

A Life for Tomorrow

Social Transformations in South-East Europe

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The Importance of Clientelism and Informal Practices for Employment Among Political Party Members After the 2000s in Serbia - An Explorative Enquiry -

The party finds jobs for members, their family members, their friends, certain votes, and these are all certain votes.

Introduction

In the paper, we focus on one particular segment of informal practices within political parties and that is how the issue of employment in the public sector structures informal networks and actions within political parties. We consider this mechanism as crucial for influencing the dynamics of everyday political functioning in Serbia. Taking into account the unemployment rate in Serbia and the belated and slow development of the private sector, which cannot absorb the labor force, employment in the public sector is considered to be an important resource. We will explore how political players create their strategies in order to satisfy personal or collective interest, specifically, employment in the public sector, “navigating between formal rules and informal norms” (Ledeneva, 2001: 15).

First, this article addresses the use and dominance of informal networks, clientelism, and patronage in the political sphere (specifically, political parties) within the post-socialist Serbian development of a democratic system. Second, we present models and mechanisms of informal institutions, networks, and rules in political parties that are important for the employment of party members in public administration. Third, we analyze the normative framework which follows these informal institutions and enables their creation and reproduction.

Theoretical framework

The interest to explore informal economy appeared in the 1970s and it has not yet abated. This interest in studying informality expanded to other areas of social life, including different informal structures, institutions, and norms in the political sphere. It is presumed that a conceptual shift, referred to as “the governance turn”, took place in the political sciences. This turn emphasizes governance over government, which means that “non-binding arrangements, voluntary agreements, soft law” should be taken into account (Christianen and Neuhold, 2012: 1). Therefore, informal institutions such as personal and patron-client relations networks, clientelism, and patronage should be analyzed taking into account that they affect political structures and behaviors significantly, thus forming parallel hidden structures, institutions, and rules of the game. Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 726) point out that “good institutional analysis requires rigorous attention to both formal and informal rules. Careful attention to informal institutions is critical for understanding the incentives that enable and constrain political behavior. Political actors respond to a mix of formal and informal incentives, and in some instances, informal incentives trump the formal ones”. Scientific exploration of informal structures and institutions is an especially demanding task because “in much of the developing and post-communist world, patterns of clientelism, corruption, and patrimonialism coexist with (and often subvert) new democratic, market, and state institutions” (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004: 725). Therefore, informal and formal structures are two integrated scenes on which social actions take place; they influence political and economic systems and individual life chances. Usually, this kind of informal constraints are linked to “traditions, customs and cultural backgrounds” (North, 1990: 6) and they are perceived as “rudiments of traditional societies” or “by-products of contemporary soci-

eties” (Gel’man, 2004: 1022). Formal and informal institutions may interact in different ways. For example, Helmke and Levitsky (2004:725) distinguish four types of interactions between formal and informal institutions: complementary, competing, accommodating, and substitutive.

Grødeland (2007:220) defines an informal network as “an informal circle of people able and willing to help each other. People linked together in an informal network derive some benefit from belonging to it and therefore have an interest in maintaining the network over time.”

In this paper, we intend to shed light on the key phenomenon we want to investigate - clientelism. For this purpose, we will rely on Van Biezen (2007: 241) definition of “party clientelism”: “a form of representation based on the selective release of public (material) resources – contracts, housing, subsidies, pork-barrel legislation, etc. – in order to secure electoral support from individuals or selected sectors of society”. Where informal practices and structures are concerned, it is especially important to stress the significance of patron-client relations between different levels of party structure and how they interconnect. Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007:7) state that clientelism represents “a particular mode of “exchange” between electoral constituencies as principals and politicians as agents in democratic systems”. In other words, individuals and/or groups realize certain interests at the expense of the public good. The main goal which drives political parties is to survive on the political parliamentary scene and/or in power. In this power game, the main risk of increasing clientelism lies in the way parties are funded (Fisher, Eisenstadt, 2006; Hopkin, 2004). These dangers of clientelism are especially prevalent in developing and post-socialist countries. (Protsyk, Wilson, 2003; Roper, 2002). Political parties can offer their clients a range of goods and services such as “non-material status improvements, jobs in the civil service, jobs in the public-sector firms, government contracts and licenses, subsidies and grants (including tax reliefs), public construction works” in order to achieve party goals (Muller, 2000: 141- 142). Kitschelt and Wilkinson point out that such links and interconnections are long-term relations that form hierarchically organized exchange networks accompanied by shared norms (2007:3-4). They further distinguish “electoral clients at the ground floor of the system, various levels of brokers organized in a pyramidal fashion, and patrons at the top” (8). Finally, the creation and maintenance of clientelist networks is organized in a secretive manner (19). Authors consider countries with a multiparty system and a low level of economic development to be fertile

ground for the development of clientelist relations. A low level of economic development which is accompanied by a high level of state distribution (van Biezen, 2004) opens up possibilities for a wide range of clientelist relations. They are perceived as rational strategies for both sides in dealing with which are dealt with various organizational, institutional and personal problems in the context of institutional underdevelopment and lack of resources.

Even though informal networks and clientelist connections exist in all political and economic systems, it is important to examine the significance of informal structures and practices in the post-socialist context. During the post-socialist period, social players create strategies and institutions “not on the ruins but with the ruins of communism” (Stark, 1996: 995). Therefore, informal and personal networks that predate the socialist period are extremely important for the development of the multiparty system. In the context of weak and blurred institutional and normative framework, in particular, individuals tend to rely more on informal institutions. As a result, patterns of clientelism and the issue of the “culture of informality” (Grødeland, 2007: 218) are prevalent in the literature on the post-socialist context and the development of democratic political institutions.

Alena Ledeneva explores the institution of *blat* or the ‘economy of favors’ in Russia. She explains the phenomenon of *blat* as “the use of personal networks for obtaining goods and services in short supply and for circumventing formal procedures” (Ledeneva, 2009: 257; Ledeneva, 1998). Furthermore, Lonkila (1997) shares Ledeneva’s opinion that despite the changes in the economic system, “on the micro-level of Russian society many things have not changed”. Personal contacts still play an important role in contemporary Russian society (Ledeneva, 1998: 200). Other authors also point out that the informal norms and institutions are still more important than formal counterparts. Gel’man (2004: 1021) terms the prevalence of informal practices in Russian society as “the unrul[e] of law”. We can presuppose that Serbian post-socialist society can be similarly characterized.

In a situation of institutional vacuum, the state cannot guarantee stability and a peaceful environment in a “low-trust” (Radaev, 2004: 91) or “public mistrust societies” (Giordano, 2013). State institutions are too weak to implement regulative measures and sanctions against opportunism and informalization. In other words, weak formal institutions and regulations lead to decreasing levels of interpersonal trust and social solidarity. In a context of distrust, uncertainty, and instability, individuals are obliged to create interpersonal

networks of support in order to reduce risks. Aleksandar Štulhofer (2000) notes that post-socialist societies have undergone an erosion of socio-cultural capital (deficit of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity). He explains the process as “the mechanism of transitional anomie, characterized by decline in trust in institutions and civic participation”. Formal and informal control mechanisms fail to prevent involvement of individuals in informal practices and other infringements. In such a situation, opportunistic informal practices are excused by survival necessity.

Having established that individuals in post-socialist countries cope with organizational, institutional, and normative obstacles, the question that follows is how they create their political strategy in practice within an uncertain economic, political, and cultural context. Since formal institutions and regulations are insufficient and ambiguous, the actors have to rely on informal networks and strategies in order to create a more trustworthy environment. Therefore, lack of belief in an impersonalized power of institutions and rule of law can be compensated for by reliance on personal networks of trust in kin and friends. Likewise, relationships in the informal sector are characterized by reciprocity and trustworthiness due to the semi-legality/illegality of participants’ activities. Therefore, we can conclude that social capital plays an important role in the informal market, as well as in the regular sector. In order to create a trustworthy environment, actors rely on members with whom they share more interests and they participate together in different social groups or networks.

Methodology

We relied on qualitative methods in order to focus on individual actors and their interactions. As a result of using this methodology, phenomena of the informal structures and practices in political life will be observed through micro lenses and in that way light will be shed on individual behavior, relations with other actors, their norms and values. For this purpose, we used in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The paper is based on six different life-narratives which provide insight into the everyday life and decision-making processes of political parties. We conducted interviews with middle level politicians from five different political parties who hold or have held important positions in political structures and public administration.

As a result, we believe that the qualitative approach will shed new light on hidden informal structures and networks within political parties in Serbia.

Due to the 'sensitivity' of the topic, it was difficult to find appropriate respondents who would answer freely and honestly. Since the interview included some sensitive questions, a very important task was to assure the anonymity of the respondents. The limitations with which researchers are faced when they investigate informal practices are noteworthy: their investigation is unlikely to capture all informal activities, especially activities connected with higher earnings and with illegal activities at the top of the political structure. This notion influenced our decision to narrow down the focus of our research onto some elements of informal practices (employment in the public sector) among middle level politicians. Their narratives are important because the politicians at the top positions had opportunity to directly influence employment of (potential) party members. Additionally, their perspective covers inter-party dynamics and sheds light on all levels of informal party structuring.

Context

During the period of socialism, the collective-owner class or nomenclature controlled the entire system of social reproduction (Lazić, 1987, 1994, 2011). In addition to the state command-planning program, this group controlled the functioning of the political, economic, and cultural subsystem. The key infrastructural basis of this class was the Communist Party, which brought together and integrated the system through formal and informal channels. Individuals and other social groups created through a process of social differentiation (classes, professional groups, intellectuals, and others) were very limited and atomized in their action potential. Since the members of the nomenclature occupied high-ranking positions, formal affiliation with the political party was a necessary condition to reach these positions. The loss of a monopoly of one (Communist) political party over public resources occurred very slowly and rather late in Serbia. Namely, even after the beginning of the process of systemic change in Serbia (political pluralization), the nomenclature remained in power and was a key player in the redistribution of economic wealth (through privatization) to their own advantage. This group led the systemic changes and thus ensured itself a privileged position in the social structure (Lazić, 2011: 69).

However, the inherited model of integration of social spheres survived until the other autonomous actors were reinforced (economic, cultural elite, political opposition), and they refused to obey the political leadership. Fighting in the political field eventually led to the establishment of a polyarchy system (Robinson, 1996) and the need for a higher level of negotiation between the key social/political actors (political parties, industry, academia, military, police, etc.), namely a new form of integration. These changes have led to a higher degree of instability of the government since political parties can lose their political position due to competition in the elections. Given that the electoral system is legitimized as the only means of coming to power, the basis for the survival of the actors on the political scene depended primarily on their ability to mobilize voters during the election process. Reaching the election census depends on the infrastructural strength of a party (organizational potential) and the amount of resources that a political party can mobilize. In a situation where the economic resources of society are low and much distribution is done through the state, the importance of the public sector is evident and the political parties are trying to gain as much direct control over the key resources – governance and public enterprises – as possible. This leads to a situation where state institutions are captured by political parties (Pešić, 2007). Although the share of public spending in Serbia is at the European average mark (in 2011, it amounted to 40.4%, for the Euro area, 38.7%, 39.4% for the European Union, World DataBank), the share allocated to employees is among the highest in Europe. Specifically, 25.6% of all payments of the state go toward salaries and social transfers of employees (as opposed to 15% of the Euro area, the European Union 13.5%, World DataBank). At the same time, 44.7% of employees receives wages directly from the state (Labour Force Survey RS, 2012). This percentage is among the highest in Europe and together with 25% of unemployed in 2013 puts a great deal of pressure on the government not to reduce the existing staff and, if possible, to reduce the pressure from loss of jobs in the private sector. That is why a part of party activities – which are informal due to their semi-legal character – are structured in order to monopolize as many jobs as possible in the public sector for their (potential) membership and thus directly and indirectly achieve two benefits for the party - financial support and voters. This structuring effects the establishment and maintenance of informal networks of trust within the parties and personal clientelist relationships within the party and with (potential) voters. On the other hand, political engagement is perceived by

the population as a key mechanism of social promotion which leads to a high level of membership in political parties and a high degree of fluctuating of membership in proportion to their current ownership of resources. The share of people who are members of political parties in Serbia is among the highest in Europe (12.2%, World Values Survey database, 2008) and it has been constant since the period of late socialism. Likewise, the fluctuation of membership is very high and is largely determined by whether the party is in power and the range in which membership of certain parties moves over time is 1:10 (Goati, 2006: 134-136).

When it comes to the perception of the channels of social mobility, a survey of youth in Serbia (Mojčić, 2012: 103) points out that informal channels dominate among them. More than two thirds of young people stated that knowing the right people is crucial, while about half of them think it is political affiliation that is key (only one third of young people list education as an important factor). Studies have revealed a low level of confidence not only in state institutions and political parties, but also in other civil society organizations. A high degree of atomization of individuals and reliance solely on oneself and family networks points to the low importance of institutional arrangements and reliance on kinship and friendship connections in important dealings with public administration. This behavior has its justification in the political culture that favors non-institutional forms of political life.

Competition over resources

The importance of the political party in the economy and its impact on personal promotion was largely legitimate during socialism, as the Party was a key player in the integration and coordination of social life. During the period of socialism, the Party served as a reservoir and training ground for the creation of key personnel in public administration and enterprises (which were political functions in both cases), so there was no need for immediate clientelist relations with the wider population because the position of the party itself was unquestioned. Membership in the Communist Party was a kind of privilege and in the course of the economic and political crisis of the late 1970s; it became a form of legitimating of the Party's activities and a channel for the promotion and employment of a wider circle of people. However, in this period, the party was an important channel of vertical mobility and social reproduction, especially of the middle and higher social strata (Cvejić, 2006).

From the beginning of the post-socialist transformation, competition between parties led to competition for resources that had previously been owned only by the Communist Party. Since the existence on the political scene was no longer guaranteed and as it is ultimately dependent on election results, political parties are faced with the critical challenge of securing votes. As early as in the first decades of political pluralism there was a need for parties to mobilize as many voters and activists as possible. Given the political legacy that involves continuing significant political (direct or indirect) control of economic life during the so-called blocked transformation (Lazić, 2011), clientelism occurs as one of the mechanisms of mobilization, among others, in the form of employment of members and their relatives. Although there were no more solid party channels to regulate entire social life by creating a new economic elite from the ranks of the former nomenclature and, further, by controlling most of cultural (media) life, the ruling Socialist Party secured the loyalty of its members by guaranteeing them positions in public companies and institutions and giving them jobs. With the fall of Milošević, there was an intensification of the struggle for public resources between the parties, as his departure opened up space that other parties sought to fill. In a society that has suffered wars and which is still in a deep economic crisis, with high unemployment, the criteria for choosing a political party for many is not its political (and economic) program; instead, it is direct benefit. Political parties have realized the importance of this relationship with the voting body, while their mutual competition further intensifies the need to maintain this system of compensation.

Competition between the parties exists and it led to it. You are faced with a choice: to be a debate club or a serious party that must be populist and that makes more than 10%. You look up to the largest parties. It is an empirical conclusion on what to do. (Interview 1)

... if the pressure widens, the party opens the door. 'Party Army', 'army', which is created by a system of numbers and informal influence on the electorate, starting from what is talked about on slavas, streets, faculties, firms creates fundamental basic election result. Mass parties are able to mobilize more people on the election. Personal interests of the people that are subject to manipulation are legitimized. (Interview 6)

If you know someone needs a job, you do not promote politics or certain attitudes but you do manipulate people's interests and thus buy loyalty. This system has limits because it can be rounded to a number of people, but when it becomes massive you cannot find a job for 1,000 people.
(Interview 3)

The mechanism of employment

After the election in accordance with the percentage of votes won, apart from the places in legislative and executive power, management positions in public companies are distributed. Both parts of the negotiations are very important for the parties, having in mind that the amount of resources that the party will be controlling depends on both. In the allocation of the resources in domestic politics, the whole sector or management of a public company is taken by a certain party; there is no mixed management. This model leads to almost complete control of a party over a part of public resources.

Division of public companies is parties' loot. Companies are categorized according to their potential ... and in accordance with the percentages won, they are shared after election. (Interview 2)

Who gets a public company, that's his feud; they can do what they want.
(Interview 4)

One of the self-evident tasks of people appointed to public administration and enterprises is to redress their party's membership and to build a wider electoral base. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to reward party activists and to bind the (potential) membership to themselves, most often in the form of permanent or temporary employment in the public sector – the government or a public company. By coming to power, the party brings in to state administration the people it trusts and hires new members to operative positions, which leads to expansion of personnel in the public sector and "bureaucratic clientelism" (Lyrintzis, 1984, cf. Hopkin, 2006: 10). Since the public sector is largely overcrowded and it is difficult to open a new position, the clientele gets jobs when someone retires or, more frequently, through fixed-term contracts or temporary jobs.

The director of a public company is pressured to bring people. ... The one who appoints you, they put pressure. It does not matter whether you left the company in losses but how many people are employed - this is a measure of cooperation and loyalty, commitment to the party. My task in the public company, when it comes to the party, is to hire someone. There was a decision that says when the three are retired, one can be employed. I came to the director and told him that I was aware he would be pressured since I was and that we can make an agreement that for every three of his people I get one. He said «All right, I understand». So it is how I was able to hire three people for a year. (Interview 2)

One respondent states that most of the employment positions are uncertain, contractual positions, because the political party can obtain them quickly. These jobs are not permanent and they last until the next elections.

Perceptions about the importance of political parties in the economy indicate that parties are primarily seen as channels for securing a living or as channels of social promotion. Although the party is working on strengthening members' bonds to their own interests, at the same time the problems of dynamics of intra-party life is recognized.

Minority of people enters the political party because of ideology, and most of the people engage in the political life because they do not have other way to find a job. People think, they have perception that you need some „political support' in order to find a job. When they get into the party they rarely say openly that they are there because of the job, but some of them who are active ask something as a return. (Interview 4)

There is a pressure by members which affect the political life. Since a party meeting starts like this: 'When are you going to help some of us? Let the talking'. The political life within the parties is suspended and what is created is a flea market or relocated employment services. (Interview 3)

The pressure is unbearable, people join the party like they come in the National Employment Agency. Especially when they detect that director of a company is a member of the party. (Interview 1)

Active middle range members of political parties are aware of this overall perception of political parties as tools for securing employment. By all means, they are aware of pressure from party members for securing more employment for them. However, they state that this perception is unrealistic, that people have a perception that it is easy to get a job, but the reality is usually different and it is necessary to wait for a job and be more active in the political party than expected. However, none of the respondents question the legitimacy of these informal employment practices; they find different ways of justifying and explaining these actions as ordinary and acceptable. Thus, in the interviews, we found a prevalent discourse of normality and legitimization of this practice, which is used to justify individual positions.

Given that a small number of members pays a fee, parties imply that ongoing activities are partly funded by persons appointed to public office, in public administration or public companies. This fee includes a part of the salary that a person receives in that position on a monthly basis and that sum is paid or brought in to the party in the form of grants. The amount ranges vary according to the importance of the position and the wage and it amounts to 10% of the income for certain positions at the municipal or city level and 20% for positions at the national level. This practice also exists in other parties in Europe (Goati, 2006: 198-199). However, some political parties have the practice in place for those persons for whom the party found a job (permanent or temporary), which is not an appointment: they also to give a certain percentage of their personal income to the party.

At lower operative levels, there is a need for party operatives who can mobilize people to promote the party.

You need a man who will agitate in the neighborhood. Experts, teachers are redundant in the party. You have opportunism where the following groups are present – housewives, unemployed, loafers, while the smallest part are young activists, students. At this level, persons who can motivate these people are needed. (Interview 4)

The profile of middle and lower level politicians is specific and special skills are desirable. One of the most important is to be an active player for particular interests of political parties, such as obtaining money, employment, contacts with business people or votes. At the lower level, it is important that they obtain “electoral clientele” (Della Porta, 2004). When party members employ

somebody, they have specific expectations from that person to create a web of dependent patron-client relations. A party needs operatives who are ready to be at the party's disposal.

Our respondents have the impression that there is, in all political parties, a negative selection of human resources. People who are selected for the most important positions are not the most professional and successful.

They are not accomplished and prominent in their profession, so they are not known outside the party structure. That is way they are obedient, accept to do whatever they are told to do, they are operative, and they do not think and ask too much. (Interview 3)

The importance of informality

Formal rules of distribution of power within the party (positioning within the party by nominating) have little or no significance. According to previous findings (Goati, 2006: 118-122), most parties are organized according to a centralized model that implies appointing from above. The key personnel at the highest level are not questioned and this is the level at which they are usually selected. Each higher level favors, often through informal channels, key people for a level that is hierarchically lower.

Within the party there are no really free, democratic elections, one team is always favored and members are always trying to be close to those who are responsible for employment within the party. (Interview 2)

Every political party is a big authoritarian family where all family members try to be close to the leader in order to get more love and resources. (Interview 3)

Although formal positions within the party hierarchy are important, power is not distributed exclusively through them. Not all members at the same position have the same amount of influence. In addition to formal structures, informal decision-making structures are also in place. These are structured both horizontally and vertically and they represent the actual decision-making channel. Given that all the major political parties in Serbia are very central-

ized and that there is no possibility of establishing factions, recomposing of power within the party is moved into the informal part of their operation (Pavlović, 2007). This phenomenon becomes evident during periods of large turbulences in the life of political parties, 'big replacement' of leadership occurs. The conflict in the party leadership moves to lower and lower levels and crystallizes in the battle for committees at all lower levels. When deciding on an appointment to public office, leading party figures have the greatest influence (although there are personnel committees in the party, their function is rarely significant in key appointments). However, their decisions are not based exclusively on the expertise and efficiency of the candidate, but, most often, on personal loyalty instead. This relationship creates a top-down network of trust within the party.

We observed that at different levels of political party structures, different mechanisms for promotion and employment (co)exist and influence the final shape of the 'cadre mosaic' of political parties. At the three hierarchical levels, informal networks and connections have different importance and transparency.

At the highest level, the top of the party nomenclature informally decides on the promotion of higher functions. Trust and loyalty are important preconditions for entering into key positions, as revealed by the practice of direct appointment of persons who are not the party's cadres by the leaders or other influential people in the party, without consultation or explanation. These people are usually members of their family or their friends.

In our party, it happens that the party chief informs us who will take which key position, and then we as the body that should decide on that are not asked anything. Some of his choices were very strange because, for some key position, he did not appoint persons from the party but his friends. There were here also sincere intentions because for some work he trusts his friends the most and appoints them to get the job well done, but there were probably other cases. (Interview 4)

On the second level, there are more formal institutions for the promotion of middle political cadre: Central Cadre Commission [*Centralna kadrovska komisija*]. These institutions cannot discuss the first echelon of state officials, only members of steering committees. This function gives them a certain exclusivity, formal, as well as informal, power in the party. Members of the

Commission have “informal power, influence and all rituals which come with that position” (Interview 1). In other words, members of the Central Cadre Commission have a certain amount of power and responsibility for some party and public positions. These individuals in the Central Cadre Commission are loyal to the clique at the top of the political party and they can select cadres in line with the agreement, anticipating a good solution for party cliques. Nonetheless, they have a certain amount of independence in their job.

At the third level, mobility and promotion of party members seems more transparent than at the higher levels. One of the respondents explains that they had a list during the campaign with party members who were active in the campaign. At the end of the campaign they were able to quantify how much an individual was active and thus determine who could get employment if there were any ‘spare positions’. The positions depend on activists’ ambition and formal qualifications. Usually, they are invited to an informal interview with party officials where they are asked what they would like to get, what kind of position.

There are informal connections on all levels. Someone who is not active and knows president of Municipal Committee (as a kin, business partner or acquaintance) can benefit from that. There are emotional as well as interest links. Somebody who has a private firm and knows president of Municipal Committee, will, for example, print material for campaign. If you climb higher on the level, informal connections are more and more important and they are less transparent. The most democratic and transparent is the municipal level. On the top of the political parties, there are number of people who are informal consultants and they do not have any responsibility, but they have power. (Interview 5)

Furthermore, employment in public administration serves as a valuable resource and tool for creating loyalty and patron-client relations. These contacts facilitate a connection between elected bodies and public administration, creating the possibility of abuse of public sinecures and resources. Party members use the opportunity for individual upward mobility by occupying positions in public administration. In this way, a base of informal structures is formed with reciprocity networks inside political parties. Members of party ‘oligarchies’ and ‘sub-oligarchies’ make useful personal ties with members of lower party structures which can be easily mobilized for obtaining or maintaining

resources and positions within the political party. Party members who are elected for presidents of public services create their own parallel structure. They employ party members and simultaneously form an informal structure in the political party. This enables them to create and favor their own people, members of the same cliques. In this way, politicians create long-term social relationships with "unequal levels of resources or power between the partners of the exchange: patron-client exchange is 'asymmetrical reciprocity'" (Lomnitz, 1988: 48). Della Porta (2004), in a study of the Italian political scene, labels these political actors 'business politicians'.

In selecting political and bureaucratic personnel, an important role is played by patronage, loyalty, and trust which shape the informal, hardly visible structure underneath formal hierarchy. On rare occasions, promotions inside or outside political parties are based on individual competence, professionalism, or merit. If they want to climb the ladder of political structure, individuals need contacts and connections and they need to be 'part of the gang'. Studies of informal networks in post-socialist countries reveal the existence and prevalence of these informal contacts in the political sphere (Grødeland, 2007).

The condition for promotion is loyalty to certain group, because there are always many groups in the political party. Loyalty means that you know who your boss is. That is the man who is higher on the hierarchy, and you have special relations, you are committed to him. (Interview 6)

Everybody chooses his/her own contributor which are appropriate according to many factors. I do not want to say that they pick poltroon, but you choose people with whom you know you can work well and that they will do things properly. (Interview 2)

If a certain fraction is dominant, loyalty opens the door to mobility within the party hierarchy.

Nonetheless, apart from these expected interests and identities, party members can develop other interest connections and networks beyond party divisions. In this way they create inter-party collusion. There is solidarity between members of the same levels from different parties and on that level they solve the problems of power and resource division in public companies. One of the respondents gave us an illustration of this not-so-rare practice.

Sometimes it is easier to reach agreement and compromise with other party members. That is why communication between politicians who are members of different parties is often better: they have a shared interest and they create informal coalitions against their own party members who are members of the clique with which they are in conflict. The reason behind this practice is that members of the same party “fight for the same resources and position inside one structure”. (Interview 3) That is why they can place more in a member of some other party.

Last but not least, it is important to mention that informal networks are characterized by shared norms, rules of the game, customs, and vocabulary easily understood by members of the same group. In our interviews, respondents used specific phrases which are connected with informal practices such as: ‘I know the man’ [*Znam čoveka*], ‘See what can be done!’ [*Vidi šta može da se uradi*], ‘It will be taken care of’ [*Biće sređeno*]. These rules of the game are taken for granted and reified, so they can always be expressed. When some of the members find themselves in certain situations and positions, they know what to do without receiving special orders. The rules of the game are accepted by both sides. Party members have a sense of obligation towards the party officials who are responsible for their employment and relations of reciprocity are enacted among party members. On the normative level, these relations are perceived as completely legitimate and as the inherent structure of political parties. The mechanism which enables long-term loyalty is mutual dependence and coalitions in enacting practices which can be morally and legally sanctioned. In that manner, social networks can facilitate trust among interconnected members. This is especially important in an untrustworthy environment with weak institutional support.

This sort of ‘bonding’ and ‘teambuilding’ between close political comrades and patron-client actors usually takes place behind closed doors and in a more informal atmosphere. Some respondents claimed that the traditional Serbian *kafana* is still an important site of different sorts of informal meetings and negotiations where people can speak freely and openly. *Kafana* is a crucial informal political institution and it is an important part of Serbian political culture in which personal contacts and favors play a prominent role. The role of *kafana* in the early development of the Serbian party system in the 19th and 20th centuries is described in historical studies (Stojanović, 2012). Our study shows that the *kafana* as an informal social institution still shapes political life in Serbia.

Finally, these aspects of culture and norms of informality, which we have only briefly mentioned here, definitely deserve more in-depth and careful study.

Conclusion

Based on the main characteristics of clientelism (within the parties' structure and the voters' networks) in Serbia, we can conclude that it is very similar to that in other developing and post-socialist states. Its two leading characteristics are a high level of competition between political parties and a low level of available resources. Political parties hold a dominant position in distributing available resources in society and they use this state of affairs as a foundation for ensuring loyalty of future voters. Although the monopoly that parties enjoy is sometimes overestimated, these semi-legal activities lead to a strengthening of uninformed connections within the parties' structures as well.

At the higher structural level within the party, there is a higher degree of informal arrangements. At this level the parties' leaders decide on the leading positions within the parties themselves, public administration, and public companies. These positions are usually filled by the most trusted parties' people. In this way a loyalty network is created for the very purpose of keeping the party in power. Thus, this type of clientelism is grounded in very tight personal connections; they are deeply individualized by citizens' functional dependence on public resources.

The exchange with the lowest (potential) party members is their vote (their own, that of their family members or friends) and the long-term support they express in return for employment. From the citizens' perspective, this relation is rational because they would rather accept a personal arrangement and direct exchange than political programs in public discourses which are not trustworthy. Inside the party structure, the exchange unfolds between the top of the party and every other layer. The basis of this exchange is loyalty to the higher level (clique) in exchange for providing (in)formal power in their current position, which can lead to improving their status. One of the main findings is that loyalty to informal party rules is perceived as more important than the formal tasks which are prescribed for some political positions in public administration. These political practices are followed and supported by a normative framework which serves as a rationalization and justification of informality. In this situation, the uncertain environment is extended,

maintaining blurred boundaries between the formal and the informal, illegal, legal and legitimate, moral and amoral. This leads to a changed perception of formal and informal rules.

Appendix

1. Interview 1. – male, graduated from Faculty of Law, University of Belgrade, Serbia middle range politician, he was employed in a public enterprise.
2. Interview 2. – female, graduated from Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia; middle range politician, she was employed as a Deputy Director of a public company.
3. Interview 3. – male, graduated from Faculty of Medicine, University of Belgrade, Serbia; middle range politician, board member of a public enterprise.
4. Interview 4. – female, graduated from Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade; middle range politician, member of the employment commission in a political party.
5. Interview 5. – male, student, middle range politician, board member in a political party and president of the Youth of a party .
6. Interview 6. – male, graduated from Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia middle range politician, Director of a public company.

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