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Social Policy or Vote-Buying: Recent Cases of Serbia and Montenegro

Abstract

The paper examines recent social interventions in Serbia and Montenegro, a Montenegrin tax reform aiming to increase salaries and a Serbian-wide scheme of cash transfers. These cases are examined through the prism of populism and political pragmatism trying to show how social policies and social interventions are prone to be used as part of the efforts to generate wide electoral support. The paper discusses social policies in the post-communist environment arguing that communism generated a set of norms and expectations that make social policies in Central and Eastern Europe more vulnerable to being manipulated for acquiring political gain than in some other countries. The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the need for more serious and more long-term social planning which will not be subordinated to the short-term political goals. Only with that being achieved, countries in the Western Balkan will be able to see higher socio-economic progress.

Keywords: Western Balkans, populism, post-communism, social policy

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Introduction

The Western Balkan area represents a political rather than geographical term, with countries sharing the same communist and conflict past as well as the hopes for a joint European future. Even though the countries are usually considered democratic, international organisations' reports continuously warn about a number of undemocratic practices present in the region. Although the paper focuses on the cases of Serbia and Montenegro, the whole region faces similar challenges of political corruption, increasing emigration, political polarisation, nationalisms, etc. The process of negotiations with the European Union has brought many benefits to the given countries, mostly in terms of access to pre-accession funds, but it has also led to a certain level of accession fatigue and demotivation, due to its length. When it comes to political and economic policy-making, European Union and other donors have a very strong presence in the region. However, the area of social policy does not seem to be under the spotlight, which can also be seen from the fact that the social protection systems in the region have not been properly reformed ever since the fall of communism (Sotiropoulos, 2014). On the other hand, both Serbia and Montenegro have a history of strong political polarisation and have been run by political leaders belonging to the charismatic leaders type. Existing socio-economic problems have often been blurred by national polarisations or other topics that had the aim to divert the attention away from poverty, corruption, emigration and other issues. In this kind of environment, policy choices can often be driven by a desire to gain wider political support, than by the desire to actually contribute to the long-term change that brings benefits to all of the citizens. It is important to state that the European Union did not prioritise social policy and it has failed to deliver a clear vision of the social policy in the enlargement countries (Cerami, 2005, p. 54). The enlargement process has mostly been focused on issues related to chapters 23 and 24, dealing with the judiciary, rule of law and corruption, leaving the area of social policy to be regulated completely by the governments.

This paper tries to explore how social policies are being used in this context and argues that social policies have a higher potential of being used as political manipulation tools than policies in some other areas. Also, the paper argues that social policies are more easily manipulated in post-communist countries than in countries that did not have a socialist past. The paper discusses several measures undertaken by the Serbian and Montenegrin governments in the previous period and analyses them through the prism of populism and political pragmatism.

The first part of the paper provides review of the existing literature related to the development of social welfare systems in the post-communist countries as well as the social policies and their relation to populism in the given context. The second part of the paper gives a brief overview of the socio-economic situation in Serbia and Montenegro, followed by the description of recent governmental interventions aiming to enhance living standards of their citizens. Those interventions are then analysed from the populist standpoint and the paper aims to provide answers to how much of those interventions are motivated by the desire to increase the living standard of the people or by the need to deliver fast results in order to gain support prior to the new elections.

Finally, the conclusion summarises the findings warning about the importance of higher European Union influence when it comes to the development of social policies in the region.

Post-communism and social policy

After the fall of communism, efforts of the region as well as the international community, were focused on political and economic reforms. Transition to the free market and building of democratic institutions that would be able to lead the transition process were the main priorities, which caused social policies to fall off the main agenda. The transformation of the social sector was, thus, much less thorough and it was rather a build-up of the already existing practices. Faced with the internal challenges and external pressures most of the countries opted for the Bismarck welfare state model. That kind of model was already present in the pre-communist period and the institutions necessary for its implementation were already in place (Cerami, 2005, p. 53). Cerami states that the post-communist countries managed to block the instructions of the international actors and to establish hybrid social policies that were in line with their cultural and historical context (Cerami, 2005, p. 69). However, despite certain small-scale reforms, the reconstruction of welfare regimes has been left incomplete since 1989 (Sotiropoulos, 2014). Nevertheless, even if the more thorough reforms were implemented it is questionable whether the system would be significantly different. As Cerami (2005) states, 40 years of communism have produced values which are likely to survive the pressures from recent transformations and that would result in the creation of the common post-communist welfare state. Contemporary welfare states in Central and Eastern Europe were not created by dictate or design, they were “built on communist and pre-communist ruins” (Cerami, 2005, p. 48). Post-communist countries did not go too far from what already existed in the communist period in regard to the social protection system, and there were at least two reasons for that. The first one was the institutional setting that was already in place, so the logical solution was to perform transition by using existing infrastructural and institutional settings which allowed for a faster transition. The second reason was the expectations that people had from their government in relation to social issues and protecting mechanisms. Communist institutions have generated a set of norms, expectations and assumptions that have shaped the outlook of the future democratic institutions (Offe, 1996, p. 217 cited in Cerami, 2005).

Those expectations are what, as I argue, makes social policy more prone to be used as part of the vote-buying strategies in post-communist than in some other countries that do not have that web of values and expectations from their governments. More generous social benefits are in many countries frowned upon as they are seen as over-regulation and as government trying to dictate all aspects of our life. However, that is mostly reserved for Western countries that do not have a history of the welfare state, like, e.g., the USA. Therefore, it is expected to have a debate in the USA on whether child benefits should be introduced or whether social security benefits should be increased. Those kinds of promises would not necessarily bring political points,

sometimes even the opposite, but for the post-communist countries, the situation is different. Due to the long history of living in a socialist state, certain benefits are not and cannot be perceived as governmental interference, but rather as a government doing its job. Unemployment benefits, social security, cash transfers for the most vulnerable ones, universal healthcare and education are seen as a minimum that government can do in countries with a history of communism, while in some other places it can be seen as overregulation. That is why an increase in social transfers will almost definitely be seen as a good thing by the voters in the post-communist countries, while in some other parts of the world it can be the opposite.

Social policies and populism

Menachem states that social policy is based on moral value on one side and socio-economic constraints on the other side, but that it essentially expresses the desire for social solidarity (Menachem, 2015, p. 491). This definition might be correct in an ideal world where policymakers do have the best interest of their constituents in their minds. But often that is not the case, therefore, it is wrong to attach any positive or negative connotation to what social policy expresses. Sometimes, it certainly expresses the desire for social solidarity, but on other occasions, certain social policies can be driven by other motivations, which will be the topic of this paper. Although many definitions of social policy try to integrate the ethical principle and imply that the essence of the social policy is a desire for higher solidarity, taking care of the weak and the just distribution, in today's world it would be much more suitable to use the definitions that are limited to the scope of the social policy, not the motivations behind it. The author of one of such definitions is Gal (2011) who defines social policy as choices authorities make in order to achieve residents' well-being in areas of education, health, welfare, employment, housing, social security and personal welfare security.

As social policies often include cash transfers and, generally, do imply some kind of financial or in-kind assistance for citizens, these measures have a large potential of being politically manipulated and used as part of the vote-buying strategy. Social policies are a wide spectrum of mutually dependent and comprehensive interventions in the area of taxes, education, labour market, human services, etc. aiming to reach a long-term and sustainable increase in the quality of life of citizens. But, sometimes, those interventions can be as simple as increasing cash transfers, introducing (or increasing) child allowance, introducing one-off payments to the elderly or vulnerable categories, etc. and these kinds of interventions show immediate results and are more or less sustainable, depending on their nature. These kinds of interventions within social policies are what make this policy area prone to political manipulation, due to their relatively high power in making voters happy in a short period of time.

Political, economic and social background in Serbia and Montenegro

There are many debates on whether Serbia, Montenegro, and other Western Balkan countries can be considered consolidated democracies or not (Sotiropoulos,

2011; Marovic, 2016). Even though both countries fulfil the minimum requirements seen as competitive election process held on a regular basis, there are many issues that pose a serious threat to the democratic nature of the countries, such as high corruption, inefficient judiciary, political influences in media, etc. (United States Department of State, 2020). The type of capitalism present in the region “allows the war of all against all, the devouring of whole business sectors by one business conglomerate and the moulding of labour relations at will, in the context of high unemployment rates, and flourishing black markets which state authorities just watch grow, incapable or reluctant to intervene” (Sotiropoulos, 2017, p. 24).

Politics in the two countries are not run by clear ideological principles, but most of the parties are rather catch-all parties trying to gain voters from all political spectrums (Bieber, 2018; Goati et al., n.d.). There is no homegrown political vision for the future of the countries in terms of ideology (Sotiropoulos, 2017, p. 67). The internal and external pressures force political parties in these countries to distance themselves from traditional left-right political polarisation and try to accommodate as many voters as possible. The absence of a clear ideological division on the party level also affects the voters without strong ideological opinions and, therefore, the ideology is mostly not a decisive factor in the elections. In fact, many political parties have ideological references in their names, which are actually far from the essence of their politics.

In terms of governmental and political stability, while Montenegro had a stable government led by the Democratic Party of Socialists (Cnr. *Demokratska partija socijalista*, DPS) for almost 30 years, Serbia has seen several power shifts. During the recent period, the situation changed and while DPS in Montenegro has been thrown from the power in the elections in 2020, the Serbian Progressive Party seems to have a long period of stable governing in front of them.

Economically, both Serbia and Montenegro have real GDP per capita levels below the EU average and are struggling with many economic issues, especially after the emergence of COVID-19 (World Bank, 2021). Economic institutions predict that although some Western Balkans economies are starting to show signs of recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic, employment rates are still deteriorating and poverty levels are increasing, with a strong possibility of inequality growth (Council of Europe Development Bank, 2021). Economic activity is concentrated in low-value sectors. Investment in education remains lower than the EU average. When it comes to the total spending per student ages 6–15 for the year 2015, both countries are seriously lagging behind the EU members – Serbia at 24.29 and Montenegro at 22.03, while the EU average was 90.03. Both countries are struggling with skills mismatch and labour underutilisation. The level of youth unemployment is around 17% in both countries (Valescka & Yannic, 2017). Emigration rates are lower than in other Western Balkan countries, but still worrying in terms of brain drain and human capital development. In 2018, the emigration rate was 1.3 in Serbia and 0.5 in Montenegro. The pandemic has put additional pressure on the existing social issues, especially in regard to the low-income families and vulnerable populations. This situation obviously demanded social policy intervention, but, at the same time, it created legitimacy for increased cash transfers to be used as part of the vote-buying strategy as will be discussed later.

Recent social policy interventions in two countries

After the 2020 parliamentary elections, the Montenegrin government was formed by three political coalitions belonging to different ideological spectrums, united in the desire to throw DPS out of power. The agreement was to form an expert, rather than a political government, and none of the government members was a politician except for the Deputy Prime Minister. The government lasted a little bit longer than one year, with a no-confidence vote on it in January 2022. During the short term, the government did manage to adopt a set of laws comprising a programme called “Europe Now”, which is considered one of the biggest economic reforms in the previous period. The laws are mostly related to tax issues and they transfer a significant portion of the employers’ tax obligations to the state, leading to an increase in the net value of the salary. The biggest novelty of the programme is that, as of January 2022, the minimum salary will be 450 euros compared to the previous 250 euros. At the same time, all employees will get an increase in salary because the state lowered the employer’s obligation towards health and pension insurance. Namely, the gross amount that the employer has been paying so far remains the same, but the net amount that the employee is getting is being increased. This set of laws has been greeted by the overall Montenegrin public, leaving many economists sceptical or at least not ready to make conclusions yet. They are showing a certain level of reservation towards this programme, warning that there has been no actual economic growth that would lead to the increased salaries and that these kinds of experiments may not be sustainable and good for the overall economy (*Kostic: Projekat “Evropa Sad” nosi velike rizike*, 2021). Many are warning that there are no publicly available data or analysis that this program was based upon and that the rationale behind these laws has not been clearly communicated. However, the nature of this program and the benefits it brings to the citizens make it hard to argue against. When the opposition expressed its reservations towards the programme, the government accused them of being against a higher living standard for the citizens. Another popular move by the government was the introduction of the child allowance for all children up to the age of six, in the amount of 30 euros per month. This measure costs significantly less than the programme Europe Now, but there is no publicly available information on how the decision-makers came to the exact amount and the age limit or what is the cost-effectiveness of the policy. What the cost-effectiveness of this policy is, will probably remain unknown since the Balkan officials are not prone to implementing serious and comprehensive evaluations of the programs in operation. However, one could rightfully ask how 30 euros a month would help the low-income family, or why middle-class and wealthy families need it. There are reasons to believe that a better-targeted policy could provide higher cost-effectiveness by granting more money to people who need it more.

As it has already been mentioned, the Parliament has voted a no-confidence to the government and the two ministers running the economic and financial sectors, which were the initiators of the programme Europe Now, have announced forming of a new political party that would compete in the next elections. They even said that their new party should be called “Europe Now”, which could be seen as a misuse of public resources. Even without the use of the name, voters will probably see

the equality sign between the new party and the program, which is likely to play an important role in electoral behaviour.

It would not be fair not to mention the previous Montenegrin governments led by the DPS, which also took many questionable decisions when it comes to the area of social policy. Their governing period did not see big or catchy actions such as Europe Now, but there were numerous controversies related to the payment of cash transfers on a local level, often to the families who are not in actual financial need, so there have been speculations as these mechanisms were being used as vote-buying. For a long time, the public sector has served as a generator of jobs in exchange for votes. There was even a publicly known rule of “one job – four votes” indicating that employing one person would bring the votes of four members of the family. These are just some of the examples that show the subordination of social policies to wider political and party goals. In addition to that, the period of the DPS rule saw adoption of what was popularly called “law on mothers”, namely, the law that envisaged that all women who had given birth to three or more children were entitled to a life-long national pension. This law was initiated by the opposition parties, but it was adopted during the DPS rule. The law was extremely criticised by the human rights activists claiming it to be discriminatory, as well as by economists, stating that it would disincentivise women from their market participation. The law was later abolished, but it did generate large support from mothers who had the right to the envisaged benefit. Although the law was supported by the parties leaning toward the right of the political spectrum, it generated wide support mostly from mothers, without the regard for their political beliefs.

It is also important to mention another program introduced by the previous Montenegrin government, which is the Programme of Professional Training for Persons with Higher Education. The programme envisages that all who get a bachelor’s degree can apply for the program that would provide them with a nine-month-long paid internships within a range of Montenegrin employers from public, private, non-governmental and media sectors, etc. What is interesting about this programme is that it targets all students, not only the vulnerable groups or hard to employ categories. Furthermore, it costs from seven to 11 million euros per year which is far more than all the remaining active labour market measures combined. The programme has been implemented since 2012 and so far, more than 54 million euros have been invested in its implementation (*Zavod za zaposljavanje Crne Gore*, 2021), even though there is no evidence that the program has had any significant impact in terms of increasing employment or employability. In fact, it is often suggested that the programme discourages employers from opening job posts because they get free labour each year as part of the programme. However, it is easy to see why a programme like this can seem like a good idea to the government. A large number of young people get an opportunity to work and earn money, which may not have been available for them to find in the market (both due to the mismatch between the skills and demand and a low level of skills people have after the graduation in Montenegrin educational system). However, even though this program is not a cash transfer, it can be perceived as such as the government gives 250 euros per month to circa 3,000–4,000 young people per year, which puts a whole other perspective of the programme. Moreover, there is no evidence of its positive impact on their employability.

Serbia, on the other hand, has a slightly different political situation than Montenegro. Namely, the Serbian Progressive Party (Srp. *Srpska napredna stranka*, SNS) has been in stable power for over a decade now, and the main issue before the previous elections was not who would win, but how big the difference between the winning SNS and the opposition would be. However, the Serbian government has recently spent large sums of money as one-off cash transfers to different categories of citizens. In April and October 2021 all citizens received 30 euros, while all pensioners got 50 euros in September and additional 20 euros in December. It has been announced that pensioners would be given another 170 euros in February 2022. Also, all those between 16 and 29 years old would be given 100 euros. The cash transfers started in the period following the emergence of the pandemic and could be justified as financial assistance aiming to mitigate the economic consequences of the pandemic. However, the target groups as well as the amounts seem very arbitrary and not based on specific data of the needs of the population. Justifying these transfers as part of the pandemic relief efforts becomes less convincing the closer we are to the parliamentary, presidential and local elections scheduled for spring 2022. Economic experts are calculating that only the transfers envisaged for pensioners and the youth will amount to up to 400 million euros which is 1% of the Serbian GDP (Karabeg, 2022). Economists are asking the legitimate questions of what logic is there behind giving 30 euros to the families who earn more than 3,000 euros per month, as well as giving cash payments to all pensioners whose pensions were not affected by the pandemic, while, at the same time, no one is helping the 500,000 of the unemployed in Serbia.

The Serbian Government insists that the money will enhance consumption and eventually return to the budget, but the economic experts warn that this logic is not viable, since, given Serbia's large import rates, most of the consumption will go to the imported goods. In fact, data shows that out of the 600 million disseminated in 2020, only a small part has gone back to the budget through the VAT (Karabeg, 2022). With the complete absence of economic logic behind the cash transfers and having in mind the forthcoming elections there is enough material to claim that these actions are populist attempts of getting voter support. Furthermore, in regard to the cash transfers to the youth, the logic can be that the cash transfers will encourage that target group to participate in the elections, as one of the recent studies shows that only 48% of that population votes. This explanation sounds even more legitimate if it is known that president Vucic, at the same time president of the SNS, has given a public statement where he insinuated that youth will get more money if they win the elections (M.D.M, 2022). If the generally populist governing style of president Vucic is added to the picture, it would be hard to argue that these transfers are part of the serious social policy initiatives.

Discussion

When it comes to the issue of cash assistance or other forms of redistribution and the political manipulation of those, it is hard to claim what the motives of political leaders that make those decisions are, although there is evidence that suggests that

in poor countries, vote-buying is a pervasive form of redistribution in which voters receive benefits – cash or in-kind – from party brokers in exchange for their votes (Finan & Schechter, 2012; Stokes et al., 2013). Although the motives can be discussed, it is certain that when politicians have electoral motivations in designing redistributive policies they lead further away from the optimal policies (Vannutelli, 2019, p. 2). As in that case, politicians will be prone to lean towards those citizens that show the highest potential to be responsive to the given policies, and if they are not the most in need, they will be left out of the redistributive packages (Vannutelli, 2019). This theory can be applied to both analysed countries. Namely, we have seen that Serbian one-off cash transfers, apart from the smaller, universal ones that targeted all citizens, were aimed at pensioners and youth. As it has already been mentioned, 500,000 of the unemployed were not part of these targeted cash transfers. During the pandemic, the unemployed people have certainly been among the most vulnerable groups, especially due to the fact that it reduced their chances of employment. Why are they left out of this pretty generous redistributive scheme is not clear, but it is possible that the government has some other mechanisms to win this population over or that they concluded that these transfers would not be enough to win over the supporters of the opposition.

Serbia and the rule of Aleksandar Vucic have a long history of speculations and accusations of vote-buying. Media have reported the cases of vote-buying on all electoral levels, providing examples of agricultural labourers being driven to the election post instead of their fields where they were supposed to perform their agricultural work, and being paid 1,000 RSD (just under 10 euros) to vote for the SNS (Popovic, 2018). Although there were no cases that had seen epilogue in court, it is evident that the practice of clientelism and vote-buying is spread in Serbia. Vannutelli writes about the lasting period of the electoral rewards, stating that if the electoral reward for beneficial policy decay rapidly policymakers are forced to make decisions in line with short-term opportunistic goals and consequently underinvest in more sustainable and long-term initiatives that could lead to the actual welfare (Vannutelli, 2019). And this logic can be used to explain why the Serbian Government is pouring immense amounts of cash as one-off payments instead of investing in the long-term social policies, despite all the social problems Serbia is struggling with.

In the Montenegrin case, the logic was different since the Government adopted an actual set of laws that would benefit citizens in a long run. The effects would be also felt immediately, but they are designed in such a way that they could last over a longer time period. As it has already been explained, the program targeted the working population, mostly affecting those who had a minimum salary. Basically, the overall working population is affected, but the smaller someone's salary is, the bigger increase they will have. The population that is left out of the program are the pensioners. Pensions in Montenegro are also low compared to the living standard, with an average pension being 299 euros and the minimum being 150 euros (M.M, 2022) and pensioners do represent a vulnerable category, so it would be logical for the increases to target both pensioners and working population. In 2022, the pensions were increased by 2.13%, but that was still a very small increase compared to the increase seen in salaries.

It is important to mention that at the time of developing and adopting the Europe Now Program, the inflation has already been higher and is only expected to

rise. Also, there has been the possibility of different companies and grocery stores raising their prices to use the moment of higher earnings. These two things combined could make the already low pensions even lower relative value in terms of what can be bought with that amount of money. But, if we look at this situation through the prism of electoral behaviour in Montenegro, pensioners are usually strongly rooted in their political affiliations and cannot be easily swung to the other side. The older part of the Montenegrin electorate is still deeply divided among the two national sides of the political spectrum and it is possible that the government members (who were already thinking of establishing a new political party) concluded that social benefits targeted at pensioners would not be that beneficial as compared to the younger population, which is traditionally more prone to changing their political preferences. These are only assumptions based on the nature of the Montenegrin electorate, although this cannot be claimed, it remains unclear why the pensioners were left out of this reform program.

Vannutelli (2019) writes about two dimensions relevant to establishing the type of transfer. The first dimension is clientelistic vs. programmatic, where clientelist would be those transfers, whose eligibility depends on the politician's discretion, while the eligibility for programmatic transfers would be based on publicly known rules that cannot be manipulated. However, I would argue that this "clientelistic vs. programmatic" typology cannot only be based on the criteria for the redistribution, but rather by the desired or achieved outcomes. Namely, examples from this paper are mostly transfers with clear eligibility rules, yet, they do contribute to the creation of the clientelistic relations and in many cases are not embedded in the socio-economic logic of the society, but rather in the political interests of the ruling elites. In fact, if we take into account the definition of clientelism as an exchange of votes for favours (Graziano, 1976), by applying it to the case of cash transfers in Serbia we can see that the transfers can be perceived as favours and the expected outcome are the votes, which makes them clientelistic. The second dimension used to determine the transfer type is temporary vs. permanent transfers, which indicates whether the transfers will last longer, independently of the electoral cycle (Vannutelli, 2019, p. 8). Based on this, Serbian cash transfers are clearly temporary, while Montenegrin tax reforms are without any question permanent. However, in the context of the use of social policies to affect voters, this division will not be enough since in both cases we have an immediate effect on the potential voters that can be capitalised on in terms of votes. Therefore, in analysing social policies, I suggest a three-fold categorisation in relation to the duration: 1) temporary, 2) permanent that brings immediate benefits to the citizens and 3) permanent that brings benefits to the citizens, but not immediately. If we apply this typology to both described cases, the Serbian cash transfers are again clearly temporary, while the Montenegrin tax reform would be permanent that brings immediate benefits to the citizens. Why is it important to make a clear distinction between permanent benefits that bring immediate impact to the citizens' standard of life and those that only show results in a long term? Well, simply because those with immediate impact have a higher probability of being used as a form of clientelistic relation for affecting voters' preferences. And those with no immediate impact, although not proof of a lack of clientelistic intentions, do have higher chances of being closer to

the programmatic kind of policies. As those policies do not bring immediate benefits to the citizens, they have a lower potential for being used as part of the vote-buying strategy, and therefore, could be an indicator of more serious, impact-oriented social policies aiming towards long-term sustainability.

In 2014 Italy introduced a transfer scheme that can be seen as similar to the Montenegrin programme, where employed persons were given approximately 80 dollars on top of their salary, through a series of tax incentives. Silvia Vannutelli implemented research which led to the conclusion that the program yielded significant electoral returns to the incumbent: a 1 standard deviation increase in the share of recipients (around 5% of the electorate) leads to a 3 percentage points' increase in the incumbent party's vote share, from a pre-treatment mean of 28 %. (Vannutelli, 2019, 25). Even though the program implemented in Italy was pragmatic and not clientelistic in regard to the eligibility rules, it was proven that it had significant impact on voters' behaviour. Vannutelli even found that the local mayors who were related to the incumbent party had actual electoral benefits from the introduced policies. And although there is no evidence to conclude that influencing voters was the primary goal of the programme in Montenegro it is highly likely that it will. It is important to mention that many international institutions such as IMF warned the Government about the riskiness of this programme and called for gradual and steady reforms where state would first try to generate the income and then to use it to subsidize for the employers' part of the health insurance, but the Government refused. Was the Government too eager to provide the Montenegrin citizens the long waited better standard of living or was it trying to generate large support just before the establishment of the new political party and its election participation, it cannot be said, but it is highly probable that the salary increase of 100% would incentivise a number of people to give their vote to the new party once it is established.

Conclusion

This paper presented critical assessment of some of the social policy measures implemented in Serbia and Montenegro in the recent period, in an effort to draw the attention to the social policies and welfare interventions being used as part of the clientelistic practices aiming to generate electoral support. Although the paper is based on the two countries, the conclusions can be applied to similar cases in other countries. The paper argues that there are at least two reasons that would affect social interventions being used as part of the vote-buying strategy more often. First one is existence of communist past as the long period of communist rule developed a set of norms and minimum expectations from the state in regard to social protection which are simply higher than in the other countries without that communist past. So, some measures of social protection which can be seen as over-regulation in other countries, will be seen as minimum requirements in the post-communist countries. Second reason is the absence of the strong ideological division among parties and the voters. Lack of consistent ideological behaviour by parties allows them to reach out for measures and actions that could be ideologically claimed by both right and the left side, without being politically

inconsistent. Equally, with voters not being clearly ideologically opinionated, parties can adjust their manoeuvres to the short-term, opportunistic and political goals instead of making sure that they are in line with the wider ideological principles.

Also, paper suggest that in today's world where policy choices are often driven by political pragmatism rather than the desire for the welfare of the people, it is wrong to attach any emphatic elements to the drivers on the social policy in the attempt of defining them. Rather, they should be defined based on the scope and the areas of intervention, as it is clear that they are often driven by narrow political interests.

All of these issues, as well as the socio-economic indicators show that there should be more attention focused on the development of the social policies in the Western Balkan countries and that has not been the case so far. Social policies have not been very high on the list of priorities of the European Union in the context of the accession negotiations, and even though, there are initiatives towards higher social cohesion and economic empowerment, stronger pressures are lacking. Social policies have been more focused on by institutions and organisations such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund, but that was part of the more technical approach focused on macroeconomic, tax and fiscal policies. The presence and the influence of the European Union in the process of developing social policies could and should relate these issues with the topics of human rights, human capital development, fight against corruption and clientelism as well as the overall development of the more equal and just society, which all are priorities of the European Union. With or without the stronger pressure from outside, countries will need to find a way to start long-term and sustainable social policy planning and stop manipulating social interventions in order to generate votes, or the true welfare state will not be able to emerge.

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