

**ESCAPE FROM POVERTY:
OBSTACLES PREVENTING NGOs FROM BECOMING
FULLY FLEDGED SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THE AREA OF
SOCIAL PROTECTION IN SERBIA**

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Introduction

The main purpose of this paper¹ is to present methodology and preliminary analysis of the obstacles preventing the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs)² in the Republic of Serbia from becoming fully developed service providers in the area of social protection. This paper is based on the analysis of published and unpublished data, as well as on a number of interviews.³ Taking into account the fact that the Government of the Republic of Serbia has made a decision to gradually shift the system of social protection from the government service-provision to the poverty-focused system based on the model of a mixed service provision, it is important to look at the ways in which this transformation can be achieved, with special reference to new, user-based, and beneficiary-oriented approaches.

In the remaining sections of the Introductory part of this paper, I will outline some problems related to the (mis)understanding of the role and meaning of civil society organizations in Serbia. In the next two parts, Analysis and Findings, I will present selected data on strategies and problems related to

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¹ This paper is based on the Report that I did for the UNDP Belgrade in September 2007. However, the views presented are my own, and the UNDP does not bear any responsibility for its contents.

² In this paper, I am using the terms NGOs and CSOs interchangeably.

³ I am particularly grateful to Ms Branka Andelković (UNDP Serbia) and Ms Aleksandra Čalošević (SIF) for their help and patience. I am also very grateful to members of the SIF team for their extensive comments and thoughtful reading of my Report. This, however, does not imply that any one of them would necessarily agree with anything written in the present paper.

the poverty reduction, along with the possible role of the CSOs. In the final part of the paper, recommendations will be made for the fuller and more efficient inclusion of the NGOs in the area of social protection.

Historically, while the Republic of Serbia was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, social services functioned primarily through the network of centers for social work (CSWs). This was a relatively well-developed, organized, and centrally financed system, which functioned to the benefit of most segments of the society between 1945 and 1990.⁴ However, since the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the whole system has gradually been deteriorating, and with increased pauperization of the whole society, the vulnerability of certain marginalized categories of the population (the poor, the elderly, children without parental care, children with learning difficulties, etc.) steadily increased. Reduction of human poverty and social exclusion could be achieved through development that increases the role of CSOs – a strategy that has been used in other transition countries from the late 1990s.⁵

Of course, there are certain peculiarities of the understanding of the concept of civil society in general. According to the 2004 definition of the LSE's Centre for Civil Society,

"Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups."⁶

⁴ See also Čalošević and Vuković 2006/2007: 1. There is also considerable evidence from the work of historians of the late 19th and early 20th century Serbia (like Dr. Latinka Perović and Dr. Dubravka Stojanović) that members of the public expected (and were granted) central role of the government in the provision of these services.

⁵ For examples from Russia, see Struyk 2003. Obviously, there are enormous differences, not just in size, but primarily in the economic sphere and in the most recent historical legacy, between Russia and Serbia. On the other hand, Struyk's publication presents some interesting examples of the involvement of NGOs in the area of social services, along with important theoretical considerations.

A highly informative and authoritative overview for Serbia is presented in Milivojević, 2006.

⁶ <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/introduction.htm>, accessed 11 August 2007.

Sometimes understood as a "third sector", apart from government and business, civil society in Serbia is viewed with a great deal of suspicion (Kovačević Vučo, 2006). Part of the reason is again historical (as, during the socialist period, similar concepts were regarded as "dangerous imports from the West"), but part of it lies in the inadequate presentation of the whole civil sector in the media, where it is frequently and indiscriminately attacked.⁷ It is sometimes referred to as a "belated civil society in Serbia" (Golubović, 2004: 83). Therefore, if the concept of civil society is to gain any currency for the wider public in the country, it must be properly explained, and its representatives should make an effort to present to the public what is it that they are doing, and why.⁸ The final adoption by the Law on Organizations (Republic of Serbia, 2007) should also provide an important step towards increasing public awareness and understanding on the role and place for the civil society organizations in Serbia.

Analysis

Unlike the concept and the meaning of civil society, issues related to poverty and social exclusion are much better understood by large segments of the Serbian society. Like many other countries in transition, Serbia has experienced pauperization of the society, and economic reforms have been very slow and erratic. There are important empirical studies, especially when it comes to the vulnerability, status, and needs of the elderly, refugees and the internally displaced persons (for example, CPIJM, 2005; Satarić, Rašević, 2007). When it comes to the issues related to social policy, the opinion of some important observers from the NGO sector was that "neither the government nor the public at large showed much interest in that area" (Biserko, 2005: 238), as it concerned mostly marginalized groups of members of society, so authorities on all levels were not very interested in attracting their votes (Matković, 2006: 33).⁹

On the other hand, it seems that there is now a broad consensus, in all levels of the government, of the need for reducing poverty and improving social

⁷ As noted by sociologist Srećko Mihajlović, according to the public opinion polls between 2000 and 2004, the number of respondents who thought that CSOs "should be banned, as they are enemies of the state" increased almost three times – from 4 to 11 per cent (Paunović, 2007: 57).

⁸ See also the list of Recommendations (Milivojević, 2006: 150-152).

⁹ In contrast to her opinion, Mr. Ivan Miladinović points to the examples of well-organized representatives of the marginalized groups in some Central and Southern Serbian municipalities, where local authorities had to take their opinion (and their votes) into consideration (Miladinović, 2007).

service delivery. There can be no sustainable economic growth and no support for the economic reforms, if the needs of the marginalized and impoverished sections of the society are not addressed. Therefore, by the end of 2005, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted The Social Welfare Development Strategy (SWDS).¹⁰ Of particular relevance for the programs of social services in Serbia in general is the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), "a program of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy (MOLESP)"¹¹ and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which is conceived and is being realized with a number of local and international partners" (Social Innovation Fund, 2004, 2005, 2006). Beside the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the UNDP, the work of the SIF is also supported by the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway (NMFA).¹²

The importance of the existence of such a program cannot be overemphasized – it appears to be very well organized and well managed, with extremely dedicated individuals working in it. On the other hand, its activities are to a large extent (if not exclusively) tied to specific projects, which is helpful for the projects, but such a program should be founded on an institutional level and with a clear institutional backing. In the Serbian context, this would probably require a Law on the Social Innovation Fund, granting it full independence, but also long-term financing from the State budget. This recommendation is based on my analysis of the functioning of the SIF, the level of beneficiaries' satisfaction with the projects approved through it, as well as on the general perception that if something is to be made operational in the long-term processes of social sector reforms in Serbia, it should be supported by adequate legal framework. As I am not a legal expert, I do not know which specific laws (or by-laws) this would entail, and the draft of the new Law on Social Protection is still not finished. However, as much as I am impressed by the level of competency and expertise of the SIF employees, I believe that they perform services which

¹⁰ There is some improvement in this area: according to the 2003 Survey of Living Standards, which covered 6,500 households, 10.2 per cent of the population in Serbia were considered as poor, while now that percentage is around 8 (Lučić, 2007).

¹¹ In the government of the Republic of Serbia, which took office in May 2007, called Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

¹² "It is simply the reform mechanism, designed and implemented to help the social welfare sector face encountering the social challenges of a transitional society. It funds local services on competitive basis, provides models of good practice and shares experiences of service provision between the sectors, in order to enhance the quality of and access to social services in general. It also offers capacity building to local providers. The idea was to start the development from within, through incentives (projects), using a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down approach" (Čalošević and Vuković, 2006/2007: 4).

are too important to be dependent on the group of (very skilled, well motivated, and highly competent, I repeat – to their credit, and to the credit of the ones who hired them) individuals, so that there should be some systemic solution.¹³

As an "intermediary body" in the area of social services, the SIF has so far distributed grants totaling 5.2 million Euros, with 6.1 million Euros projected to be distributed in the next three years. Of the 212 supported projects, only three have been considered as unsuccessful, and the level of beneficiary satisfaction is very high (90 per cent, according to the data in Matković, 2006: 66).¹⁴

On the other hand, the work of most CSOs in Serbia is unknown to the larger public – despite the fact that there are 19,129 registered CSOs (including citizens' organizations) in the country (Milivojević, 2006: 56-57). The public perception and relatively low degree of appreciation for the work of the NGOs is not helped by the perceived greed of their founders and members. For example, in mid-1990s, when salaries in Serbia were extremely low, some members of the NGOs were making even several hundred times more than the average salary in a state-owned company, and this was skillfully exploited in the media adverse toward the civil sector in general. On the other hand, examples of the organizations that were supposed to protect the rights of the minorities, but in fact did very little work, only serve to fuel the negative stereotypes.¹⁵

According to Mr. Miljenko Dereta, Head of the Civic Initiatives, one of the largest and best organized NGOs in Serbia, the new Law on Associations (Republic of Serbia, 2007) should be extremely important in this regard, as it will:

- define what "a citizens' association" really is;
- acknowledge the very existence of the civil society sector for the wider public;

¹³ According to Mrs. Ljiljana Lučić, some system solutions in the whole area of social protection could come not only with the new Law on Social Protection, but also from other laws that have yet to be proposed and accepted, like the Law on Local Self-Government (Lučić, 2007).

¹⁴ According to Čalošević and Vuković, "over 92% of those interviewed expressed great satisfaction with the quality of the services granted" (2006/2007: 6).

¹⁵ Dr. Božidar Jakšić, personal communication, 14 August 2007. Dr. Jakšić has considerable experience in the study of Roma communities in Serbia and Montenegro (for example, Jakšić 2002).

- be of psychological importance, as it will make campaigns where NGOs were attacked by some politicians more difficult;
- provide the first step towards more complex legal and tax regulations;
- provide a unitary register, which would help establish a full (and exact) number of the NGOs in Serbia, which would limit the space for manipulation.

Mr. Dereta also believes that, even with all of its vagueness, the present Draft Law is still "optimal for the moment," and that it definitively provides a crucial first step towards final regulation of the whole civil society sector (Dereta, 2007).

Findings

Since its foundation, the SIF has coordinated, implemented and monitored a variety of local projects in the area of social welfare. From the very first Call for Proposals (in 2003),

"Priority was given to 'partnership in action' projects that provided a better access to social protection services and linked system social protection institutions with organizations belonging to the non-government sector. In accordance with this principle, all organizations not belonging to the social protection system were obliged to submit their project proposals in *partnership* with institutions from the social protection system. Social work centers and residential institutions were encouraged to create partnerships both with other centers and institutions and with non-government[al] organizations, private companies, local self-governance bodies, or public institutions (although this was not a formal requirement for applying)" (Social Innovation Fund, 2004: 11).¹⁶

The structure of main target groups are already visible from the list of the approved projects from the first Call for Proposals, as they include children and the young (29 projects), elderly and pensioners (18 projects), victims of violence (13 projects), people with disabilities (12 projects), "family and other" (8 projects), and Roma (also 8 projects). Some of these groups, like the elderly and the young, have also been reasonably well covered by the

¹⁶ I am using this just as an illustration for its overall activities – the SIF has gradually developed more towards emphasis on innovation along with sustainability in the subsequent Calls for Proposals. I regard this shift in emphasis as a clear indicator that this agency is willing to continuously learn from its experiences and improve in the future.

system of social protection before 1990s. However, the importance of organizing the care for the elderly is especially pertinent, given the aging of the population in Serbia.¹⁷ The SIF has from the start been represented in the media, with media outlets being especially interested in projects helping victims of family violence (Social Innovation Fund, 2004: 51).

The emphasis on the sustainability was present from the beginning, and 39 of the initially approved projects (following the first Call for Proposals, 2004/2005) were evaluated as "extremely successful", so they "received funds for the continuation of funding. A total of 15 projects were implemented by centers for social work (CSW), 12 by residential institutions, while 11 projects were implemented by non-government[al] (NGO) sector, and only one by a private agency" (Social Innovation Fund, 2005: 11). The table below shows Projects with approved continuation of funding, according to the target groups:

Target groups	Number of projects
The elderly	10
Victims of violence	6
Children deprived of parental care	5
Children with development difficulties	4
Children with asocial behavior	3
Family in crisis	3
Family imperiled by poverty	2
The Roma	2
Adults with development difficulties	1
Professionals	1

Source: Social Innovation Fund (2005).

Following the second Call for Proposals, the sustainability analysis by the SIF showed that:

¹⁷ According to the average age of its population, Serbia is considered to be the fifth in the world (CPIJM, 2005: 7).

"All successful initiatives have the following elements in common:

- good cooperation with the local government was realized, established services correspond with the priorities of the local social policy,
- project visibility was realized in the local community,
- project bearers were willing to reorganize the activities of their institutions and introduced, or plan to introduce, some of the project activities into their regular work,
- projects develop innovative and appropriate services, target-created in accordance with the well-identified needs of social groups at risk" (Social Innovation Fund, 2006a: 3).¹⁸

The framework has gradually developed, so that, by the third Call for Proposals, the SIF identified two priorities:

1. the transformation of institutions;¹⁹ and
2. the development of other social protection services in a local community.²⁰

This development requires greater presence of the CSOs in this area, and this opens issues that should be addressed at both local and central levels. On the local level, there seems to be a degree of competition between the CSWs and CSOs. This is seen, among other things, in the fact that employees of the local CSWs frequently form their own NGOs in order to apply for funds from donors. According to some well-informed sources from the civil sector in Serbia, this creates a situation where there are some "para-statal NGOs"– and there should be a way of distinguishing between them and the so-called "real" NGOs (Dereta, 2007). As resources are scarce, and with the increasing "donor fatigue" (especially when it comes to the aid for the refugees and the IDPs), there is a sense that they must compete for the (ostensibly limited) funding. Local governments in many cases do not see the value of including CSOs in the area of social services delivery and protection – this is in part

¹⁸ Research conducted by Vojo Lučić and Marija Stojadinović.

¹⁹ "This priority was chosen since the part of the SWDS directed towards the transformation of residential institutions was elaborated in great detail and it enabled a rational selection of projects, or local services which can be initiated via the SIF. Furthermore, this approach enables the realization of the other SIF aims, and among them a unified development of social protection services in Serbia, [where] the reduction of poverty, and the inclusion of the NGO sector in service provision have an important role" (Social Innovation Fund, 2006: 16-17).

²⁰ "The second priority aimed at other target groups (victims of violence, the poor, marginalized groups, etc.) to be included in the SIF's work. By including this priority, the scope of the tender was expanded, and the competition and the quality reached a higher level" (Social Innovation Fund, 2006: 17).

related to general prejudices against the NGO sector in general, and in part by a perceived lack of transparency in how the funding is used in various projects. There is a need to develop effective and efficient monitoring procedures, and here the experience that the SIF has with its own monitoring and evaluation units could be very beneficial. On the other hand, the SIF cannot substitute for the lack of proper accreditation and registration procedures on the level of the country as a whole. According to Mrs. Ljiljana Lučić, State Secretary for the Social Policy in the Ministry of Labour, these procedures are currently being developed.

Some more general problems in this area include lack of adequately educated and skilled people who could work in this sector – such as social workers and psychologists. This is the case with all the potential providers, both on state and on the level of CSOs (Lučić, 2007).

The problems that many CSOs face concerns the discrepancy between the long term needs for specific projects on the one hand, and short term funding (strictly limited by the project's duration) on the other. For example, an organization like the Serb Democratic Forum (SDF), which provides free legal aid for the elderly and the refugees, cannot stop providing this type of aid after a year or two. In the situation where they constantly need to re-apply for funding, and despite the assistance they receive both from the state (Commissariat for Refugees) and international organizations (UNHCR), this makes their mission increasingly difficult.

The lack of coordination between the CSO and state initiatives is also apparent in the example of the shelter ("safe house") for the women victims of family violence, started in 2007 by the B92 media outlet from Belgrade. The B92 was able to secure many private and institutional donors for this action; however, there seems to be a total lack of any government involvement or interest – and it is unclear whether the B92 did not ask anyone, or no one from the Belgrade government sees any value in committing any resources to this very important and highly visible action.²¹

Institutionally, local municipalities are either unaware of the extent of the benefit they might have from the partnership with local CSOs, or they tend to see them simply as competitors in the struggle for the (increasingly limited) financial resources. As a positive example, one could turn to the activities of a well-established NGO from the south of Serbia, The Educational Center ("Edukacioni centar") from Leskovac. This organization,

²¹ By the time of the writing of this paper, I was unable to schedule a meeting with someone from the B92 to discuss this very interesting situation. The criticism of this apparent lack of coordination was expressed to me in the interviews I had in the CLDS.

which has 22 full time employees, structures its activities along three main axes:

1. support for the local (municipal) economic development;
2. development of the local NGOs and support for the youth; and
3. support for the reform initiatives by the government (MEU, 2007).

This is one of the rare instances which proves that coordination with local authorities is possible. Several others include municipalities in Central Serbia (like Jagodina and Svilajnac), where local authorities have seen the value of collaboration with the civil sector (Miladinović, 2007).²²

However, the question still remains whether it is possible to effectively deliver social services on a local level without much greater degree of *decentralization* (Matković 2006).²³ The experience from the European Union shows that *the regionalization* can be extremely effective in this regard. An example from Slovenia where a volunteer provides help for a single working mother by waking her daughter up every morning and making sure that she gets to school on time is the case in point – as such service would be simply too expensive and too impractical to be coordinated by a local CSW (Dereta, 2007).²⁴ There are similar examples of good practice from Serbia, for example from the area of Knjaževac, a town in the east central Serbia, where organizations like the "Timočki klub" provide help for the elderly, covering 86 villages and settlements, some of which are even 50 km from Knjaževac.²⁵ On the other hand, there are different ways of regionalization, and one should bear in mind suspicion that some parts of the public have toward that concept. The very concept of decentralization is viewed with considerable unease in Serbia, beginning with the government representatives. On the central level, there is unease at the thought that someone would be trying to additionally "carve up" the country. On the local

²² For example, according to Mr. Miladinović, who is also involved with the SWDS in this region, and collaborates with both the DFID and the NMFA projects, Jagodina is the municipality in Serbia with the highest percentage of its budget allocated for the social protection.

²³ Matković 2006 presented a very good and detailed outline of decentralization processes, along with some very useful recommendations.

There are several very useful texts on the social policy issues in various global contexts available online at the <http://www.unrisd.org/>.

²⁴ I am very grateful to Mr. Miljenko Dereta for this example.

²⁵ Over 36 per cent of the population in the municipality of Knjaževac are more than 65 years old (MEU, 2007).

This CSO provides aid for the elderly since 1999.

level, given historically centralized social services in Serbia, many local authorities are simply afraid to try something new, or to show any initiative.²⁶ Paradoxically, the processes of democratization of the Serbian society since 2000 have only led to increased centralization in this area. Given mixed ideas and strong feelings at the very mention of the word "decentralization", any future steps in this area should be done after proper consultation with all the relevant factors, both on local (primarily municipal), and state (ministry) levels.²⁷

Concluding Remarks

Despite the fact that The Social Welfare Development Strategy (SWDS) has been adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2005, a number of important issues in the area of social services delivery and access remain unresolved. Of paramount importance for the greater inclusion of NGOs in this area is the provision of *a well defined institutional environment* for their functioning. Some important aspects of the *legal and institutional framework* should be established after the adoption of the Law on Associations in the National Assembly. Although this Law does not really distinguish between NGOs and citizens' and voluntary associations, it will still present an important step forward.

Despite all the political obstacles, increased *regionalization of the country* as a whole seems necessary – this would facilitate access to different aid programs from the EU funds,²⁸ but also help address increased regional inequalities within Serbia. An obvious problem is posed by the fact that local party hierarchies (within the municipalities) primarily feel obliged to consult their party bosses "in the center".

²⁶ This explains why almost 50 per cent of local OKOSP projects have failed (Čalošević, 2006). OKOSP is an abbreviation for the "Opštinski koordinacioni odbor za socijalnu politiku," or "Municipal Social Policy Coordination Board."

²⁷ A very good example for the importance of consultation is provided by the closing of the home for orphans in the municipality of Vranje in the south of Serbia, following which these children were moved to more appropriate accommodation, primarily with the foster families. According to Mrs. Lučić, in this case, the consultations lasted several months, and the municipality undertook an obligation to fund this project in its entirety from the next year (Lučić, 2007).

²⁸ Increasingly, EU bureaucracies tend to promote concepts like the one of "Europe of regions," insisting on the regionalization and even trans-border and trans-national cooperation.

The *budget monitoring* itself (on all levels) should considerably help the poverty reduction.²⁹ Therefore, this would have to go hand in hand with strict anti-corruption measures and control of how the money is spent, which could increase a general level of trust that citizens have in their institutions.

The *institutionalization* of social services should be twofold:

1. more responsibility for particular projects should be granted to local self-governances; and
2. certain projects³⁰ should obtain long-term sustainable financing, and not be dependent on the projects that last a year or two. In the cases where CSWs and NGOs compete for funds, it should be noted that there are certain expenses (electricity, water, telephone, space) which the CSWs already have, so they are never included in the cost of the project.³¹ Therefore, projects proposed by the NGOs could sometimes appear to be much more expensive because they simply lack this kind of institutional backing.

In both of these cases, there is a need to involve private sector and private businesses. The state could easily do this if it would provide tax incentives for the private sector, so that they are encouraged to invest in this area.³² The private sector should be encouraged to invest, while the provision of services should be left for the properly *licensed* and *accredited* organizations. Of course, this will also require *constant monitoring and transparency* in the procedures of how the resources are spent.³³ This should also influence more emphasis towards innovation in the area of social service provision.

²⁹ In this regard, continuous tax reform could prove very important as well.

At the time of the writing of this paper, the information was presented that, according to the data from the World Bank research, Serbia is ranked fourth in the world by the level of the corruption in health services. This information was presented on 24 September 2007 by the representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, published in a number of daily newspapers (*Danas*, *Dnevnik*, etc.), but it is quite disturbing to find that comparatively little has been done in this area in the last six years. See <http://www.portalargus.org/vesti/7596.html>, accessed on 25 September 2007. For the data on the corruption in health services presented on 27 October 2001 by the Transparency Serbia, see http://www.transparentnost.org.yu/ts_mediji/0003-izv001.html, accessed 26 Sept. 2007.

³⁰ Such as the aforementioned provision of free legal aid for the elderly and refugees, for example.

³¹ Needless to say, these are not "free" in any sense – they are actually being paid for with the taxpayers' money.

³² At present, the only area where private sector is present to a significant extent in the area of social services is opening of private institutions for the care of the elderly. However, this is to a large extent due to a lack of specific legal parameters for this, and in practice means that people who are well off can afford good care – which still excludes large segments of the population.

³³ As already noted above, the SIF has good experience in this area with its monitoring and evaluation units.

There are some cases in which the central (state) authorities could help free local resources that are available, in order to help some segments of marginalized population. This concerns primarily the elderly, and the resources are in the areas of agriculture, village tourism, and arts and crafts (CPIJM, 2005: 7).

A considerably higher degree of *decentralization* is needed in order to shift more social services to the communities themselves. This goes primarily for the services where a considerable degree of "local knowledge" is necessary – especially when it comes to the care for the elderly or the children with special needs, for example.³⁴ In the latter case, parents' associations have already proved to be instrumental, like in the municipalities of Jagodina and Svilajnac (Miladinović, 2007). Of course, although decentering could seem cheaper and more efficient for the provision of services, there is a paramount need for the establishment of *clear and transparent procedures* on how the funds are spent.³⁵ Local communities will also be much better aware of the particular needs that they have. According to Matković, at the local government level, there is a pressing need to form specific *databases* on vulnerable groups and their particular needs. Following on this, some type of planning documents for the area of social services should be compiled, and this could be done between several municipalities. This would include *pooling of resources* and promote *partnerships* between different local organizations, including CSOs (Matković, 2006: 63-64).

This will be achieved much more easily after reducing of the stereotypes against the civil sector in general, and the forthcoming Law on Associations should provide an important first step in it.

All of these aspects should be combined with attempts to implement *licensing and accreditation* of local NGOs. This is a very important topic, but I was unable to get more information on how it is going to be implemented in Serbia, as the process has yet to begin.³⁶ This is a very important area, and I believe that it requires the institutions (like the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy) to familiarize themselves with the ways in

³⁴ I found the fact that organizations such as "Timočki klub" did not know (or could not respond) how many beneficiaries they have, a cause for some concern (as stated in the response to a question by Mr. David Lampert, Interview on 5 September 2007).

³⁵ As mentioned above, even if decentralization would take place, it would be of little use if the local party representatives remain to be highly centralized.

³⁶ At the time of the writing of this paper, the Ministry of Labour has advertised for the accreditation of training programs of service providers in the area of social protection: <http://www.minrzs.sr.gov.yu/srp/page.php?iduser=1&path=index/Konkursi/Konkurs%20za%20akreditaciju%20programa%20obuke%20pru%C5%BEaoca%20usluga%20u%20oblasti%20socijalne%20za%C5%A1tite/>, accessed 25 September 2007.

which licensing is done in countries with more experience in the area of social protection (like Scandinavian countries – for example, The Kingdom of Norway, which is very much involved in providing aid for the social protection services in Serbia), but also with some of the countries which used to be part of Yugoslavia (like the Republic of Slovenia).³⁷ Although these should be done in accordance with the principles outlined in the SWDS, more efforts should be made to establish *a continuous dialogue* between the government representatives (on all levels) and representatives of the CSOs. At the local level in particular, these should see themselves as allies, and not as competitors. Many CSOs have considerable experience in applying for projects and project management and, together with unused resources available on local level, this should help in future fundraising. This should also alleviate the degree of suspicion that they have toward each other, and help a much better (and considerably more balanced) presentation of the NGOs in the media. On the other hand, the state must provide tax benefits (like the abolition – or significant decrease – of the VAT) for the CSOs and non-profit organizations in general – Serbia is one of the very few countries in the world where these are viewed (and treated) just like any other (profitable) business.

Last but not least, I fully agree with Matković that *the SIF and the Fund for Financing Organizations of Persons with Disability must continue functioning* (Matković, 2006: 64-65). Furthermore, this functioning must be institutionally guaranteed, and, given the legal and institutional framework in Serbia, this would, in the case of the SIF, probably require a separate *Law*, establishing it as a fully independent agency, with long-term financing.³⁸ On the other hand, this recommendation is also dependent on the new Law on Social Protection, and perhaps some degree of greater autonomy (especially when it comes to financing) and institutionalization could be included in it.

³⁷ According to Dr. Matković, this idea was already present when she was Minister for Social Protection, but it could not be realized at the time, as Slovenia was preparing for the full entry into the EU, and there was a period of political instability in Serbia from the early 2003. Therefore, I am not proposing something really new here, but something that people with considerable experience in this area already thought of.

³⁸ As noted above, as I am not a legal expert, I do not know how this would work in practice. However, I am convinced that an agency (or an institution) of such importance could not be dependent only on the skills and expertise of its current employees.

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Interviews with

(along with the place and date where they were conducted):

Ms. Jelena Miloradović, SDF, Belgrade, 7th August 2007.

Ms. Vera Kovačević, Ms. Milica Stranjaković and Dr. Gordana Matković, CLDS, Belgrade, 9th August 2007.

MEU – Monitoring and Evaluation Unit members, SIF, Belgrade, 5th September 2007.

Mrs. Ljiljana Lučić, State Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Belgrade, 11th September 2007.

Mr. Ivan Miladinović, Pomoravski okrug, Belgrade, 14th September 2007.

Mr. Miljenko Dereta, Civic Initiatives, Belgrade, 24th September 2007.

Aleksandar Bošković

***Escape from Poverty:
Obstacles Preventing NGOs from Becoming Fully Fledged Service Providers
in the Area of Social Protection in Serbia***

A b s t r a c t

The paper deals with possible solutions of problems affecting particularly vulnerable parts of the population – the elderly, poor, and refugees, among others. In order to fully realize the potential for providing services for the unprivileged, it is necessary to establish full cooperation between civil sector and non-governmental organizations, and government agencies. The paper covers some issues that explain lack of cooperation between these sectors and offers some recommendations for the immediate future.

Key words: *social services, social care, NGOs, service provision, vulnerable population, Serbia*

Aleksandar Bošković

***Bekstvo od siromaštva:
Prepreke koje sprečavaju NVO da postanu potpuno razvijeni pružaoci usluga
u oblasti socijalne zaštite u Srbiji***

R e z i m e

Rad se bavi problemima koji pogađaju posebno ranjive segmente stanovništva, kao što su starije osobe, siromašni, ili izbeglice. Da bi se u potpunosti iskoristile mogućnosti za pružanje adekvatne socijalne zaštite onima kojima je to potrebno, neophodno je uspostaviti punu saradnju između nevladinih organizacija i državnih institucija. U tekstu se pominju neki problemi koji sprečavaju potpuniju saradnju između organizacija iz državnog i nevladinog sektora, a pružaju se i određene preporuke za poboljšavanje ove saradnje u budućnosti.

Ključne reči: *socijalna zaštita; NVO-i, pružanje usluga, ranjive populacije, Srbija*