 19th century, in Montenegro the interest groups system was almost non-existent in the pre-socialist period with only a few participative elements, such as the use of tribal assemblies. Socialism did not support associational life, since most of the organizations that were founded at the time were under some form of government control. As a consequence, the interest groups system in Slovenia shrank during socialist rule, while in Montenegro it remained at the same level. During the 1980s and after the collapse of the socialist regime the interest group system in Montenegro finally starts to develop, being heavily influenced by international donor and assistance programmes, while in Slovenia the system had a new opportunity to flourish. In this article we are particularly interested in how the interest group system contributes to the quality of democracy. Although Montenegrin interest groups have been a tool of influence and democratisation primarily on behalf of the international community, their internal democracy is less sophisticated than is the case in Slovenia. The results show that the origin of the interest groups system and the distinct histories of the specific political cultures seem to be embedded in the functioning of contemporary interest groups. This in turn, determines the strength or weakness of these groups in facing the challenges of de-democratisation.*

Keywords: *interest groups, democratisation, members, access*

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Introduction: The impact of interest groups on democracy

Interest groups represent important actors in policy making in modern democracies. They are positioned as mediators between different actors, acting as a link between citizens and the government, by bringing the interest of groups of citizens to the attention of decision makers. In some respects, interest groups can even serve as a substitute for the public in policy processes (Lundberg – Hysing 2016). Due to the transmission belt role of interest groups in policy making, some scholars have begun to stress the importance of the interest groups system for democracy. For example, the neo-Tocquevillian approach emphasizes the importance of associations for the proper functioning of democracy and democratization (Kaufman 1999) and their influence as crucial actors in truly democratic systems. Indeed, interest groups are the very essence of the democratic process (Watts 2007). Their involvement in the policy making process is particularly desirable, since they can act to enhance democracy. Having interest groups as central democratic partners in the policy making process enhances the open, transparent, and participatory character of the decision-making process. They contribute to a more reasonable process of policy-making, especially by providing information and analysis based on a multitude of different perspectives (Watts 2007: 14–21) and from their awareness of everyday experiences by being close to their members and grassroots. The advocates of participatory democracy view the participation of citizens in the political decision-making process as a main quality of state functionality and believe that the legitimacy of rules and legislation need to be assigned by citizens themselves (Jüptner et al. 2014).

The point of any democracy is that it provides citizens with a political voice, so that they ‘can express their views, preferences, and interests towards political institutions and hold public officials to account’ (Fraussen – Halpin 2016: 476). Interest groups are seen as an alternative to other forms of democratic legitimization where citizens can express their voice such as elections. In this way, interest groups ensure that different types of interests, beyond those represented in the national parliaments, and outside of the election period are taken into account in policy-making (Greenwood 2007; Heritier 1999). As such, interest group involvement in policy-making boosts legitimacy. Decisions that are based on prior consultation with relevant interest groups are more likely to win the approval of the public, since citizens, via interest groups, have an opportunity to express their view on the new legislation before it is adopted. The role of interest groups in the policymaking process is diverse, ranging from enhancing citizens’ participation, creating a space for discussion and a forum for members to express themselves, providing representation for excluded social groups and giving a voice to the disadvantaged, to providing expertise to decision makers, advocating for better democracy and more transparent decision-making process

and holding state actors accountable (Piotrowski 2009: 170). All these activities contribute to supporting and increasing the quality of democracy.

Recently, scholars have drawn attention to the concept of “uncivil society”, which describes the efforts of interest groups to challenge liberal democratic values (Glasius 2010). For “uncivil society” it is hard to talk about the contribution to the quality of democracy. The interest groups system thus needs to be understood as a system which consists of different interest groups with different values and norms, where not every contribution by an interest group to the policymaking process can be understood as automatically contributing to democracy. However, as Kopecky and Mudde state (2003: 151–152) the distinction between civil and uncivil is generally unhelpful. Furthermore, a vibrant civil society does not yet mean a “civil” civil society (Berman 1997).

If the strong and vibrant interest group system is a sign of a “healthy democracy” (Pietrzyk Reeves 2008: 80) it is an even more important sign of a successful democratisation process in post-socialist countries and a necessary precondition for democratic polity. The emergence of interest groups in post-socialist countries should thus be understood as one of the prerequisites of successful democratization. However, the contribution of the interest group system to the quality of democracy is hard to measure. Still, in general, it could be demonstrated in two ways: 1) as involvement and access to decision-makers and 2) as the internal democracy of interest groups, where members of interest groups have a clear say in internal decisions (Warleigh 2001).

Although access to the decision-makers does not yet mean influence, it is a necessary precondition (Truman 1951). When a political system offers a number of opportunity structures for the involvement of interest groups in policy making, this means that interest groups have more opportunities to express their views and positions. Still, not all groups manage to gain access to decision-makers. Based on previous research, those interest groups with more resources in terms of time, staff, information and money, such as business interest groups, are more likely to have direct access to decision-makers, which creates a bias in interest representation (Eising 2007). Consequently, these groups rely more on direct strategies where interest groups reach out to decision-makers by directly targeting policy activities at them. Interest groups that are less likely to gain direct access rely more on indirect strategies with appearances in the media and the mobilisation of citizens through protests, petitions and demonstrations (Beyers 2008). In this case there is no guarantee that the message of the interest groups will reach their lobbying targets. It may get lost on the way.

Besides the involvement of interest groups in policymaking, in order to ensure the quality of democracy, it is also important that interest groups express democratically formed opinions and actively seek the inclusion of members in internal decision-making. Membership involvement in interest group activities is important due to the skills and capital citizens acquire through active

participation in associational activities. Political and social participation in interest groups enables members to network on joint interests, preferences and needs (Mackerle Bixa et al. 2009: 244; Levin Waldman 2012: 56). Such civic participation can be understood as the “heart of democracy” (Levin Waldman 2012: 56) and as “necessary for democracy and thus for development” (Petrova 2007: 1278). The inclusion of citizens in the representative and service functions performed by interest groups strengthens political democracy and social cohesion (Dekker – Van der Broek 1998: 12; Mackerle Bixa et al. 2009: 244). Through the participation of citizens in interest group activities, citizens learn democratic decision-making (Mackerle Bixa et al. 2009: 244) and become more competent citizens (Dekker – Van der Broek 1998: 17). Active membership in interest groups has a positive effect on indexes such as the levels of social trust, political interest, political learning, political skills, the level of political activity, democratic values (Dekker – Van der Broek 1998: 33; Mackerle Bixa et al. 2009: 244; Levin Waldman 2012: 57; Sissenich 2010: 16) and on the level of tolerance (van de Donk et al. 2003: 268). These in consequence contribute to active citizenship and also help foster stronger democracy. Membership of interest groups can also be understood as a form of social and human capital, an indicator of community involvement and as necessary for “social integration, economic efficiency and democratic stability” (Newton 2001: 202). When members are actively included in the internal decisions of interest groups, the interest groups uphold democratic norms and standards and where the role of members in interest groups is important, the interest groups themselves have a democratic structure and are internally democratic (Warleigh 2011).

However, the involvement of members in interest group activities cannot be taken for granted. Interest groups which aim to have more impact on policy decisions tend to professionalise their activities and engage employed staff with the requisite time, skills and knowledge to engage in lobbying. As a result, some interest groups do not have enough time and resources to include members in their decision-making processes. Members are thereby left out of the policymaking process (Jordan – Maloney 1997, 2007; Warleigh 2001). When members and supporters are left out of policymaking activities, the interest groups’ activities may not be as important for the state of democracy and good governance as we would expect them to be, since, in such cases, the interest group lacks internal democracy.

In this article, we are interested in how the interest group system in Montenegro and Slovenia contribute to the quality of democracy. These two states have differently developed systems of interest representation, even though, during their common experience of socialist rule as constituent parts of Yugoslavia, interest group representation was obstructed in both countries. Both countries are young democracies that have recently gone through the process of democratic transition, in which the interest group system plays an important role.

Our main research interest is how the development of the interest group system in each country contributed to the inclusion of interest groups in policymaking processes, and the internal democratic structure of the interest groups. To answer our research question, we will firstly compare the process of the development of the interest groups system in each country and in the empirical section analyse two characteristics of interest groups that, besides other factors, can contribute to the quality of democracy: 1) the inclusion of interest groups in policymaking and 2) the internal democracy of interest groups.

However, the characteristics and development of the interest groups system and its participation in the policymaking process can be regarded only as one limited factor contributing to the quality of democracy. As outlined in the introductory chapter of this special issue (Komar – Novak 2020) there are several factors that need to be considered when evaluating the (de)democratisation process in both Montenegro and Slovenia. Since these factors are analysed in other contributions to the special issue, we will limit our analyses only to the contribution of the interest groups system to the quality of democracy. Nevertheless, this represents a limitation to our analysis, since we will not be able to draw large conclusions. When it is only the development of the interest groups system that contributes to democracy and other factors fail to do so, then a country cannot be regarded as democratic.

The article is structured as follows: after the introductory section where we describe the contribution of interest groups to the quality of democracy, we continue by comparing the similarities and differences in the development of the interest group systems in both countries. In the empirical part, we analyse data collected as part of a Comparative Interest Group survey, which enables the comparative analysis of the involvement of interest groups with decision-makers and their internal democracy, following which we present the answers to our research question. In the concluding part, we sum up the main findings.

The development of the interest group systems in Montenegro and Slovenia

In post-socialist Central and Eastern European countries, by contrast to Western democracies, the emergence of modern interest groups and political systems was not the result of century-long processes, but rather the result of rapid and unexpected regime change in the late 20th century. The same is true for both Montenegro and Slovenia. The development of the interest group system in both countries could be divided in four different periods: pre-World War II, the Federal Yugoslav period, the period of democratic transition and the most recent period of Europeanisation. Nevertheless, the development process did not evolve in both countries in the same way. Although during the period of federal Yugoslavia, interest groups system activities were obstructed, we can still

highlight many differences in the characteristics of the interest group systems in both countries.

Table 1: Differences and similarities in the development of interest groups in Montenegro and Slovenia

Time period	Montenegro	Slovenia
Before World War II	No interest group system; society organized more around extended family linkages and tribes	Development of an interest group system with the March Bourgeois Revolution in 1848
Federal Yugoslavia	Postponed development of an interest group system until the late 1980s.	Development of the interest group system slowed down until 1974, when new associations were established. In the 1980s new social movements encourage pluralization.
Democratic transition	The first anti-government, anti-war, weak and disorganized groups were established that later died out. Further expansion of the interest groups system was possible after a surge of foreign donations aiming to democratize the country	The number of interest groups increased and very diverse interest groups were established.
Process of Europeanisation	Foreign donors started to withdraw which led to a decrease in interest groups supported by donations and the establishment of new grassroots organizations. Since assistance is now channeled through large EU donations, the largest organisations have flourished and started to act as an intermediary for smaller groups, who now receive donations from their larger peer organisations.	Interest groups started to network with similar EU organisation to acquire knowhow in their specific policy field.

The interest groups system in Slovenia started to develop quite early on and has a long tradition, although with periods of inhibited development. The breaking point for the development of associations was the March Bourgeois Revolution in 1848 that introduced freedom of association as well as the legal basis for established associations (Črnak Meglič – Vojnovič 1997: 156). In the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, interest groups played an important role in the social, political and cultural life in Slovenia (Bibič 1997: 22; Črnak Meglič – Rakar 2009: 239). The interest groups system before World War II was very vivid, diverse and comparable to that found in other European countries (Kolarič et al. 2002: 97).

Despite sharing a common recent history, in Montenegro, unlike in Slovenia, the interest group system was almost non-existent prior to the 2nd World War, at least as we would understand such a system today. Even though there were

participative elements in the early 19th century, when some of the main decisions were made by tribal assemblies consisting of selected male representatives,² the pre-transition political culture in Montenegro could best be described as 'subject', using the classification by Almond and Verba (1963). Being very underdeveloped and poor and having a society organized more around extended family linkages than rules and regulations, the Montenegrin system of interest articulation was dominantly personal and individualized. People tended to prefer to appeal directly to the ruler to get their interests served directly from him, rather than to organize in groups and promote group interests. Bearing in mind the size of the country, this was in fact possible. The other option for problems of a more collective nature was inter-tribal warfare. The tribal assemblies consisting of the most "notable" men articulated the interests of the tribe in question. Even though this communal level democracy was quite lively given the time in question, it was too collective to produce interest groups. Moreover, bearing in mind Montenegro's pre 2nd World War lack of development in terms of the economy, political culture and social organization, it does not come as a surprise that most interests at the time were connected to warfare and politics and articulated through political parties and movements.

After World War II, with the change in the political system and with the advent of federal Yugoslav rule, the development of the interest groups system in Slovenia was slowed down. During that period, some of the organizations died out and other came under state control. Organizations whose activities were limited to the local level or whose content did not interfere with political power continued to operate. Organizational life became limited to social and political organizations and associations that received state support (Hvalič et al. 2001: 7; Kolarič et al. 2002: 99–102). A lot changed for Slovenian interest groups with the changes made to the constitution of Yugoslavia in 1974 that introduced decentralisation and the adoption of the Act on Societies, which guaranteed citizens their constitutionally ensured freedom to associate, to carry out their interests and establish societies. During this period new, autonomous, citizens'-initiated organizations were established. The social and political changes that started before independence, beginning in the mid1980s, encouraged pluralization, initially in the area of subcultures and social movements. The first new social movement established in Slovenia was Punk at the end of the 1970s. The unsuccessful repressive measure of the state against the Punk movement opened up space for other autonomous social movements such as the peace, ecological, spiritual, subcultural and feminist movements that were established at the beginning of the 1980s (Kolarič et al. 2002: 108–109; Fink Hafner et al. 1992: 249–250).

Even though federal Yugoslav rule brought a lot of emancipatory innovations to Montenegro, the establishment of an interest groups system was not one of

2 These assemblies were called "plemenski zborovi", which directly translates as tribal assemblies.

them. The system of governance was not a major stimulant for changing the “subject” political culture of Montenegro, as defined by Almond and Verba (1963) since most of the organizations that were founded at the time were under some sort of government control. In these circumstances, Montenegro entered the era of pluralism before ever being able to develop a truly participative political culture. Nevertheless, the first official interest groups can be related to the beginning of federal rule. Even then, the culture of promoting your own interests in Montenegro relied mostly on personal connections within the Communist Party to get “things” done. The other options included government approved organisations, such as labor unions. This is why there are only a few interest groups in Montenegro that originated before 1989. The interest groups system in Montenegro started to develop in the late 1980s and after the break-up of Yugoslavia. However, there were several factors that impeded its progress: these included the unresolved statehood issue that prolonged the period of transition, the predominant party system and the previously described political culture.

With the arrival of independence in 1991, the change in the political system and the introduction of a market economy, the number of interest groups in Slovenia increased (Črnak Meglič – Rakar 2009: 237; Fink Hafner 1998: 290) and very diverse interest groups were established. In the mid-1990s, Slovenia was one of the countries with the greatest number of interest groups in Europe (Kolarič et al. 2002: 116) while Slovenian members of parliament noted the increased activity of interest groups in policymaking (Fink Hafner et al. 2015b: 77). Neocorporatism defined the opportunities for interest groups in Slovenia in important ways. As part of the Economic and Social Council, which has been established in 1994, business and labour interest were represented and had the opportunity to access decision makers directly. Additionally, a corporatist system was incorporated in legislative power in the form of an upper chamber. The National Council represents territorial and functional interests including those of trade unions and employers’ organizations, as well as some professional interests (Novak – Fink-Hafner 2019a).

It took significantly longer for Montenegro to complete its transition than Slovenia. In the first independence referendum which was held in 1992, 95.4% of those who voted (on a 66% turnout), expressed their preference for continuing to live “in association with the other Yugoslav republics who wish the same” as was asked by the Referendum question. This in fact, at the time, meant only Serbia. This “attachment” to Serbia continued until the late 1990s, with the first real break happening in 1997 after a split within the ruling party between “pro-union” and “pro-independence” camps (Krašovec – Batričević 2020). Finally, the “pro-independence” faction prevailed in the referendum that took place in 2006 and during which 55% of the participants voted in favour of independence. The late democratic transition in Montenegro is significantly reflected in the structure of the interest group system. First of all, most interest groups

were established after 1997. The development of a post-socialist interest groups system in Montenegro prior to Europeanisation might be divided in two phases: a civic alternative phase and an expansion phase (Komar 2015). The majority of interest groups that were established during the civic alternative phase (1989–1997) were anti-governmental and anti-war groups that articulated the voice of the opposition. Although genuine, they were weak and disorganized and most of them ceased to exist after a time or lost their influence. The expansion phase (1997–2006) was characterized by an expansion stimulated by external factors. In particular, being concerned by the situation in the region and seeing Montenegro as a potential anti – Milosevic ally, the international donor community poured funds into civil society organisations and independent media in the late 1990s. Many grants supported the institutional development of these organisations and aimed to strengthen their organisational capacity.

Alongside the democratisation process in Slovenia, processes of Europeanisation also had an important influence on the political culture of interest groups, transforming them in more active organisations (Fink Hafner et al. 2015a). These effects started especially after 1996, when Slovenia signed an Association Agreement and submitted its application for EU membership, and have been ongoing since then (Djurović – Lajh 2020). Interest groups in Slovenia started to receive funding from the EU, although donations from foreign funds were not present to the same extent as in some other post-socialist countries. Networking with EU level umbrella groups and with interest groups from other EU member states became very important to the development of interest groups in Slovenia, to their empowerment and in terms of acquiring new resources such as information and know how (Fink Hafner 2007). During this period, interest groups also participated in the negotiation processes for accession to the EU (Fink Hafner et al. 2015b). With full membership of the European Union, the interest groups were presented with new opportunities for funding from EU projects and programmes, as well as new access points to decision-makers.

The Europeanisation process was also significant for the development of the interest group system in Montenegro. The process started after 2006 when Montenegro signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement and applied for EU membership (Djurović – Lajh 2020). This phase of the development of the interest groups system has been described as the Europeanisation phase (Komar 2015). After Montenegro became an EU candidate country, many independent foreign donors withdrew, leaving the European Commission as one of the main remaining contributors. This initiated a “clean up” among interest groups that depended on foreign funds. Smaller ones started to disappear while the large ones became much professionalized. They receive significant donations (often from EU funds) that enable them to employ professional staff and resources in their work. Many of these professionalized interest groups became an important player in the EU integration process. Even though candidate status does not en-

able Montenegro to influence EU policy making, their access to EU level interest groups and institutions is considerable. Very often they become an instrument of EU policy in Montenegro. They participate in government working groups to prepare legislation, write shadow and monitoring reports, and inform EU officials about actual Montenegrin progress in implementing the reforms that are the conditions for EU accession.

Table 2 presents the way in which the interest groups system slowly developed in both countries. While prior to 1980 in Slovenia more than 20% of today’s interest groups had been established, in Montenegro this share is lower, and fewer than 10% of current interest groups were established before 1980. The Slovenian interest groups were established in different time periods, mostly after independence (in 1991) and after becoming an EU member state (in 2004). The majority of Montenegrin interest groups were established after 2004, and especially after independence in 2006. Independence and the change in the political system had an important effect on the development of the interest group system in both countries. We can assume that with the further integration of Montenegro into the EU, there will be a further impact on the membership and pluralisation of interest groups.

Today, the interest group sector in both countries could be described as vivid, with established relationship between government and interest groups (Vujović 2019; Novak – Fink Hafner 2019b; USAID 2019). Nevertheless, the system faces various challenges such as the absence of more stable funding, especially for advocacy activities, and consequently low levels of professionalization in general. Both countries, however, have recently adopted Nongovernmental Organisations (NGOs) Acts and measures designed to improve funding opportunities, at least for general interest groups (Novak – Fink Hafner 2019b; USAID 2019). In both countries, EU funds are among the most important sources of funding (Vujović 2019; Novak – Fink-Hafner 2019b).

Table 2: Year of the establishment of interest groups

	Up to 1980	1981-1990	1991-1997	1998-2003	From 2004 on
Slovenia	21%	8.9%	26.4%	15%	28.7%
Montenegro	9.3%	1.6%	6.7%	14.5%	67.9%

Source: CIG survey

We will now move on to an analysis of two factors related to the contribution of interest groups to the quality of democracy: 1) their inclusion in policymaking and 2) their internal democracy.

Data and methodology

In this article, we define interest groups as groups that are informal and do not seek to form the government, that are political and pursue public policy goals and that are organised (Beyers et al. 2008). This may include public interest, citizen and/or diffuse interest groups, organized industry, professional and business associations, voluntary groups, cultural groups, think tanks, youth organizations, cultural exchange groups, pro-European groups, and so on. However, we have excluded companies, firms, law firms and consultancy firms. Some interest groups are primarily service providers, but may also perform advocacy and lobbying activities.

For the analysis, we use data gathered as part of the Comparative Interest Group Survey (CIGS) (Beyers et al. 2016; Beyers et al. 2020). The survey addresses the organisational characteristics, political activities and strategies of interest groups. Thus far, it has been conducted or is in the process of being conducted in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden. For the purposes of this special issue, we will limit our analysis to Montenegro and Slovenia (see Komar – Novak 2020). The response rate of the survey was 36% for Slovenia and 38.2% for Montenegro, which is relatively high compared to similar online surveys (Marchetti 2015).

For each country, a comprehensive mapping of the interest groups population at the national level was conducted. In the case of Slovenia, the sampling was based on the Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services (AJPES) database, which is the primary source of public information on business entities in Slovenia, being where all legal entities need to be registered. In Montenegro, the initial sources were two registers: the Ministry of the Interior's list of registered NGOs and the Central Registry of Business Entities. From the latter, we selected only those organizations that represent the interests and views of specific groups.

The research question that we want to answer is: how does the interest group system in Montenegro and Slovenia contribute to the quality of democracy in both countries? To answer this question, we will compare two factors related to the contribution of interest groups to democracy: 1) their inclusion in policy making and 2) the internal democracy of interest groups themselves in Montenegro and Slovenia. In the analysis we will take a descriptive approach, since we want to compare both factors of the contribution of interest groups to democracy in both countries.

The inclusion in policy making is operationalised as the frequency of contact with national decision makers. We are only interested in contact with national decision makers and not EU policy makers because, predominantly, inclusion in national policymaking contributes to the quality of national democracy. The

exact wording of the question was “During the last 12 months, how often has your organization actively sought access to the following national level institutions and agencies in order to influence public policies?” The respondents evaluated the frequency of their contact with ministers (including their assistants/cabinets/political appointees), elected members from the majority governing parties in parliament, elected members from minority or opposition parties in parliament, national civil servants working for the Prime Minister’s Office, national civil servants working for departmental ministries such as agriculture, environment, transport or health, and so on, national civil servants working for the coordination of EU affairs and people working for the courts. The frequency of contact was reported on five-point scale: 1 – we did not seek access, 2 – at least once, 3 – at least once every three months, 4 – at least once a month and 5 – at least once a week.

The internal democracy of the interest groups is operationalised through the role of members in interest groups activities. The exact wording of the question was “How important are members to your organization with regard to the following activities?” The respondents evaluated the importance of members to the following activities: providing evidence of support from affected members or concerned citizens, helping to influence public policy (e.g. by contacting politicians or civil servants), identifying problems or providing ideas about your organization’s activities, providing ideas about your organization’s campaigning strategies, running local groups or branches and generating income for the organization (e.g. through fees, subscriptions, fundraising, contributions, and so on). The importance of members was also reported on a five-point scale: 1 – not at all important, 2 – not very important, 3 – neither important nor unimportant, 4 – important and 5 – very important.

We will now present the research results where we will take a comparative approach and compare the data for Montenegrin and Slovenian interest groups.

Results and discussion

Firstly, we look at the contact between national interest groups and national decision-makers. We understand this measure as an indicator of the openness of the political system to include interest groups in policymaking. For an interest group to have an impact on policy results, it first needs access to the relevant decision makers. Established contacts with decision makers are an indicator of direct access where the possibility that interest groups are heard by decision makers is greater than in the case of indirect access.

Figure 1: Contact with national decision-makers (q33)³

Source: CIG survey

As can be seen from Figure 1, the surveyed interest groups in Montenegro and Slovenia behave similarly when it comes to contacting decision makers. The averages in both countries do not differ significantly. In both countries, interest groups tend to contact the executive more frequently, especially ministries and national civil servants working for departmental ministries. However, interest groups from both Slovenia and Montenegro contact decision makers rarely. On average, these contacts occurred at least once a year for ministers and national civil servants working for departmental ministries. Other political actors are hardly ever contacted, which shows the absence of regular contacts.

The main differences between Montenegrin and Slovenian interest groups in relation to their contact with decision makers can be observed when it comes to contacting elected members from minority and opposition parties, where interest groups in Montenegro tend to contact these people less frequently than those from Slovenia do. The second difference can be seen when it comes to contacting national civil servants, where, again, Montenegrin interest groups tend to contact them less frequently. On the other hand, compared to their Slovenian colleagues, Montenegrin interest groups tend to contact national civil servants working for the coordination of EU affairs and the courts more frequently. We could speculate about the reason, but one of the hypotheses might be the prolonged position of one party in power in Montenegro (Nacevska – Stankov 2020) that places decision making power almost exclusively within the government and makes the usual deliberative process that include

³ The values in the figure represent the following: 1 = we did not seek access, 2 = at least once, 3 = at least once every three months, 4 = at least once a month and 5 = at least once a week.

opposition parties less effective. In addition, the fact that Montenegrin interest groups contact EU affair officers more often than groups from Slovenia do illustrates the non-democratic elements of their political culture and the need to seek external legitimacy, which, in Montenegro, is stimulated by both the lack of trust in institutions and the role of international community in building democracy. On the other hand, Slovenian interest groups, operating in an EU member state, may take advantage of other access points in the multi-level system of the EU when they try to influence EU policymaking, so they do not rely only on EU affairs officers (Novak – Lajh 2018). Indeed, in their involvement in national policy making, Slovenian interest groups turn more towards national civil servants working for departmental ministries. Finally, the fact that Montenegrin interest groups contact the courts more frequently than those in Slovenia do illustrates the conflicted nature of policy making in Montenegro and the fact that interest groups often need to assume the role of watchdogs and monitors of the decision-making process.

Figure 2: Importance of members, mean value (q5)⁴

Source: CIG survey

More differences between Montenegrin and Slovenian interest groups can be observed when it comes to the perceived role of the members within interest groups as shown in Figure 2. In most aspects, Slovenian interest groups evaluate the importance of their members as being greater than it is to their Montenegrin peers. The difference is most visible when it comes to the importance of members in generating income for the organisation. As has already been described, most interest groups in Montenegro are not member-based or

⁴ Importance of members is reported on a five point scale, with the following responses: not at all important (1), not very important (2), neither important nor unimportant (3), important (4) to very important (5).

grass-roots oriented. They depend on foreign and, more recently, governmental donations for their financing. On the other hand, more Slovenian interest groups have been created so as to represent their membership and therefore they are more dependent on them for the funding. Furthermore, Montenegrin interest groups rely less on their members in identifying problems and offering ideas about activities or strategies. The situation is reversed in the two cases: Montenegrin interest groups rely more on members for providing evidence of support from affected or concerned citizens and members as well as for running the local branches. In general, interest groups representatives view their members as relatively important to interest groups activities. Members are on average important to interest groups, which could be seen as indicative of high levels of internal democracy that are probably connected to the lower levels of the professionalization of interest groups in these two countries and their dependence on volunteers and voluntary work (Novak – Fink Hafner 2019a; Komar 2019). With the further development of the interest group systems and their professionalization in both countries, it will become important to maintain the active role of members in interest group activities. This is especially true for interest groups in Montenegro that have a generally weaker grassroots base.

Conclusion

In this article, we have provided a structured overview of the development of the interest groups systems in both Montenegro and Slovenia. We found that even though the two countries shared a substantial part of their recent history, due to their different political cultures, their interest groups system developed differently. Our main aim in the article was to answer the question of how development of interest group system in each country contributed to the inclusion of interest groups in the policymaking process and to the democratic structure of the interest groups themselves. We tried to answer this question by looking at the historical development of the interest groups system and through an empirical analysis of the characteristics of modern-day interest groups in both countries.

The development of the interest groups system in Slovenia began in the 19th century and even though it stayed dormant during the federal Yugoslav period, it restarted soon after the introduction of pluralism in the 1990s. As the result, their internal democracy seems to be stronger as they depend more on their members both for funding and for daily operations.

On the other hand, the interest groups system in Montenegro basically started to develop after the end of socialism, either in the form of an early anti-war civic opposition that emerged as a reaction to the government or as a tool for democratisation used by the international community in the late 20th century. Reaching its peak in that period, the system never developed to be internally democratic and has remained dependent on external funds for its functioning.

The data from the CIG study showed that Slovenian interest groups tend to be included more in policy making in general, while their Montenegrin peers tend to have greater contact with EU coordination officials, which illustrates the need for external legitimization in policy making in Montenegro. Additionally, they contact the courts more often which provide evidence of the conflicted nature of this process. Moreover, the CIG study provides evidence that the interest groups system in Slovenia contributes more to the quality of democracy by involving their members more and giving them more power. The case is different in Montenegro, where most interest groups are not grassroots based or member centric.

These results show that the origin of the interest groups system and the history of each specific political culture seem to be embedded in the functioning of contemporary interest groups in both countries, which could affect their resilience in facing current de-democratisation challenges. Where there is a well-developed interest group system, this can contribute to the quality of democracy and even strengthen it. However, in both countries there is still room for improvement in terms of creating a more inclusive democracy especially as regards the inclusion of interest groups in policymaking and increasing the accessibility of decision makers. If interest groups do not have access to the policy making process, this can easily lead to a de-democratisation process. When aiming to improve the quality of the policy making process, decision makers could also be pro-active in ensuring the involvement of interest groups. Furthermore, the development of the interest groups system in Montenegro should in the future concentrate on supporting more membership based and grassroots interest groups that might also contribute to encouraging active citizenship and the political socialisation of its citizens. Although Slovenian interest groups are highly dependent on their members, in order to strengthen inclusive democracy, the same applies to them, since active citizenship in that country remains underdeveloped.

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