

Russia and Estonian Civil Society Discourses Compared

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1. The concept of civil society in the comparison of political cultures

The concept of civil society is open to diverse interpretations, which undoubtedly explains much of its popularity since the 1980s. It has appeared at least in the criticism against local dictatorships in Latin America, the neoliberal critique of the welfare state, the antineoliberal critique of globalization, the communitarian critique of individualized modern societies, and the opposition to the Soviet-type system and the construction of democracy in Eastern and East-Central Europe. And besides the contemporary repertoire it has a varied history with different traditions (see, e.g., Keane [ed.] 1988, and Cohen and Arato 1992, as two examples of the enormous literature on the subject).

Yet, looked at from the perspective of the *history of concepts* (what in German is called *Begriffsgeschichte*) the existing ambiguity of the concept – its nature as a “conceptual chameleon” (Kocka 2000, 21) -- is not a problem but an object of study in its own right. This view guides these notes. The question is, what the concept of civil society means in different countries and cultures, and in different languages. As Jürgen Kocka (2004, 65) and Michel Offerlé (2003, 5-6) point out, it is true not only that the concept has had a successful career in many languages, but the meanings of the phrase denoting what is called "civil society" in English are not identical in other languages. Thus *grazhdanskoe obshchestvo* in Russian, and *kodanikuihiskond* (or *kodanikeühiskond*) in Estonian are not identical concepts.

My hypothesis is that a comparative study of the concept of civil society in different languages could give new insight into the political cultures of the respective countries. As Mikko Lagerspetz has remarked, "a study of how the concept [of civil society] is

interpreted in a society can tell us more about its prevailing political culture than does a study of its formal political institutions" (2001, 11; see also Kocka 2000, 26-29). In this preliminary overview of the use of the concept in Russia and Estonia, and in Russian- and Estonian-language discourses, I will concentrate in the first place on a sample of the scholarly utilization of the concept, hoping not to be immersed in the abundance of the material and to maintain comparability.¹

The reason why the concept of civil society seems expressive of political culture lies in its close relationship to the conceptions of the state, society, democracy, public sphere, and most concretely, voluntary associations. This richness is common to its usage in different cultural contexts, whatever varieties the notion may otherwise display. Because the concept evokes fundamental issues in democratic politics, it presumably brings forth, explicitly and implicitly, basic assumptions in the political culture, understood as the "sociology of the ordinary citizenship" that includes notably the ways people frame political questions, get angry, and act together, that is, both their pragmatic and their strategic modes of action (Cefai 2001, 97, 99).

Even though the focus is on the concept, its proponents -- the scholars -- and their position in Russia and Estonia will hopefully be illuminated as well. After the presentation of the main theme the role of intellectuals will be shortly depicted from the perspective of the discourses in the two countries.

2. "Purposive adoption" of a concept

The common context for the use of the notion of civil society in Russia and Estonia, the opposition to the Soviet system and the construction of democracy after the disintegration of the USSR, provides the central starting point for the comparison. In both countries the issue of the *adoption* of a culturally specific concept presents itself in an acute form. Civil society is an inherently Western idea, a "product of the West" (Kocka 2004, 76), and in both countries it was introduced in relation to Western models. In the West the idea of civil society and liberal democracy as a whole largely developed as "unintended outcomes" of the efforts of

¹A recent review of the use of the notion of civil society in contemporary Russian political thought is Pursiainen & Patomäki 2005. See also the literature cited in Evans 2002 and Pursiainen 2005. Elena Belokurova and Natal'ia Iargomskaia (2005) have interestingly analyzed the use of the term civil society in the discourse of social organizations and local authorities in different regions in Russia.

statemakers (Tilly 1975, 633). That is, practices and conceptualizations of civil society evolved in a centuries-long development without appearing as a preconceived project to be carried out. In the present-day Russia and Estonia, instead, at issue is the adoption of this idea, both in discourse and in practice. The two countries have, in their own ways, embarked on westernization, including the establishment of democratic and capitalist systems based on an ideal-typical Western model, of which civil society is an integral part (Howard 2003, 49, 50). Therefore views about civil society are expressive not only of the problems of democratization in general, including participatory democracy, but also of special problems of a large-scale system change. For this reason the analytic and the normative aspects, both of which are necessarily present in the civil society debate, may appear with different weight and in different ways in the Russian and the Estonian discussions on the one hand, and in the Western one(s) on the other.

How have the institutions of civil society been introduced or reintroduced under constraint of the existing culture and earlier institutions in Russia and Estonia? In other words, how has the "purposive adoption" of institutions (Offe 1995, 117) been carried out in the two cases? A major issue is that whereas in several Western contexts the institutions of civil society constitute an element in an established system of interlinked elements -- the public sphere, articulation of interests, etc. --, in a postsocialist situation these latter elements had to be created more or less at the same time as the associational life was adopted or revived. That is, in the former socialist countries the actors in state institutions and in civil society had to be defined, and the relations between them regulated, practically at the same time as was introduced the distinction between the state and civil society: both the rules of the game and the players who play the game had to be defined simultaneously. Mikko Lagerspetz, Erle Rikmann and Rein Ruutsoo (2002, 85) catch an essential part of this problem, when they remark that "[f]rom the point of view of democratic participation, the task of the Estonian (and more generally, Central and Eastern European) civil society is not to influence the existing channels of participation from 'the outside,' but *to create such channels in the first place.*"

Claus Offe (1995, 117, 122) has addressed this issue in discussing "the transnational transferability of institutional arrangements" during the post-socialist transition period. He points out (1995, 122) that institutions -- for example the institution of the voluntary association, central in most conceptions of civil society -- are difficult to transfer from one culture to another. First, the "purposive adoption" may spoil the desired effect, because the designing and implementation of new institutions necessarily takes place in the shadow of

those institutional patterns that are to be replaced. It may well happen that a formal set of rules and procedures is adopted, but not the shared meanings, values, and moral underpinnings that make people comply with those rules. In established conditions the existence of institutions implies that certain positions and incumbents, certain players of the game “are already constituted, the only problem being that their interaction must now be regulated.” But when an institution is transferred elsewhere, as has happened in Eastern and East-Central Europe, “it is by no means clear who qualifies as a player, and consequently ... players (corporate actors, trade unions, political parties, professional associations, etc.) must first be constituted before they can play according to the newly designed rules.” The problem is that the players cannot be constituted by copying institutional rules from elsewhere, because these rules presume that the issue of the constitution of players has been solved already.

Another issue further complicates the purposive adoption by making it difficult to push aside existing institutions. Institutions “do not serve an external purpose ..., but they ‘internalize’ the purposes and values to which they contribute. That is to say, they *select means and ends* simultaneously, and they thus come to define and prescribe practices that are ‘valuable in themselves’.” Therefore institutions are not easy to eradicate even if they can be shown to be grossly deficient in some conceivable instrumental respect (Offe 1995, 124). There are thus considerable obstacles both to adopting new arrangements and giving up old ones. These difficulties presumably appear in civil society discourses of those countries whose civil society has long been suppressed, if it ever functioned in them at all.

3. On the Russian civil society discourse²

The Russian term *grazhdanskoe obshchestvo* goes back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Volkov 1997, 82-83), and it had a place in the Hegelian, Marxist and other philosophical literature, translated into Russian and discussed in the nineteenth and the twentieth century, but it never became a central term in the Russian debate, before the challenge to the Soviet system gained momentum in the 1980s. Then the term emerged as one of the most popular ones in the rhetoric of the new mass action, along with other new or newly important terms referring to democracy, such as “citizens' movements” (*grazhdanskie*

²I thank Elena Belokurova and Suvi Salmenniemi for their comments on an earlier version of this section.

dvizheniia), "citizen initiatives" (*grazhdanskie initsiativy*), and "constitutional state" (*pravovoe gosudarstvo*). Almost simultaneously *grazhdanskoe obshchestvo* found its way in the scholars' vocabulary as well.

Rather than a concept in the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s it was a slogan, conveying the idea that civil society was the prerequisite for the new or future democratic and civilized order. In most analyses applying the notion, the Soviet Union or Russia was viewed as another country that will more or less follow the Western path, and the term appeared as a catchword to describe those conditions that were required to further perestroika and then democracy in the Western sense. Even the CPSU adopted it in 1990, declaring as its objective the formation of "civil society, in which people (*chelovek*) do not exist for the state but the state for people." Usually the term conveyed similar aspects of economy and society as in the West. "The proprietary right ... provides the basis for civil society"; the emergence of civil society presupposes "the self-organization of the population in terms of dwelling areas, reconciliation of different group interests, ... the creation of self-administrative councils and committees [and] of consumer cooperatives (*potrebitel'skie obshchestva*); the consolidation of the "democratic structure of civil society" requires, among other things, "development and expansion of socially significant middle classes" and "social institutions guaranteeing the citizens' rights and freedoms"; and so on.³ The juncture at the turn of the 1990s was seen to bring Russia into the Western mainstream, including a "normal society," "normal historical process," or "normal market democracy," and the dominance of "universal human values."

The use of "civil society" for framing purposes was not insignificant. New terminological resources were and are needed for the conceptualization of the democratic development and its obstacles (Diligenskii 1997, 7, 12). Gradually the term became a "conceptual code of the epoch" (Golenkova 1999, 4).

With the decline of popular movements in the early 1990s, however, activists and

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The quotations come, respectively, from *Rossiiia segodnia. Politicheskii portret v dokumentakh 1985-1991* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1991), 39; the program of the Free Democratic Party of Russia (*Informatsionnyi Byulleten*, no 1 [St. Petersburg: Dvizhenie "Demokraticheskaia Rossiia," Sankt-Peterburgskoe regionalnoe otdelenie, 1992], 7); the program proposal of the Social Democratic Party of the Russian Federation (*Politicheskie issledovaniia*, no. 1/1991, 208); and the annual report of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (*Otchet o rezultatakh vypolneniia nauchno-issledovatel'skikh rabot i nauchno-organizatsionnoi deiatel'nosti instituta za 1990 god* [Moskva: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, Institut Sotsiologii, 1990], 31-32).

scholars alike painfully realized that the creation of civil society was a more complicated and a more laborious task than had seemed in the days of perestroika. The disappointment led a number of scholars to reflect on and to analyze the concept in relation to Russia, especially obstacles to its realization (Belokurova 2001, 41). Today it is a routine term of the Russian social science vocabulary.

In her informative overview of the Russian social scientists' "reading" of the concept of civil society Elena Belokurova (2001) structures the discussion with two Western traditions, called the "L-tradition" and the "M-tradition." According to Oleg Kharkhordin (1997, 38), from whom Belokurova draws the distinction, the former tradition, "going back to John Locke, ... considers civil society as an ethical community that lives under natural law prior and outside politics," and the latter tradition, "named after Charles Montesquieu, ... presents civil society as a multitude of citizens' autonomous associations that are intermediaries between the individual and the state and, if needed, defend the freedom of the individual against the usurpation by the state." Civil society is presented on the one hand as a civilized society, and on the other hand as a sustained, organized capacity to lay claims to the state.

The salience of this two-fold division, discernible explicitly (Kharkhordin 1997; Belokurova 2001; Petrov 2005, 6; Belokurova & Iargomskaia 2005, 23) or implicitly (e.g., Golenkova 1999, 5; *Politicheskaiia sotsiologiia* 2001, 227-228) in a number of Russian reflections and studies is interesting, because it does not appear with the same explicitness at all in the Estonian discussion. It apparently captures a major dimension in the Russian discourse,⁴ and perhaps most significant is that the "L-tradition" is "quite popular" (Belokurova & Iargomskaia 2005, 23) among Russian specialists. In Belokurova's view those scholars stressing this tradition -- democratic values, civilized social life, and the like -- see, by and large, the prospects of civil society in Russia in a more negative light than those stressing people's self-organization ("M-tradition").

In the former group of students it is common to impute the poor prospects of civil society to the absence of the middle class and the ethnic heterogeneity of the population which block the growth of a civic and egalitarian culture. More pessimistic still among these scholars are those who evoke the nature of the political culture, paternalist consciousness among people, and the centuries-long cleavage between society and the state power (Belokurova 2001, 36-40).

⁴Kharkhordin draws the distinction from Charles Taylor (1990, 104-115), but it seems more complex than the form in which it has been introduced in the Russian discussion.

The problematic character of political culture allegedly manifests itself in a mentality that thwarts the activity necessary for the emergence of civil society. "The historically formed ideotype of the Russian personality (*russkaia lichnost'*)" involves an aspiration to egalitarianism and the absence of ethics of success, weak capacity to take responsibility for one's own life or the transfer of responsibility to instances above the individual himself - fate, God, power (Diligenskii 1997, 12-13, cited in Belokurova 2001, 36-37). It is easy to find other examples of this line of thought (e.g., Basina 1997, 92, 102). The second factor, the paternalist consciousness, or an "archetype of domination-submission (*arkhetip gospodstva-podchineniia*)" (Khlopin 1997a, cited in Belokurova 2001, 39) seems practically indistinguishable from the proclivity to transfer the responsibility to other instances than oneself.

While these alleged traits of political culture and consciousness refer to passivity, some scholars of this orientation also invoke the concept of freedom -- in the sense of *volia*, which brings in an indifference towards formal rules, legal norms and other comparable obligations as typical of people's behavior in Russia, in opposition to freedom regulated by institutionalized rights and obligations (Khlopin 1997b, 64-65, cited in Belokurova 2001, 37; Diligenskii 1997, 15). Here reappears the duality between passivity and sudden outbursts of disorder, so familiar from many (stereotypic) descriptions of the Russian national character or mentality. It implies a harsh contrast between state and society, which Belokurova identifies as the third factor Russian commentators in the "L-tradition" consider responsible for the absence of civil(ized) society.

In the "L-tradition" especially those elements are emphasized (and possibly reinterpreted) that make sense negatively. Much emphasis is put on the existence of autonomous individuals as a characteristic of civil society. These of course appear in standard Western social science conceptions as well, but less conspicuously than in the Russian ones. By stressing this feature Russian L-commentators highlight the difference (or even otherness) of their society and thereby the obstacles standing in the way of civil society in Russia. Hence the strong emphasis on the culturally determined type of the "Russian personality" as the main "psychological and cultural" obstacle to the development of civil society, or the opposition found between the "psychology of state-dominated paternalism" and "individualist life strategies," in a number of "traditionalist" reflections (e.g., Gadzhiev 1994, 62, cited in Belokurova 2001, 33; Diligenskii 1997, 10, 13, 15, 17, 20). This kind of cultural-psychological view of a (national) mentality, common in Russian accounts, cannot be found in the Western

discussion. Thus most L-commentators' views imply that the concept is of limited or no value if applied to Russian conditions. As Elena Basina (1997, 104) puts it: "The following phenomenon is characteristic of the Russian social life: all 'Western' planted into our soil bears fruits which differ considerably from the seed, and, what is most important, from the expected result."

L-views usually propose an important role for the state. It may be seen instrumental in defending people's rights and promoting civil society "from above," in the absence of the middle class as a necessary base for civil society, or the state is needed *in opposition to* society, vacillating between passivity and order. Some scholars consider Russian popular action as potentially uncivil or destructive, liberating "negative energy" and threatening the country with centrifugal tendencies (Belokurova 2001, 37). In this perspective the state is a potentially benevolent authority, needed to guarantee the order. Giving priority to the state as an organizing force is an idea profoundly entrenched in the Russian political culture, and it largely prevails in Russian politics and thinking today (see, e.g., Pursiainen & Patomäki 2005, 6-11; Hale 2002). The point here is that this perspective may shape the Russian scholarly discourse even among those analysts who are sympathetic to the concept of civil society, understood as the sphere of civilized interaction in which the relations between people or social groups are regulated. On some occasions there appears a kind of longing for harmony here. Civil society may be seen as an element in a "complete social organism"; it has a "homeostatic function," or the "function of mother," completing the "function of the father" fulfilled by the state (Bachinin 2003, 307-308). A logical end point of the "statist" approach (Hale 2002) is the conclusion that not only are the prospects of civil society poor but there is no soil for it to take root, and therefore it is erroneous to think that civil society would be needed in Russia at all. Belokurova notices that scholars representing this view have connections to the Slavophile tradition in the Russian social thought (2001, 40-41, 44; cf. Pursiainen & Patomäki 2005, 23-32).

The prominent role granted to the state in this orientation is in line with the perceived causes of the weakness of civil society in Russia. The burden is placed mainly on factors of non-political nature -- cultural deep structures or deficiencies in the social structure -- which can be corrected only or primarily by an educating or socializing authority or protecting measures of the state. Often (but not always) these commentators are "traditionalists," who stress the peculiarity of the Russian culture or civilization in contrast to the Western one.

A different view of civil society and its prospects in Russia emerges from those

texts which represent the "M-tradition," or stress the voluntary organizations and the associational activity as the core of civil society, that is, organizational and institutional factors that make people capable to act jointly for common objectives and to lay claims to the state. This conception may imply an explicitly active or even contentious relationship to the state, unlike the L-view. As a rule the representatives of this perspective are "modernizers" (Belokurova 2001, 44). Many of them were close to the mass movements in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, and unlike the "traditionalists," they have studied associations empirically. Moreover, they often have links with the organizations of the "third sector." In several cases these organizations and their publications promoting civil society are financially supported by Western donors; usually the publications have a limited circulation only. A linkage seems to exist between some university intellectuals and the third sector, a linkage that can marshal resources for the former and offer them a mode of action corresponding to their theoretical and ideological orientations (Belokurova 2001, 42-43). Often in this context "civil society" is not a reflected concept but rather a term utilized (if utilized at all) thanks to its ideological proximity to other notions of Western origin, like "non-profit organizations" (*nekommercheskie organizatsii*) and "non-governmental organizations" (*negosudarstvennye organizatsii*), which were adopted in the 1990s in Russian to mark a break with the organizations of the Soviet period.

"Modernizers" are generally optimists or at least less pessimistic than the "traditionalists." They not only find elements of civil society in the Russian past, but they also see in the present process of organization a basis for the development of civil society in contemporary Russia (Belokurova 2001, 44).

One more term is "social partnership" (*sotsial'noe partnerstvo*), originally used to describe relations between the state, the labor unions, and the employers' organizations. This meaning the term still has (see, e.g., Crowley 2002; Krivosheev 2004), but in the mid-1990s it was also redefined to cover the regulated relationship of the third sector to the state and the economic sector, especially in relieving social problems. In organizations of the third sector social scientists meet other people and provide knowledge and practical skills necessary for common activity with authorities and enterprises on supposedly equal terms (see Liborakina et al. 1996). In practice the leading role in social partnership is played by the state (Pursiainen & Patomäki 2005, 8-11).

Social partnership includes a view of civil society as one partner (see, e.g., Model' & Model' 2000), but apparently it has, in part, replaced the latter concept in the

"modernizers" discourse. In *Sotsial'noe partnerstvo. Zametki o formirovanii grazhdanskogo obshchestva v Rossii* (Social Partnership: Notes of the Formation of Civil Society in Russia) civil society is portrayed (only) as the frame in which develops the main precondition of the social partnership, the voluntary organizations (Liborakina et al. 1996, 41-47). The term civil society itself has apparently receded into the background as an object of analysis and reflection, losing ground to more concrete terms denoting people's organized activities. "Usually civil society is considered as the totality of voluntary social associations," says M. Fliamer in the volume on social partnership (Liborakina et al. 1996, 41). Moreover, it is understandable that the stress on associations and the like is stronger in the empirically oriented modernizing view of civil society than in the more abstractly oriented traditionalist one. Also, the stress on organized activity apparently provides a basis for the optimist view that despite many problems a civil society does exist in Russia.

Finally, there is a perspective that appears in Belokurova's overview (2001, 40, 44-45) but is not identified as an approach separate from the others. It strives through conceptual work to escape from the dilemma of either denying the applicability of Western-type concept of civil society, or identifying it in the present-day Russia by what can be called "conceptual stretching" (see Gel'man 2002, 14-20, 22). Oleg Kharkhordin (1997) and Vadim Volkov (1997) have looked, in different ways, for a theoretically based perspective to people's autonomous activity vis-à-vis the state in Russian history, by relating it to Western traditions. Kharkhordin distinguishes an Orthodox Christian tradition as the basis of a civil society conception, along with Protestant and Catholic visions, and Volkov sees the functional equivalent for civil society in the Russian idea and practice of *obshchestvennost'*. Kharkhordin's interpretation leads him to stress friendship networks as a basis of civil society (1997, 54-56), and in Volkov's view the birth of civil society requires that the Russian tradition of social solidarity and civic virtues will be incorporated into it.

Schematically the differences between the three approaches can be presented in the following way. In the L-view civil society in the Western sense (individualism, civic culture, etc.) is incompatible with the Russian tradition and therefore does not exist in Russia, and cannot or even should not come into being in Russia. In the "modernizers" M-perspective, instead, the concept and the implied model adopted from elsewhere, provide an appropriate critical starting point for the assessment of the Russian situation: elements of civil society in a conventional Western sense (people's self-organization) can be discerned in Russia, and they should be developed further. Finally, Kharkhordin's and Volkov's conceptions are attempts to

redefine civil society in a way adequate in the Russian conditions: there is no Western-type civil society in Russia but in the Russian history there is something that can reasonably be seen as the Russian counterpart to it; therefore at least elements of it or a potential of its (re-)emergence or consolidation exist, and civil society thus understood could and should be developed. Admittedly this categorization simplifies the situation. Not all those who portray civil society as a civilized community are "traditionalists," nor is it excluded that a common value base and self-organization can appear in one and the same conception. Yet the presentation should clarify different dimensions in the largely theoretical-philosophical Russian discussion.

4. On the Estonian civil society discourse

Like in Russia, "civil society" became in Estonia a catchword and a concept in scholarly discourse in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. But the context was different, and so have been the ways and the timing in the use of the concept. In Russia the context for the process of imitation and modification was a new round in encountering the problem of Russia's relation to the West: how to learn from the West in order to defend Russia against the West, to catch up with it, or to supersede it, a challenge familiar from the reforms of Peter the Great to Bolshevism as a Russian variant of Marxism. In Estonia the context was provided by the regaining of independence and a perceived "return to the Western world," which later has been institutionally substantiated by the country's entrance in NATO and the European Union.

From this vantage point can be examined the ways in which the Western civil society discourse has been adopted in Estonia, and, more specifically, the ways in which the state is seen in relation to civil society. In the latter respect it is of importance that the discussion has been going in a country under (re)construction as a state and nation.

Unlike in Russia, the term entered public discussion with force only in the middle of the 1990s, or even later. It did not belong into the vocabulary of the "Singing Revolution" of the late 1980s nor of the establishment of the independent state in 1991. In the upheavals of the time priority was given to the terminology of mobilization and state- and nation-building (Ruutsoo 2001, cited in Raik 2003, 201; Ruutsoo 2002a, 189-226). Symptomatic of the secondary role of the notion during the early period of change is that originally no established word corresponded to it. Civil society was often called *tsiviiliühiskond*, and only later the term *kodanikuühiskond* established itself (Ruutsoo 2001; Lagerspetz 2000, 1-2). Even today the

form of the term is not fully fixed.⁵

A major impulse to the introduction and then even a predominance of the term in the public discussion came from the mainly EU-based "democracy promotion," in which "Western" concepts and models were introduced in or imposed on Estonia (Raik 2003, 42), and "external" became "internal."⁶ In this process, since the late 1990s, the concept of civil society became "one of the keywords" to the extent that "statements stressing the need for the involvement of civil society seem[ed] to have become an almost compulsory part of any speech concerning EU integration given by an Estonian politician, and this issue [came] up in all parliamentary deliberations on the EU" (Raik 2003, 62, 214-215). Usually democracy promotion meant, in concrete terms, projects to increase the participation of interest groups and other NGOs and civic organizations in the political process. (Raik 2003, 202-223)

Undoubtedly this discussion enhanced the sensitivity of the Estonian academic community to the issues of civil society and to the concept itself, especially because the image of the Estonian transition as a "return to the Western world" dominated much of the politically relevant social science discussion and research in the 1990s. Yet still in 1997, when social scientists published a major collective volume under this title (*Return to the Western World: Cultural and Political Perspectives on the Estonian Post-Communist Transition*, ed. by Marju Lauristin & Peeter Vihalemm), the concept appeared only marginally.

One of the most determined proponents of the term in the late 1990s and later has been Rein Ruutsoo. In his book *Civil Society and Nation Building in Estonia and the Baltic States* (2002a) Ruutsoo considers civil society, in accordance with what in Russia is called the "M-tradition," as the "arena of the polity where self-organizing groups, movements, and individuals, relatively autonomous from the state, attempt to articulate values, create associations and solidarity, and advance their interests" (2002a, 40).⁷ The concept is utilized as a critical tool in the analysis of Estonia. Ruutsoo contrasts the mobilization of the late 1980s, which he portrays as the (re)birth of civil society, based on organizational phenomena like the Song Festival and the existence of various networks and other organizations, to the situation in

⁵Along with the form *kodanikuiühiskond* (literally: citizen's society) appears the form *kodanikeühiskond* (literally: citizens' society), favored by a number of social scientists. See Lagerspetz 2000, 2; 2001, 14.

⁶The expression comes from Graham Avery and Fraser Cameron's book about the enlargement of the EU (1998, 31, cited in Raik 2003, 101).

⁷The definition is drawn from Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan.

the beginning of the 2000s, when the political groups remain indifferent to the development of civic activism and civil society (Ruutsoo 2002a, 157, 174-176, 215, 364, 366).

Ruutsoo has also adopted the notion in a critical tone in opposing the "ethnic nation-state idea" to civil society, which is an "essential concept capable of challenging" the former idea (2002b, 38, 41; cf. Ruutsoo 2002a, 224, 231). The distinction seems significant, among other things, in conceptualizing the position of the Russian-speaking minority. If the frame in studying democracy in Estonia is the "ethnic nation-state," those who are not citizens do not necessarily appear in the analysis at all, whereas if civil society is the starting point, they will, because they are members of it, even though they are not members of the state. But in this sense the concept has apparently not been used in research, except for a few remarks.⁸

In any case, most frequently the notion of civil society has appeared since the late 1990s in the study of democracy, notably of participatory democracy (Lagerspetz, Rikmann & Ruutsoo 2002, 75). EU-based pressures and international funding may have promoted this work, but the initiative of social scientists themselves has clearly been instrumental. Those involved are interested in developing civil society in the sense of the proliferation of NGOs and other forms of people's self-organization. The volume and composition of the associational activity have been investigated in 1998 and 2005, first with pessimistic conclusions (Lagerspetz, Rikmann & Ruutsoo 2002), and then with moderately optimistic ones (Rikmann et al. 2005).

In this research activity a close relationship was created between social scientists and the representatives of the state institutions. The most striking indication of the social scientists' involvement in the civil society development both as scholars and as partners to the state organs is a framework document for regulating the relationships between the NGOs and the government in Estonia, called Estonian Civil Society Development Concept, and approved

⁸A related context that remains within the frame of the existing polity could be local politics, because the non-citizens have the right to vote in local elections. This situation makes their empowerment an aspect of democratization within the polity. However, other conceptual tools than "civil society" have apparently been found most appropriate in empirical local studies (see Berg 1999; Berg & Sikk 2004). – In the collective volume *The Challenge of the Russian Minority* (Lauristin & Heidmets [eds] 2002) the term civil society appears in the connection of the Russian minority a few times only. The editors make use of it in a cultural perspective, in analyzing the integration through cultural learning and individual success as a part of the democratic construction of the Estonian state: "integration is viewed rather as a *cultural process*, stressing the opportunities for members of the minority to learn Estonian, to *participate in civil society*, to get a good education, etc. ... The Estonian model of integration is clearly based upon liberal ideas, stressing personal choices and responsibilities." (Lauristin & Heidmets 2002, 29; emphasis added).

by the Estonian Parliament in 2002. The democracy promotion played a role in the preparation of the document; the initial impulse came from a project in the UN Development Program (Lagerspetz 2001, 3, 13; Rikmann 2003, 12). The document defines mutual tasks of the public sector and citizens' initiatives as well as principles of their cooperation in politics, public administration, and the "construction of an Estonian civil society,"⁹ in order to develop participatory democracy in Estonia. It has resulted in organized connections between the two partners, and recently these have stated a need to develop their cooperation further, thanks to a multiplication of mutual contacts (Rikmann et al. 2005, 85; cf. Kivirähk 2004). Among social scientists the document has been mainly welcomed as a constructive measure.

Social science expertise was involved in the process in two ways. First and most importantly, given that the current debate of civil society and the NGOs in Estonia was inspired by Western, mainly Anglo-Saxon models, social scientists were used as experts capable of mediating these models and ideas and helping their introduction in the Estonian conditions. Second, in connection with the preparation of the document, social scientists involved in it carried out a series of interviews about civil society conceptions among academic specialists, civil servants, politicians, local government officials, business people, and NGO activists (Lagerspetz 2001, 9, 14; Ruutsoo, Rikmann & Lagerspetz 2003). In addition to this, some social scientists have made a kind of pedagogical contribution in the process, by establishing relevant Estonian terminology and trying to make the idea of civil society familiar among the wider public (Lagerspetz 2004; Lagerspetz et al. 2003).

In sum, the Estonian discourse on civil society has been intimately connected with the promotion of democracy in the Estonian state, including above all participatory democracy. The "M-tradition" (without the term itself, however) has predominated, in accordance with the general approval of Western conceptualization and the belief that civil society is both needed and realizable in Estonia. There is nothing to wonder in the prevalence of this perspective, if we keep in mind that the idea of the "return to the West" is commonly shared (but with different emphases) among the Estonian social scientists.

5. Comparative remarks

The fundamental starting point for the study of the two cases reviewed is that in both of them

⁹Rikmann 2003, 12. See, in more detail, <http://www.ngo.ee/kodanikeyhiskond/ekak.html>

the civil society discourse resulted from the crisis and downfall of the Soviet Union and from the subsequent turn to the West in a search for the model of democracy. Also significant in the two cases is that Soviet rule disintegrated from above rather than through a sustained challenge from below. In a wide historical perspective this is true, despite the existence of a Russian democracy movement during perestroika and despite the Estonian "Singing Revolution," through which Estonians were able to seize the opportunity and then intensify the challenge. Both developments clearly differ from the protracted Western struggles, in which organizations representing popular groups succeeded in entering the polity. It was this development that brought forth the sphere called civil society. From the eighteenth century onwards citizens' economic activity was increasingly assigned to the institutions of private property, contract and market -- distinct from the state as an interested party. At the same time, there evolved a private sphere of personal freedom, as a contrast to the domination of collective social bonds. These processes provided a resource basis for laying claims to the state in the sense of an effective autonomous use of political rights, such as rights to organize, to speak publicly, to assemble and to demonstrate (Cohen 1985, 681; Poggi 1990, 21).

In the two cases examined here, instead, an opportunity presented itself rapidly, without a long-standing organized challenge. Civil society had to be created, and models were available. "Civil society" became a *project*, an element in a "framing strategy" that was to promote democratization (Glenn 2001, as cited in Kanieski 2002, 458), a language through which the new situation and its challenges could be conceptualized, at different levels. It became an object of reflection for scholars and a catchword for those willing to promote democratization. And perhaps most importantly, it has become, at least to a certain degree, a discursive tool in the regulation of relations between (local) authorities and non-state actors, a way to speak in their mutual communication. In Russia the "rhetoric of civil society" has developed into a "key element" for various actors "to position themselves in conditions, in which various spheres of social life have begun to liberate themselves from under the tutelage of the state" (Belokurova & Iargomskaia 2005, 23, 24). In Estonia the Civil Society Development Concept, as an important policy document, has contributed to a "widespread conceptualization of a new social perspective and political practice" among representatives of state institutions and organizations of civil society (Rikmann 2003, 13).

Yet differences between the two countries are remarkable as well. Most obvious is the huge difference in size -- in this respect Estonia is comparable rather with one region in Russia than the Russian Federation as a whole --, which certainly has made it much simpler to

establish connections between state organs and main scholarly experts in Estonia than in Russia. But the contexts for the "learning from the West" are very different. Russia is an old state, and there society has throughout history "proven unable to impose on political authority any kind of effective restraints" (Pipes 1974, xvii). Estonia is a new state, or a state under (re)construction. It proclaims continuity with the Republic of Estonia of the interwar period, and although it is controversial, how "Western" or democratic the political system was from 1934 onwards, the distinction between state and (civil) society was certainly much more established there than it is in the Russian tradition. In Russia the civil society discourse is an element in encountering the West one more time, with all ensuing ambiguities, whereas in Estonia it is a part of the "return to the Western world."

Hence the abstract or "philosophical" and skeptical tone in the Russian civil society discourse, in contrast to the overwhelmingly practical and straightforward adoption of Western vocabulary in Estonia. Not surprisingly, the "M-tradition" has been more central in the Estonian discussion than the Russian one. And hence, parallelly, the ambiguous official and popular stand on the Western "aid negotiation" and "democracy promotion" in Russia, in contrast to its comparatively unproblematic adoption in Estonia.

6. Scholars as intellectuals in the civil society discourse in Russia and Estonia

If civil society is a project and therefore needs to be created or adopted purposively, it must be carried out by some actors. The state is necessarily one of these, but among them are also scholars-intellectuals, at least at the discursive but possibly also at the practical level. Here we meet one more common element in the Russian and the Estonian situation. Scholars who lead the discussion about civil society have difficult to avoid, even if they will, a political involvement of some sort; the mainstream Western civil society discourse is more "academic" by nature. However, the role of the intellectuals is not similar in the two cases.

In Russia it has happened before that the adoption of concepts developed elsewhere as a guide for the future development has provoked elitism and utopianism. A number of commentators suspect that something similar might happen again in the present situation. The "construction of civil society" has been compared to the once celebratory "construction of communism" (Maksimenko 1999, 120, cited in Belokurova 2001, 46). There is a risk of normative bias, as Vladimir Gel'man (2002, 20) has put it, when one applies a concept from a different social science culture to study unreflectively a changeover in Russia

from a “poor” form of governance to a “good” one. The analysis of civil society is not only diagnostic; it is "diagnostic-prognostic" (Belokurova 2001, 40). Those better informed are obliged to give "democratic enlightenment" in this issue to their disoriented co-citizens (Diligenskii 1997, 21) – many of whom have certainly no idea of what civil society in the Western sense is.

A graphic illustration is V. Bibler's analysis of the "civil society and social contract" (1990) in the optimistic days of the mass movement. On the one hand he derived the necessity of civil society in Russia from the logic of the industrial society (it is needed in order that the industrial "civilization" can function normally), but on the other hand he proposed that preconditions for it should be created "in an accelerated tempo" and "to a certain extent, artificially" (1990, 350, 352, 358; cf. Alapuro 1993, 211-213). One can easily find related, even though less intense expressions in the contemporary accounts (see, e.g., Belokurova 2001, 34, 35, 41; Diligenskii 1997, 11; Zubov 1997, 35).

At another level the risk of elitism poses itself in the relation between the scholars-intellecutals and the third sector. Many Russian organizations have been funded by international donors, they are not generally trusted among the population, and their prestige is low. The relation of organizations to their supposed constituency is often weak, which may mean that their representative role is weak as well. Of those employed in Russian NGOs, 60 per cent have a higher education; such organizations are prone to become resource pools for an active minority (Zdravomyslova 2005; Henry 2002, 188, 193, 201).

In Estonia many intellectuals-scholars have been politically relevant actors from nationalism and national consolidation in the nineteenth century to the elaboration of the government minority policy in the 1990s and the 2000s.¹⁰ The present role of social scientists in proposing models for civil society, and providing expertise and new terminology for its development, continues this tradition, as does the recent portrayal of Estonia's historical trajectory as a simple return to the Western civilization (on this, see Alapuro 2003). Moreover, a number of scholars were prominent actors in the transition itself in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Most important and interesting in the combined role of Estonian intellectuals-scholars (or scholars-intellecutals) is that they are able to speak their scholarly language in participating in the nation- and state-building process. The most telling example is the Estonian Civil Society Development Concept. Its cooperative spirit and the unproblematic

¹⁰On the latter role, Lauristin & Heidmets 2002, 25; cf. Heidmets & Lauristin 2002, 322.

role of social scientists as scholarly experts in its preparation are in a striking contrast with the ambivalence of the most spectacular Russian attempt to prepare regulation between the NGOs and the state, the Kremlin's Civic Forum in 1991 (see Nikitin & Buchanan 2002; Kharichev 2001).

All in all, the discourses on civil society seem to display, on the one hand, another version of the ambivalence of the Russian intelligentsia in relation both to the state and the West, and on the other hand the state- and nation-building role of Estonian intellectuals as one example of the situation that is not exceptional in small European latecomer countries.

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