

SÜDOSTEUROPA-JAHRBUCH

Herausgegeben
Im Namen der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft
von Gernot Erler

BAND 43


PETER LANG

Klientelismus in Südosteuropa

54. Internationale Hochschulwoche
der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft in Tutzing
5.-9. Oktober 2015

Herausgegeben von Klaus Roth
und Ioannis Zelepos


PETER LANG
BERLIN, 2018

Three Facets of Political Clientelism: The Case of the Western Balkans

Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos, Athens

Introduction

The persistence of political clientelism or patronage in the Western Balkans is undisputable. Clientelism has been practised since the earlier stages of transition to democracy from state socialism and continues to be practised unabated today in Albania¹, Serbia² and FYR Macedonia³, three West Balkan countries on which this article will focus. For instance, despite repeated civil service reforms in Albania and FYR Macedonia and although over time the former country made more progress than the latter after 2001, political clientelism, in the form of politicization of civil service, is still rampant.⁴ The same can be said about Serbia, which, in comparative terms, had a better skilled civil service, bequeathed from the federal administration of the one-party state that was Yugoslavia until its dissolution.⁵ However, in Serbia under Milošević the legacy of party patronage in an one-party-state was reproduced, if not fortified. After the fall of Milošević democratization went hand-in-hand with the comings and goings of public employees, a pattern influenced by government instability in the first half of the 2000s and the patronage practices of the Tadić and Vučić governments that have followed since. The main question of this article is why clientelism (or patronage) persists in these countries, despite the fact that everyone recognizes that clientelism is a major impediment to further democratization and economic development.

¹ Nisida GJOKSI: Leviathan on Paper and Party Patronage in Practice: Contested Civil Service Reforms in Albania and Macedonia 2000–2010. Paper presented at the Political Studies Association Conference, Sheffield 2015, <https://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/conference/papers/2015/PSA2015-Ngjoksi-Leviathan%20in%20paper%20patronage%20in%20practice.pdf>, last accessed on 13.2.2015; and Anjeza XHAFERAJ: Appointed Elites in Political Parties – The Case of Albania. In: *American Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 2, 3 (2013), 307–318, <http://www.mcsr.org/journal/index.php/ajis/article/viewFile/1420/1444>, last accessed on 12.2.2016.

² Andrew KONITZER: The Forensics of Patronage: Parties and Public Sector Employment in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, IREX scholar research brief, September 13, 2013, <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/2012-2013%20STG%20Scholar%20Research%20Brief%20Template-%20FINAL.pdf>, last accessed 11.2.2016.

³ Harald SCHENKER: Patronage Politics Push Macedonia to a Precipice, *Balkan Insight*, 28 December 2012, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/patronage-politics-push-macedonia-to-a-precipice>, last accessed on 13.2.2016.

⁴ Nisida GJOKSI: Leviathan on paper and party patronage in practice, 10–15.

⁵ Dimitri A. SOTIROPOULOS: From an Omnipresent and Strong to a Big and Weak State: Democratization and State Reform in Southeast Europe. In: *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 2, 1 (2002): 63–74.

Moreover, all West Balkan countries have been subjected to different degrees of pressure from the European Union and have been offered assistance and stimuli to seal their institutions off from political interference by successive governments and major political parties. The article's main argument is that in the Western Balkans clientelism reigns supreme because it is a multifold mode of political domination of alternating governing elites over the state and society.

Clientelism or patronage (used interchangeably in the rest of this article) does not seem to decline with the passage of time and the advancement of democratization in the Western Balkans. Democratization has not been all that successful, but it has certainly advanced. Freedom House (2015), in its latest record of how democracies perform, asserts that among the West Balkan countries only Slovenia is a consolidated democracy. Croatia and Serbia are classified as semi-consolidated regimes, as are Bulgaria and Romania. Bosnia-Herzegovina and FYR Macedonia as well as Albania are "transitional government or hybrid regimes", whereas Kosovo is a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime.⁶

Yet, contrary to expectations of modernization theorists, in this region and other patronage-ridden regions of the world, democratization and the integration of national economies in the world market is not accompanied by a decline of patronage relations. This may be the result of the functions which patronage fulfills.

Our argument in this article will be that clientelism is not so much a mode of political incorporation or integration into the political system, but it is a mode of political domination over the masses, most appropriate to analyse how it functions in the post-communist Western Balkans. In what follows, we will first discuss clientelism as a form of political incorporation and then as a form of political domination. We will contrast bureaucratic clientelism to traditional patterns of clientelism. Then we will expand on how clientelism helps political patrons to exercise domination over the state and society. We will distinguish three facets or levels of clientelism, namely clientelism "at the top", "in the middle" and "from below", discussing in turn each of the three levels with reference to empirical data from three West Balkan democracies, Albania, FYR Macedonia and Serbia. And we will conclude summarizing our main point, which is that at least in contemporary Western Balkans, clientelism is not so much a mode of political incorporation of the masses into the political system as a three-fold mode of political domination over state and society.

To analyze these themes in this chapter, we use primary sources, such as personal interviews conducted in Belgrade and Skopje in 2015, national and European Union sources as well as selected secondary bibliography.

⁶ FREEDOM HOUSE: "Nations in Transit", 2015, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/nations-transit-2015#.VrHK8tKLtcc>, last accessed on 31. 1. 2016.

Political clientelism as a mode of political incorporation or participation

Clientelism has been interpreted in various ways, among which the linkage or "patron-client exchange" approach is a common one.⁷ This approach focuses on the links which political clientelism, in particular, creates, namely on the fact that clientelism essentially functions as a mode of political participation through which citizens become integrated in the political system.

Typically, in this approach the clients are individual voters or whole families who side with particular candidates before elections or form a long-term relationship of political exchange with them. Politicians running for office and even more so politicians who already hold office become their patrons and benefit from this patron-client exchange probably more than clients do. This exchange involves voting for a candidate instead of another one and receiving preferential treatment by public services which the patron politician can influence. Examples of preferential treatment include obtaining quicker or better treatment by public administrative and welfare services, through the intermediation of one's own patron, after he or she wins a seat at the local, regional or national parliament or becomes a government official.

This is a mode of political participation because instead of turning to any available local or professional association or labour union or other "horizontal" association, in which they are entitled to be members because of their place of residence or occupational status, voters engage with politics through "vertical", i. e., hierarchical, linkages which they establish with individual patrons. These are politicians, party cadres and government officials who promise to look after their clients' personal or family interests. It is a mode of political participation also because political clients build patronage-based political identities. Clients understand politics through the exchange relationship they forge with a politician or a political party. If the politician or the party fails to be elected or fails them, with regard to his or her role as a political patron, then there are chances that citizens, accustomed to experience politics through their integration into networks of patronage, will shift their allegiance to another patron.

Seen "from below", i. e., from the standpoint of individual voters, partaking in a network of patronage is a strategy of survival, in the case of political clients of low social class origin; a strategy of upward social mobility, in the case of clients belonging to the educated lower-middle and middle classes; or a strategy of prosperity in the case of businessmen who aim to increase their business turnover or their share of a specific market sector through winning direct awards of pub-

⁷ HERBERT KITCHELT, STEVEN I. WILKINSON: Citizen-Politician Linkages. An Introduction. In: HERBERT KITCHELT, STEVEN I. WILKINSON (eds.), *Patrons, Clients and Policies*. Cambridge 2007, 1-49.

lic contracts, public tenders and obtaining loans from state-owned, i. e., government-controlled banks.

In that sense, political clientelism as a concept is extended here to include government-business relations where the former is a patron but also a beneficiary of business activity. It is expected that a company which has thrived on the favourable treatment by a politician or a political party will return the favour by financing the latter's political campaign.

Political clientelism as a mode of political domination

Seen "from above", i. e., from the level of government – business relations and more importantly from the standpoint of a political party's drive to ascent to and remain in government, political clientelism is not so much a mode of political incorporation as a means of political domination. In fact, in societies of scarce economic resources and weak institutionalization of parties and other democratic institutions, political clientelism consists of a repertoire of political initiatives which contribute to a governing party's or in a narrower sense a governing elite's prolonged stay in power.

As it is well known, political domination, according to Max Weber, means "the probability that certain specific commands will be obeyed by a given group of persons".⁸ This probability is associated with a minimum of voluntary compliance of obedience rather than the imposition of sheer force. In order to analyze how political domination is exercised in variable ways, Weber distinguished different forms of legitimate domination. This is different from the concept of mode of political domination, employed in this article, because such a mode requires a more concrete analysis of how particular political regimes and governments use or abuse power.

Thus, as Nicos Mouzelis claims, the West's parliamentary mode of domination differs from the mode of political domination found in the semi-periphery of capitalism (e. g., in Latin America, Southeast Europe).⁹ In the former the subjects of political domination, citizens, associations and all types of collective actors, may periodically exercise some control over those who rule, through the use of individual and collective rights and with the help of balance of powers, as the power of the judiciary or the legislature may countervail that of the government. By contrast, in the latter type of political domination, in historical periods of rule

⁸ Max WEBER: *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York 1968, 212.

⁹ Nicos P. MOUZELIS: *Politics in the Semi-Periphery: Early Parliamentarism and Late Industrialization in the Balkans and Latin America*. London 1986.

diverging from the liberal democratic model, such control from below is almost possible.

In this article, political domination is understood as a repertoire of tools available to ruling elites. Some of the tools may be lawful, such as using the pro-government parliamentary majority to legislate new policies, while other tools may be unlawful, such as using the secret services to spy on the opposition.

There is obviously a range of tools which may fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. There are many modes of political domination, of which three, namely populism, corruption and clientelism, may prove useful for the study of West Balkan politics. All three are employed in variable degrees by parties in government. While the first two modes of political domination, populism and corruption, require a separate analysis and cannot be included in this article, the third one, clientelism, will be analysed in the sections which follow.

In this context it is also possible to understand clientelism as a vehicle of political domination rather than political participation. As Petr Kopecky, Peter Mair and Maria Spirova argue¹⁰, patronage may be an exchange between parties and voters which links the former to the latter, but equally fulfills another function. Patronage benefits the involved political party organization because, upon the party's rise to government, it allows it to populate state institutions. Patronage thus becomes an organizational resource through creating a new mode of party-society links, now that ideological and class-based identification of voters with parties is on the decline; through recruiting party supporters to government-controlled job posts; and through constructing communication channels between the party and its political clients. In short, through exercising patronage, political parties on the one hand attempt to survive organizationally in a period of diffuse political alienation of citizens from the political system and parties. On the other hand, parties control and manage state institutions by appointing party cadres and loyal professionals to management posts and even middle-ranking posts of such institutions, for as long as they stay in government.

Clientelism's repertoire involves material benefits, familiar to analysts of clientelist systems, such as dispensing public sector jobs and welfare state benefits to one's own clients; offering promotions and transfers of civil servants supporting the government up in the civil service hierarchy or across the public sector; and granting state-owned bank loans on favourable terms and awarding public contracts without an open call for tenders to favoured businessmen.

Using clientelism as a means of political domination, a governing party or coalition of parties in government builds a solid electoral base, forms a malleable body of public sector workers and shapes a docile business elite, while it keeps

¹⁰ Petr KOPECKY, Peter MAIR, Maria SPIROVA (eds.): *Party Patronage and Party Government in European Democracies*. Oxford 2012.

the opposition at bay. The opposition's open supporters are usually discriminated against by the authorities. Non-aligned officials and technocrats are excluded from policy formulation and businessmen with no ties to the government see their chances to win public tenders or contracts dwindle.

None of the above phenomena would have been as crucial in an economy with a robust private sector as job opportunities and investment opportunities would not depend as much on the government's whims. However, in economies with strong state intervention in the market, high unemployment, uncompetitive export sector and grossly fluctuating foreign direct investment, such as the economies of Western Balkans, the rise and fall of households and private companies may depend on whether a household or a company plays along with or at least is not neglected by the aforementioned clientelist system of political domination.

Finally, political clientelism is a concept wider than politicization of state institutions, such as public administration or the judiciary. First, clientelism may be based on a person-to-person or a political party-to-person long term relation between a patron and a client, while politicization focuses on how political criteria are employed to affect human resources management in state institutions. Second, clientelism may have a collective and even organized beneficiary, such as all members of an interest group, an occupation or a profession, whom a patronage-practising government selects out and treats more favourably than members of other interest groups, e.g., with regard to subsidies or welfare benefits.

Traditional and bureaucratic clientelism

In earlier historical periods, e.g., in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, when parliamentary democracy evolved around loose circles of politicians competing for power, supported by local party bosses, the individual bond between patron and individual voter was the cornerstone of political clientelism. After the emergence of mass parties, the bond was transformed. In the age of party democracy and specifically during a process such as democratization, which in South East Europe seems a never-ending process, political parties hold a prominent role. The earlier person-to-person relationship between patron and client has been transformed into a systematic person-to-organization relationship. The voter turns not to an individual candidate, to serve as his or her patron, but the local bureaucracy of the party to which he or she is attached.

This is the phenomenon of bureaucratic clientelism which has not led to the total eclipse of traditional, individual clientelism, but is a better analytical tool to investigate the relations between politics and society in patronage-ridden political regimes. Bureaucratic clientelism has been first observed and analysed in

multi-party systems such as in contemporary Latin American democracies and in post-authoritarian Greece.¹¹

Bureaucratic clientelism is a concept which implies that political elites and the masses are still linked together, only now the vehicle upon which the voter rides into the political system is not a personal relation to an individual patron anymore. The vehicle now is the bureaucratic structure of a political party, with its organizational hierarchy, top management, national organs and regional and local party organizations.

However, among its other aspects, a bureaucracy is also a form of political domination, with those at the top bureaucratic echelons requiring the submission of the rest who populate the lower echelons and the bureaucratic organization as a whole dominating a certain territory or part of a population.

Nowhere has this domination function of bureaucracy been more visible than in state socialist regimes. Bureaucratic clientelism may have been a concept useful to analyse multi-party democracies, as such as those mentioned above, but it can actually be applied to one-party states, namely the state socialist regimes of South East Europe, if not the rest of Eastern Europe, before 1989. Indeed, as it is well known, before the transition from communism, a very hierarchical and thus bureaucratic system of patronage existed in the one party states of South East Europe. In each of the South East European countries, e.g. in Yugoslavia or in Albania, the ruling party, such as the League of Yugoslav Communists or the Party of Labour of Albania, catered to the needs of its members.

Moreover, patronage networks linked not only the party as a whole with its members, but permeated relations between higher party officials and the party's rank-and-file. Thus, ministerial, ambassadorial and higher-ranking party and administrative posts in state institutions (known with the collective term "nomenklatura"), were filled by candidates backed by members of the Politburo of the ruling parties, army generals and other top officials. These patrons, then, created their own patronage networks and protected their clients by appointing them or transferring them to posts of their choice. In exchange, a patron could count on the loyalty of such client, which was useful in the power struggles at the top echelons of the party and the state.¹²

After 1989–1991 clientelism survived in South East Europe as former ruling parties were revamped and changed their names, but retained their regional and local party organizations. Relying on such organizational bases, revamped communist parties were able to win the first round of parliamentary elections. They

¹¹ Christos LYRINTZIS: Political Parties in Post-Junta Greece: A Case of Bureaucratic Clientelism? In: *West European Politics*, Vol. 7.2 (1984), 99–118.

¹² Plamen K. GEORGIEV: *Corruptive Patterns of Patronage in South East Europe*. Wiesbaden 2008, 69–70.

preserved their patronage networks and ruled until they were defeated in elections.

One can expand the above argument and adapt it to the political environment of the Western Balkans in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Upon forming a single-party government or participating in a coalition government, political parties in the recently consolidated or less well consolidated democracies of the Western Balkans enjoy a leeway which governing parties in longer consolidated democracy may not have.

Parties in the Western Balkans are more or less able and prone to infiltrate, not only the central public administration and public bodies supervised by ministries, but also institutions such as the judiciary or formally independent regulatory and administrative authorities, public media and business-enterprises in which the state owns a larger or smaller share of stock. Governing parties have an obvious interest in expanding into such institutions in order to implement their policies, but also in order to have multiple points of advantage over parties of the opposition.

To sum up our argument until this point, in order to understand patronage or clientelism in the post-communist Western Balkans it is probably more useful to prefer the political domination over the political linkage approach. Indeed, one may discern three facets or levels at which clientelism serves as a mode of domination.

Clientelism at the top-level and state capture by private interests

Clientelism at the top-level involves the selective distribution of spoils of large economic value to preferred business entrepreneurs. It implies the selection of a few among different businessmen willing to cooperate with the governing elite or even the invention from scratch of businessmen who act as front men representing the business interests of politicians in power. The selected or invented businessmen work with the governing elite for mutual benefit. Politicians in power, individually or in agreement with each other, offer to the chosen businessmen opportunities for profit making, such as discriminatory awards of public contracts and sale of state-owned assets. The Prime Minister or ministers responsible for specific policy sectors, such as industry, trade or agriculture, have public services, such as the services of the Ministry of Finance or the Privatization Agency, treat the chosen businessmen favourably.

Favourable treatment is accomplished through by-passing regulations which may require open public tenders or exploiting legal loopholes in the relevant processes. Controlling the judiciary and neutralizing any independent regulatory authorities, which may want to monitor the awarding of public contracts or a privatization process, is a vital pre-requisite for successfully practising clientelism at the

top. In contrast to the well-documented phenomenon of state capture by business elites, in the case of clientelism at the top the initiative lies not with well-connected and agile businessmen but with politicians in power.

In state capture, politicians may accept business proposals by entrepreneurs or co-shape such proposals with them. The phenomenon of state capture usually entails businessmen who bribe their way into looting state assets or acquire disproportionate influence in policy-making in public policy sectors where they want to invest their capital or increase their business turnover. In a different vein, in the case of clientelism at the top, it is politicians in power rather than entrepreneurs who conceive and implement an alliance with businessmen whom they chose to work with.

Politicians in power do not pursue the construction of a competitive market but employ clientelism to shape a business environment which looks different from a level-playing field.¹³ This pattern is most explicit in Serbia under SNS rule. As a well-informed observer of Serbian politics has put it, "you have a full-blown kind of clientelism, linking selected businessmen to ruling politicians, which is something larger and worse than corruption".¹⁴

In Serbia clientelism at the top occurs in the agricultural, industrial and the service sector. In agriculture, the SNS government dispenses subsidies to selected large land owners instead of focussing only to the crisis-hit small farmers.¹⁵ In the industrial and service sectors, what is observed is often the reverse of state capture. Whereas in cases of state capture, private businessmen influence decision-makers and curb policy-making to their interests in the sector in which they engage in business, in Serbia it is often the case that "tycoons are created by the political regime itself. This was started by Milošević, to the point that politicians and tycoons became inseparable, but it is also reproduced today under the rule of SNS".¹⁶ Today, ruling party elites instrumentalize specific policy sectors (e.g., public works) to help the rich, which "amounts to a new redistribution of the by now scarce wealth. Along the way, members of the SNS party elite want to enrich themselves".¹⁷

In FYR Macedonia clientelism at the top involves forging ties with foreign, such as American or Greek businesses and offering them favourable terms to invest in the country, securing minimal labour costs and a low flat tax rates. It also involves penetrating the private media sector and marginalise or close down pri-

¹³ Lenard J. COHEN, John R. LAMPE: *Embracing Democracy in the Western Balkans. From Post-Conflict Struggles Toward European Integration*. Baltimore 2011, 405, 468.

¹⁴ Personal anonymous interview with foreign journalist, Belgrade, 12. 11. 2015.

¹⁵ Personal anonymous interview with Serbian journalist, Belgrade, 25. 4. 2015.

¹⁶ Personal anonymous interview with director of major NGO, Belgrade, 27 April 2015.

¹⁷ Personal anonymous interview with political analyst and author, Belgrade, 27 April 2015.

vate channels which refuse to serve the interests of the governing party. A typical example is the private television channel A1 which was raided by the financial police in November 2010.¹⁸

Clientelism at the middle-level

Clientelism at the middle level involves the appointment of unqualified governing party cadres at management positions and posts of advisors in ministries, public bodies and state-owned enterprises and the hand-picking and promotion of tenured civil servants whose basic qualification is that they are supporters of the governing party to the top echelons of the civil service hierarchy. This is a typical trend in the Western Balkans.¹⁹

The reasons for the persistence of the trend, although differing by country, are several. First, there is a long-term of distrust of citizens and political parties towards the state and suspicion among warring ethnic groups. Second, there is a historical legacy of political control of the bureaucracy, bequeathed from the period of state socialism. And third there is a conceptualization of the civil service as a depository of low-skill, redundant labour rather than as a guardian of legality, which in modern democracies should bound all administrative acts, and a resource for better decision-making in various policy sectors.

Economic modernization and inclusion in today's competitive global economy require the functioning of a reliable and competent state which steers economy and society out of the murky waters of underdevelopment. Even though one would make the hypothesis that on the road to integration into the European Union, West Balkan countries would gradually shed patterns of clientelism at the middle, in practice such phenomena persist over time in a variety of ways.

Lenard J. Cohen and John R. Lampe summarize the situation, writing about "persistent politicization" in multiple levels of the public administration: "The 'spoils system' mentality throughout the Western Balkans has generally meant that each victorious incoming political party, or more typically a coalition of parties, not only changes the head of each ministry but also treats its entire administrative staff as its patrimony and as an opportunity for rewarding its supporters with patronage appointments."²⁰ It is to the recruitment of party supporters to the

¹⁸ Sinisa Jakov MARUŠIĆ: Police Drama at Macedonian A1 TC. In: *Balkan Insight*, 25 November 2010, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/police-drama-at-macedonian-a1-tv>, last accessed on 13.2.2016.

¹⁹ Aleksandra RABRENOVIĆ, Tony VEREJEN: *Politicians and Top Civil Servants in Former Yugoslav States: Back to Discarded Traditions?*, Sept. 2005, <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsec/PoliticiansCSYugoslav.doc>, last accessed on 11.2.2016.

²⁰ COHEN, LAMPE: *Embracing Democracy in the Western Balkans*, 132.

lower echelons of the public administration and state owned enterprises that we now turn.

Clientelism at the bottom-level

Clientelism at the bottom level refers to the recruitment to the public sector of supporters of a governing party or a politician who is influential at the national, regional or local level. This type of clientelism means the distribution of spoils to favoured individuals or to selected occupational categories of the population or interest groups which constitute the favoured electoral pool of a party's voters.

On an individual basis, clientelism at the bottom involves the recruitment of voters of the governing party to public sector jobs, either in tenure-track posts or more frequently on temporary, fixed-term or project-based, job contracts. This type of clientelism also involves exerting influence on public services, such as public hospitals, welfare services, state-owned banks and the personnel departments of central and local public administration, so that the individual who enjoys the support of a minister or a cell of a governing party benefits from better or quicker or more generous treatment. For example, the political client may be accepted earlier to a hospital, receive a little known state university stipend or, if he or she is already a public employee, be transferred to a more relaxed public sector job.

On a collective basis, clientelism at the bottom means that a group of people who share the same status, e.g., war veterans or farmers from a favoured region of the country, receive resources, such as pensions or allowances, not distributed to other groups of similar status or in times of economic adversity are shielded from public spending cuts.

Family networks

In the Western Balkans, amidst periodic wars, ethnic conflict and economic failure the wider family is one of the few, if not the only, institution staying intact. Indeed, clientelism at the bottom is embedded in family networks. For example, Cohen and Lampe cite the news item that in 2005 in the then state-owned Prishtina airport employees used to call each other not by name or by their job title (e.g., "chief"), but by their kin role ("uncle", "nephew", "cousin").²¹

When it comes to obtaining a public sector job, it is difficult to disentangle the "purchasing power" of family connections from party loyalty. In an April 2015

²¹ COHEN, LAMPE: *Embracing Democracy in the Western Balkans*, 146.

opinion polls, 81 per cent of Kosovar respondents claimed that "family connections, bribe, party alliance and other non-merit factors" matter.²²

Party networks

In a longer term perspective, affiliation with a party in government and particularly a party governing for a long time may eventually count more for job seekers than family connections. The primary example is Montenegro where one party, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), under Milo Djukanović, has been ruling since 1991. In Montenegro about one third of total employment posts are public sector posts and they tend to be filled by supporters of DPS.²³ Since the end of the war in Bosnia, the largest political party in Republika Srpska, which earlier was the Serb Democratic Party and later the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), headed by Milorad Dodik, has captured most posts in the largest employer which is the state.²⁴

Similar phenomena occur, not only in the Macedonian and Serbian party systems, each of which is dominated by a very powerful party (VMRO-DPMNE in the first case and SNS in the second), but also in polarized party systems, such as the Albanian party system. In detail, in Albania, the recurring almost life-and-death struggles between the Democratic Party of Albania (DPA) and the Socialist Party (SP), mean that before or after each election and government turnover, there is a high turnover in public employment too. It is reported that between July 2005 and May 2006 about 30 to 35 per cent of civil servants were changed on political grounds, while just before the national elections of 2009, the DPA government hired an additional 1 700 temporary public employees.²⁵ Based on official data, another source states that within three months after its arrival to power in 2005, the DPA managed to fire a total of 14 453 public employees from a variety of state agencies, all the way from staff of the Council of Ministers down to tax, customs and police authorities, and to replace them with DPA supporters.²⁶ Thus, tradition-

ally, the two parties alternating in government, tend to fill public sector posts with their supporters in a massive scale after they assume government.²⁷

In FYR Macedonia the same holds for the parties in the Albanian minority, with which Albanian voters identify not on a programmatic but on a patron-client basis.²⁸ To a certain extent, this holds for the members of the Macedonian majority too, where, however, the nationalist/populist tendencies of VMRO-DPMNE, the party which has been in power since 2006, have added an ideological dimension to the conflict between government and opposition, beyond the patron-client dimension. The VMRO-DPMNE government has practised clientelism at the bottom in the sense that it has privileged the interests of selected social groups. It has distributed subsidies to farmers as well as cash benefits and non-monetary benefits, such as bus passes and passes to spas and recreation centres, to pensioners.²⁹ Above all, it has opened the gates of public sector jobs to the governing party voters.³⁰

Indeed, as official data of the Macedonian State Statistical Office shows, there was a sharp increase in the size of public employment between 2008, the year VMRO-DPMNE obtained the absolute majority of parliamentary seats, and 2014, a year in which the same party won national elections again. In 2008 among those employed in sectors other than the private sector, 24.2 per cent were employed in the public administration, defense and compulsory social security.³¹ Six years later, in 2014, their share was 30.4 per cent.³²

Among all those employed in the public sector, most were not civil servants but temporary public employees hired on the basis of their patronage links with the governing coalition of parties (VMRO-DPMNE and the Albanian party DUI). Towards the end of 2011 out of the 120 000 public employees, only one sixth had

²² UNDP Kosovo, Public Pulse Report – IX. Prishtina April 2015, 6.

²³ Marko SOSIĆ, Jovana MAROVIĆ: European Integration and Party Politics in Montenegro. In: Corina STRATULAT (ed.), EU Integration and Party Politics in the Balkans. European Policy Center Issue Paper no. 77, September 2014, 32.

²⁴ Bodo WEBER: The Limits of EU's Transformative Power in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Implications for Party Politics. In: Corina STRATULAT (ed.), EU Integration and Party Politics in the Balkans. European Policy Center Issue Paper no. 77, September 2014, 102.

²⁵ COHEN, LAMPE (eds.): Embracing Democracy in the Western Balkans, 134.

²⁶ Anjeza XHAFERAJ: Appointed Elites in Political Parties – The Case of Albania, 309.

²⁷ Arolda ELBASANAJ: Enlargement Instruments and Domestic Constraints: Public Administration Reform in Post-Communist Albania. In: Südosteuropa 57, 1 (2009), 70–90.

²⁸ COHEN, LAMPE: Embracing Democracy in the Western Balkans, 265.

²⁹ INDEPENDENT, Projects for Free Spa, Tourist Services for Macedonian Pensioners to Continue Realization, London, 27 August 2015, <http://www.independent.mk/articles/21457/Projects+for+Free+Spa,+Tourist+Services+for+Macedonian+Pensioners+to+Continue+Realization#sthash.UjJ0d6im.dpuf>, last accessed on 30. 1. 2016.

³⁰ Personal anonymous interview with pro-government political researcher and additional anonymous interview with MP, former supporter of the government's parliamentary majority, Skopje, 16 November 2016.

³¹ State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia: Labour Force Survey 2008, Skopje 2008, 30.

³² State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia: Labour Force Survey 2014, Skopje 2014, 56.

been hired and were regulated by Civil Service and Public Servants' legislation. Thus the majority were hired on various job contracts.³³

These patronage phenomena, however, have not suddenly appeared with the ascent of VMRO-DPMNE to government in 2006. The Social Democratic Union (SDSM) and Albanian parties, too, have been involved in sustaining patronage for a long term and certainly since the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001) which provided for the participation of the Albanian minority in national and local government structures. One observer in fact claims that there are not really any real political parties in FYR Macedonia. Each party is just a constitutive part of a large patronage group, and three or four of such groups compete for power.³⁴

In Serbia, the transition from the semi-authoritarian regime of Milošević to the democratic regime inaugurated by Djindjić and Kostunica in 2000 did not mean the abandonment of clientelism at the bottom. By contrast, the previously employed criterion of recruitment to the public sector, which was loyalty to the single governing party, the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), was now supplanted by the criterion of loyalty to the parties forming successive, unstable coalition governments. Party supporters were channeled to the ministries each government coalition partner was assigned to manage. If a minister and a deputy minister, appointed at the same ministry, came from different parties, then different and opposing teams of newly hired public employees were formed within that ministry.

The consequence for the government of Serbia was not a set of coordinated ministries co-working within a coalition government, but "a confederation of fiefdoms".³⁵ The result of all these arrangements was that in 2014 Serbia was reported to have a civil service force of 558 000 (including defense but excluding local public administration and the personnel of state-owned enterprises). Tony Verheijen notes that this is almost double the number of civil servants in other European countries with a population of similar size, such as Bulgaria, Belgium or the Czech Republic.³⁶

Again, as in the cases of Albania and FYR Macedonia, one should associate clientelism in Serbia with one political party, i. e., the SNS which has been the leading party in elections since 2012. Patronage is long-term and has been practised by successive parties in government. In fact, when more than one parties

³³ OECD: "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Assessment Report", Sigma country assessment reports 2013/10, April 2013, Paris, 3–4, <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/5jz2rqkxq22.pdf?expires=1454316917&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=9D768119C42C61ED650624B4B844A18E>, last accessed on 30.1.2016.

³⁴ SCHENKER: Patronage Politics Push Macedonia to a Precipice ...

³⁵ COHEN, LAMPE (eds.): Embracing Democracy in the Western Balkans, 133.

³⁶ TONY VERHEIJEN: "Opinion: Serbia – State Employees Galore, but where is the Private Sector?", The World Bank, 2 April 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2014/04/02/serbia-state-employees-galore-but-where-is-private-sector>, last accessed on 11.2.2015.

participated in coalition government, a quite frequent phenomenon in post-Milošević Serbia, the number of available public sector jobs at various levels would grow to accommodate for the pressures by partners of coalition government to obtain their share of the pie.³⁷

Notably in Serbia, in a twist of collective clientelism, pension funds instructed by SNS government officials decide on increases on pensions received by pensioners, thus "buying" their support in a large scale.³⁸ This type of distribution of income to low-income groups is combined with the unnecessary recruitment of new employees to the public sector, particularly in municipalities controlled by the governing party SNS.³⁹

Conclusions

In this article, our main argument has been that in order to understand if and how the democracies of Western Balkans, such as Albania, FYR Macedonia and Serbia, have proven to be problematic, it is useful to take a deeper view at how state-society relations evolve around patronage or clientelist arrangements. These relations are political and thus reflect asymmetries of power, namely political domination of the political patrons, such as the elites of major political parties, over their clients. Thus, we have suggested that clientelism is not so much a mode of political incorporation of the masses into the political system as a mode of political domination over the masses. In the countries under study, clientelism is a mode of political domination, because it helps political patrons arrive in power and prolong their stay in power.

An additional argument of this article is that clientelism is a three-fold mode of political domination which political elites use after they ascend to power. First we have clientelism at the top, meaning the relations forged between the head of government and government ministers, on the one hand, and representatives of the business world, on the other. Then there is clientelism at the middle, meaning the recruitment of political party loyalists to the higher echelons of ministries, public bodies, and state-owned enterprises. And finally there is the most common form of clientelism, namely clientelism at the bottom. This entails the recruitment of party voters to entry-level positions of the public sector, as well as the preferential treatment of such voters when it comes to their horizontal mobility, i. e., transfers across public services, and vertical mobility, i. e., their rise up the career ladder.

³⁷ KONITZER: The Forensics of Patronage.

³⁸ Personal anonymous interview with Serbian journalist, critical of the government, Belgrade, 30 April 2015.

³⁹ Personal anonymous interview with political activist, participant in the anti-Milošević movement of the 1990s, Belgrade, 9 November 2015.

In all these cases, clientelism implies not a fair patron-client exchange, where the former offers protections and the latter political support, but rather unequal relations, where the patron has the power to elevate or downgrade a client. This is true even if the client is not an unemployed person seeking work in the public sector but a businessman seeking investment opportunities. Indeed, the first of the three types of clientelism, i. e., clientelism at the top, has to do with the government's distribution of state assets, bank loans and government-controlled investment opportunities to selected business circles.

A final point is that in cases such as contemporary Serbia and FYR Macedonia, where governing elites use clientelism in state-business relations, we observe the reverse of the phenomenon of policy capture: it is not business companies which capture state sectors, but rather state elites themselves which select business companies or create such companies anew and help such favoured companies to increase their market share and profits.