

Serbia: Interest groups in an unconsolidated pluralist democracy

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Like Serbian politics in general, informal ways of conducting political business also characterize the country's contemporary interest group system. This is largely due to decades of authoritarian rule and less than 30 years' experience with pluralist democracy. Added to this, the period following the end of socialist Yugoslavia, particularly the authoritarian rule of Slobodan Milošević and Serbia's involvement in war, undermined the development of a pluralist group system. Despite these setbacks, and in the face of continuing constraints, several elements of a modern group system have begun to emerge. This development has contributed to the advancement of Serbia's brand of majoritarian democracy.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The concept of an *interest group* is little understood in Serbia, and thus the term is not in common use. Nevertheless, group activity has been a significant aspect of Serbia's political experience in the past and remains so today. Yet, as in the past, the contemporary group system includes only a small segment of the population. So despite several advances since the years of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), several constraints on group activity continue to exist. In addition, there are legacies from the past including a major role for unofficial interests and power group using the advocacy methods they have always used—personal contacts, often involving corruption.

Given this combination of circumstances, the question posed in this article is: “to what extent are interest groups included in the public policy-making process?” Answering this question is challenging. This is because there is no existing research directly on Serbian interest groups. Plus, there is difficulty in conducting survey research in a country where policy-makers still act in a clandestine way and many are suspicious of academics seeking information on political activity, particularly on power relationships.

Nevertheless, by drawing on both secondary and one original source, we can provide a holistic study of Serbia's group system. The secondary sources include work on Serbian history and culture and some work on civil society groups and on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Of the latter is a recent study on Serbian civil society groups (Orlović, 2015, as cited in Fink-Hafner, 2015). This study also includes a chapter on the women's movement in Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia (Širočić, 2015, as cited in Fink-Hafner, 2015). The original

source for this article was a small survey as explained in section 5.5 and Box 3 of the introductory article to this volume. Those interviewed included various people involved in or who observe the political process. Those interviewed are listed at the end of this article.

The analysis begins by outlining the fundamentals of group activity in Serbia. Next is a review of the role of interest groups in Serbia's development. This is followed by consideration of the contemporary political environment of group activity. Then, three sections cover the range of groups operating in contemporary Serbia, the strategies and tactics they use, and the power dynamics of group activity. Next comes an assessment of the extent to which interest groups have aided the advancement of Serbian democracy. The conclusion revisits the chapter's theme.

2 | THE FUNDAMENTALS OF INTEREST GROUP ACTIVITY IN SERBIA

As an interest group system transitioning from authoritarianism to pluralist democracy, Serbia manifests many of the characteristics of such systems. It is, in fact, a hybrid combining many legacies of past ways they operate side by side with the development of new techniques of group activity.

To provide a foundation for the various aspects of group activity, this section outlines the basic characteristics of the country's group system. Today, six characteristics are particularly important: the persistence of informal ways, a negative attitude to interest groups, a

gradual process of institutionalization, the importance of the international community, and a bifurcated group system.

2.1 | The continued significance of informal political advocacy techniques

One significant legacy from the past is the continued use of informal ways of conducting political business and particularly political advocacy. Much informal activity is conducted by prominent individuals and power groups. Moving from a predominantly informal group system, to a formal institutionalized one, is a major challenge facing Serbia as in all transitional group systems.

2.2 | A negative attitude toward interest groups and their political role

Both the public and many politicians have a skeptical, in some instances a negative, attitude toward what in effect are interest groups. Much of this is due to a lack of knowledge of their role in a democracy, among other reasons. Negative public attitudes often stem from past and present political corruption. These attitudes are reinforced by the lack of transparency of interest groups activity.

2.3 | Gradual development of an institutionalized group system

Despite these first two characteristics, advances have been made since the demise of the SFRY, particularly since 2000, in the development of an institutionalized political advocacy system. These include the transformation of interests that existed under the SFRY, the establishment of a range of new formalized interest groups, the use of a broader range of strategies and tactics, and attempts to deal with the old ways of corruption and lack of transparency.

2.4 | The role of the international community

Since the war of the 1990s, the international community has played a dominant role in Serbia. At first, this was working to end the military conflict. Since then, it has involved a range of activities from helping the country move toward pluralist democracy to aiding economic development to promoting human rights. In these capacities, the community is an influential lobbying force, sometimes in a formal capacity, sometimes as an informal interest.

2.5 | A bifurcated interest group system

Even taking into consideration the advances in institutionalization, Serbia is an example of a bifurcated as opposed to an integrated group system (Klimovich & Thomas, 2014, pp. 184–186). A full explanation of the bifurcated–integrated transitional group theory is provided in the first article in this volume (see section 5.6–5.9). In a bifurcated group system, there is a small elite involved in the political advocacy system, usually well versed in its operation and often engaged in the old informal ways of lobbying. The mass of society is not part of the system for a variety of reasons, including lack of knowledge of political advocacy and skepticism toward the system, among other reasons, as noted above.

2.6 | From basic characteristics to specifics

The rest of this article expands on these basic characteristics of Serbia's interest group system. Again, the major question we are attempting to answer is: "to what extent are interest groups included in the public policy-making process?" Explaining the development of the Serbian polity and its group system will help in answering this question.

3 | THE ROLE OF INTEREST GROUPS IN SERBIA'S DEVELOPMENT

Serbia's political tradition is layered with a strong authoritarian element, most recently the totalitarian experience with communism. Even today, a strong authoritarian political culture exists. This is corroborated by a 2016 survey according to which 80% of citizens approve of a strong leader, that is, a strongman; and 61% of this 80% display a political culture of authoritarianism (Demostat, 2016).

Until 1878, Serbia was part of the authoritarian Ottoman empire. That year, it gained independence and was ruled as a kingdom for most of the period until the First World War. As a member of the SFRY between 1945 and 1990 it was ruled again by an authoritarian regime. After the collapse of the SFRY, together with Montenegro, Serbia became the leading force in the new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that lasted until 2002. For most of this time it operated under the authoritarian rule of Slobodan Milošević. When Montenegro voted for independence in 2006, Serbia also became an independent. It was only after the end of the Milošević era in 2000 that Serbia began a serious experience with political pluralism.

3.1 | The SFRY years—1945–1990

Even as an authoritarian communist system opposed to pluralism, different interests were accommodated within the single party and the Socialist Alliance of the Working People. As a civic association, the alliance was intended to represent the variety of interests in society. This and other party organizations operated in a top-down policy process rather than bottom-up. Despite these formal party mechanisms and party philosophy, interests did exist outside the party, and mostly operated in a less visible informal level, and usually with less influence than formal institutions.

More visible lobbying occurred through chambers of commerce, foreign trade associations, and large companies. Awarding contracts to companies, among many other decisions, was not a matter of institutional arrangements, but dependent on the company or particular interest's contacts, the power struggle among republics and provinces, and the conflicts over policy priorities in certain areas. As one of our interviewees emphasized:

In the SFRY private business was reduced to a minimum. Accordingly, the struggle was among companies such as Genex, INA, Energoinvest, Energoprojekt and other major businesses. Which one, from which republic or within one republic, got a commission or contract, and whether the highway to be built would lead from Zagreb and Belgrade to Niš or to the seaside. Once a

company had become dominant, the competition among companies declined significantly.

As reflected in this quote, during the years of the SFRY, decisions were taken under the covert influence of informal circles representing interests rather than interest groups.

3.2 | The Milošević years—1990–2000

This period is marked by two contrasting developments. On the one hand, some aspects of pluralism were at work, resulting in the emergence or reemergence of many advocacy groups. On the other, was the dominance of Slobodan Milošević. These two contrasting developments occurred against the backdrop of war and United Nations (UN) sanctions.

Independence and the transition to pluralism brought developments in interest and interest group activity. A range of civil society advocacy groups developed or reestablished their activities. These included NGOs, new trade unions, new media interests, independent journalist associations, and a judges' association, among others. After the initial political euphoria, however, a more traditional personalized form of political advocacy became the norm. With personality and personal connections dominating over institutions and legal rules and procedures, in many ways, the operation of interests and interest groups under Milošević was similar to that of the SFRY. It is a classic case of an informal, elitist-run, clandestine system laced with corruption, where power groups dominated with, in the case of Serbia, the added element of an all-controlling leader.

With his strong authoritarian tendencies and experience under communism, Milošević was the major dispenser of benefits in this highly personalized advocacy system. In effect, the collection of informal interests close to him formed their own interest group system, the most powerful one in comparison with the developing formal pluralist system. Not surprisingly, benefiting tremendously from informal political advocacy, the elite around Milošević were not supportive of the operations of a developing formal group system. In fact, they were very opposed to it given their opposition to pluralism.

3.2.1 | Religion, ethnicity, military conflicts, and international intervention

As in most Balkan countries, religion and ethnicity overlap in Serbia. Consequently, in combination, religion and ethnicity have been a major influence on Serbian politics. Serbs make up over 83% of the national population of just over seven million. As Serbs who are religious are Orthodox Christians, which is dominant at 84.6% of the population. Catholicism is the second most practiced religion at 5% of Serbians. The third is Islam with 3% of the population.¹

Although religion and ethnicity have an important influence on contemporary Serbian politics and interest group activity, it is far less significant than in the 1990s. In these years, major conflicts occurred with Islamic minorities, particularly ethnic Albanians then living in the province of Kosovo. There was, in fact, a much larger percentage of Muslims living in Serbia during the SFRY, perhaps as high as 15%.²

In the 1990s, both ethnicity and religion were instrumental in Serbia's involvement in wars with Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbia did so largely to protect its resident Serb populations in these countries. There was also a conflict in Kosovo to keep it within Serbian territory.

During these wars, atrocities were committed by all sides. But the Serbians were seen by the international community as committing major atrocities. These and other military actions led to an extensive UN presence in Serbia. In an attempt to bring the perpetrators to justice, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established (commonly known as the Hague tribunal).

The issues surrounding the tribunal became a major part of Serbian politics after the 1990s. The major issue is the so-called command responsibility: whether those commanders who knew of the atrocities and failed to stop or punish the perpetrators should be criminally prosecuted and turned over to the ICTY. As we will see, this issue has been reflected in the country's developing interest group system.

3.3 | The third period—2000 to the present

The end of Milošević's rule and the transition to an actual pluralist system, opened more opportunities for interest groups. Their activities became more institutionalized, in part due to the involvement of the European Union (EU) in Serbia's governance. Political transparency increased, public hearings became frequent, and political advocacy expanded to include NGOs, state institutions, and business associations, among other interests. Some attempts to introduce lobby regulations have been made, and overall, interest groups are seen as more legitimate than in the past.

There has been a gradual movement away from personalism to institutionalism. This has included establishing the legal status of political parties, trade unions, and some citizens' associations; though many interest groups are still informal or do not have legal status, which is detrimental to their legitimacy and operations.

The rest of this article expands on this contemporary period of interest group development, particularly the current situation. We begin by explaining the contemporary political environment that shapes current group activity.

4 | THE CONTEMPORARY INTEREST GROUP OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

We can identify eight influential circumstances. These are (a) authoritarianism versus pluralism, (b) traditional social values, (c) persistence of long-standing political mores, (d) perception of interest groups, (e) governmental and policy issues, (f) the role of the international community, (g) political party–interest group relation, and (h) the legal environment of group operations. Several of these were identified above as long-standing aspects of Serbia's political development and so are treated very briefly.

4.1 | Authoritarianism versus political pluralism

Much about Serbia today, particularly its politics and political attitudes, can be explained by the growing pains of the transfer from authoritarian rule, most recently communism, to pluralist democracy. With decades of top-down government where political participation was largely window dressing, to adjust to the relatively free, politically competitive, and more transparent system of liberal democracy, is fraught with challenges. As the status quo is a strong force in politics, the success of the transition requires adapting political values and the ways of conducting political business in a major way.

The dominant political culture of authoritarianism, the political and economic strictures of war, and the oppressive rule of Slobodan Milošević, were major impediments to the successful transition to pluralism. As we know, this had major repercussions on the development of a viable interest group system, so today it is a hybrid system with elements of both authoritarianism and pluralism. Several of the influences on the contemporary group system considered below, are a product of the difficulties of this socioeconomic and political transition.

4.2 | The hangover of traditional social values and its consequences

Serbia has always been a hierarchical society with a small powerful social, economic and political elite atop a mass deferential society. Moreover, belonging to a prominent family and having elite contacts have been a major element of political success. Although of a slightly different nature, this elite rule also operated in the years of the SFRY. This social structure and its influence continue in pluralist Serbia and very much affect interest group activity.

4.3 | Persistence of old political mores and practices, and corruption

The new oligarchs and tycoons reflect another legacy from the past. As in the past, today, the dominant way of doing political business is

by informal means among elites and often behind closed doors. It is a system based on power groups where close personal contacts exclude the mass of society.

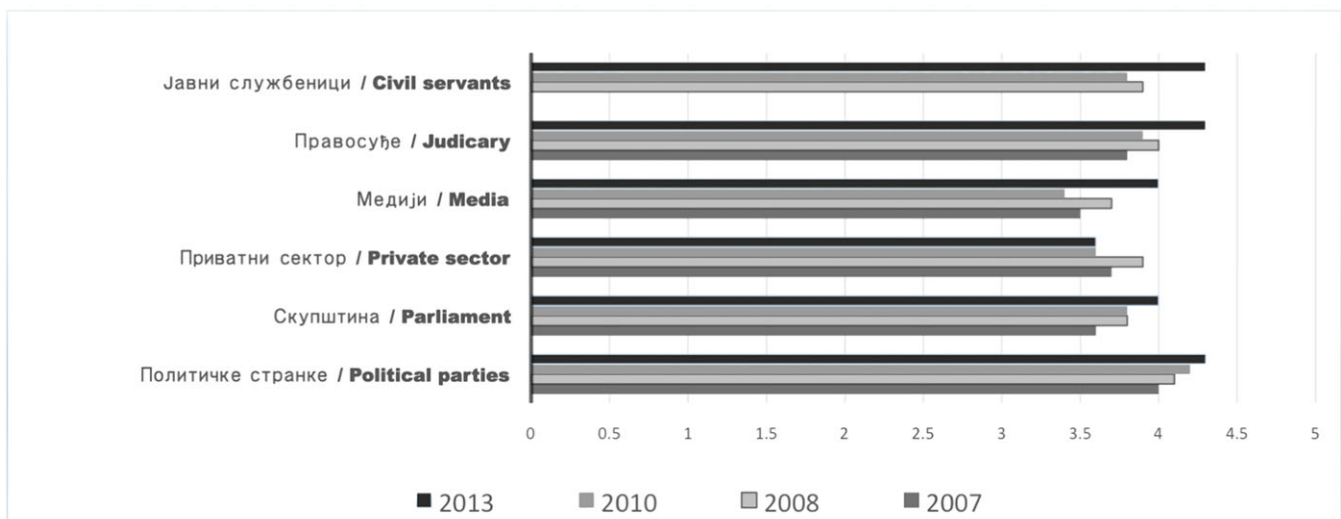
As a major way of operating politically, this informal mode of policy making shapes how interests and interest groups operate, particularly the traditional ones, such as business and trade unions. To be sure, informal contact and power groups are also features of advanced group systems, as in the United States and Western Europe. But, in these systems, institutionalized and formal group activity is the norm, conducted in an environment of political transparency. In contrast, the largely clandestine way that much of Serbian politics and group activity are conducted provides fertile ground for corruption.

4.3.1 | Corruption

According to most of those we interviewed, political corruption, bribery, and palm greasing are the main means for achieving political objectives. This is certainly reflected in comparison with other countries. According to Transparency International (2016), an anticorruption NGO based in Berlin, Serbia ranked 71st out of 168 countries on their Perception of Corruption index. Serbians' perception of corruption in national institutions is set out in Figure 1.

4.4 | The public's and public officials' perceptions of interest groups

The skeptical, often negative attitude among the public to interest group in the past remains imbedded in Serbia's political culture. Many among the public see interest groups as not a legitimate part of the political system. One reason is that interest groups were not a visible part of their experience under authoritarian regimes. Consequently, citizens are unaware of the essential role that advocacy groups play in the development and consolidation of democracy. Also, citizens are distrustful because they see the very limited negotiating power of those who represent their interests. This distrust spills over to formalized groups, such as trade unions, professional associations,



Source: Developed by the author.

FIGURE 1 Serbians' perception of corruption for selected years, 2007–2013. Source: Developed by the author

and business associations. The public's belief that interest groups are corrupt, is reinforced by a lack of transparency.

By contrast, public officials, both elected and appointed, generally have a positive attitude toward groups and their lobbyists. To politicians, interest groups are important because they may be vote getters, help pay expenses, and provide necessary knowledge and skills.

Moreover, there is an increasingly positive attitude to interest groups that has been reinforced by educational and other activities by the EU to strengthen the foundations of democracy. These efforts, together with an increasing number of Serbians realizing the value of interest groups, are beginning to change the perception of these organizations in the country's political culture

Nevertheless, those with positive attitudes to interest group activity are still a small minority. This negativism and nonparticipation by the mass of the Serbian public regarding interest groups, are partly responsible for the system being classed as bifurcated.

4.5 | Government and the power structure

According to the constitution of 1990, Serbia has what can be described as both a modified parliamentary system and a semipresidential governmental system. However, from the early days under Milošević after the demise of the SFRY, the executive branch has been the major power center. Consequently, since independence, the executive branch has been the major target of lobbying by the most organized and knowledgeable interests and interest groups.

4.6 | The legal framework of interest group activity

There is no regulation of interest groups and lobbying in Serbia. As a result, there are no registered lobbyists, although, of course, there are many who engage in this activity. A lobby law has been proposed as part of the government's efforts to fight corruption, and such a law may be enacted in the near future. There is, however, an Anti-Corruption Agency.

Our interviewees gave reasons for the lack of lobbying registration. Some commented that those who lobby have much more political leeway to achieve their goals, often including bribes and other forms of corruption. Plus, many of those who lobby can now take the money, not report the income, and not pay taxes on it. Many of those public officials lobbied are willing to accept this situation because without registration there is no indication to the public that they are under a lobbyist's influence. Even though there are no registered lobbyists, it is well known who can close a deal.

Despite the lack of specific laws, the activities of interest groups are becoming more institutionalized and transparent. As a result, there is an increasing acceptance of the legitimacy of many advocacy groups by some members of the public and many public officials. In part, this is due to the result of the strategies and tactics of some groups becoming more acceptable, as they operate in the open and use official channels as opposed to behind-the-scenes methods.

The ongoing development of legal provisions and increasing acceptance of group operations are important factors in Serbia developing from a bifurcated to an integrated group system.

4.7 | The influence of the international community and external interests

Although we can talk of the *international community* as a catch-all term, it is far from a monolithic or united political force. Its makeup and influence is wide-ranging, consisting of individual countries, such as the United States, Germany, Britain, France, Russia, and increasingly China; the UN, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the EU with its various agencies; foreign businesses; and a range of NGOs, from those promoting humanitarian causes to those concerned with the economic and physical welfare of Serbians. There are also international organizations, such as the International Chamber of Commerce and the International Labor Organization present in Serbia.

Three major ways that the various elements of the community influence Serbia's government and the country's interest group system have been on economic and financial matters, the quest for membership in the EU and NATO, and an anti-international sentiment among some Serbians.

As regards the financial and economic factor, the majority of trade is with EU countries. Other influential economic forces include the United States and China (which sees Serbia as a point for accessing the EU market), both mostly concerned about trade. Russia is concerned with trade but also has strategic interests. We return to its influence later.

Since 2000, Serbia has sought membership in the EU. This has given the EU a major influence over the actions of the government in complying with various standards, promoting openness in policy making, and involving interest groups in government decision making.

EU accession is linked, in part, to membership in NATO. Two factors differentiate the attitude of many Serbians to NATO membership from citizens of other Balkan states. One is the experience of NATO's bombing campaign in 1999, resulting in lingering negative memories among many citizens. The other is the positive attitude to Russia among many Serbians.

Although the presence of the international community can be seen in a positive light given all the benefits it has brought, some Balkan countries are a kind of protectorate of the community. This includes Serbia. It has produced a negative attitude towards the international presence among many of its citizens. Ivan Krastev (2004, p. 31) encapsulates part of the reason:

Governments are elected after a love affair with the electorate, but are married to international donors. Viewed from below, the Balkan democracies are political regimes in which voters are free to change governments, but are very much constrained in changing policies.

4.8 | Political party–interest group relations

The relationship between political parties and interest groups often defines the power structure in a democracy. Each can be the center of political influence, or share power. Although parties generally

dominate interest groups in Serbia and thus shape group activities and curb their influence, the situation is not clear-cut.

The generally low public rating of political parties and distrust in them are due to weak links with various interest groups. Part of the reason may be that parties lack a permanent policy orientation, which makes it difficult for them to align with many cause groups and other value-based advocacy organizations. To deal with this disconnect, parties have increased communication with interest groups, social movements, and the media, and also make use of public opinion polls (Bartolini & Mair, 2001, p. 336).

Nevertheless, parties wield considerable influence. They often capture (are able to control the activities of) state institutions to serve narrow interests. So interest groups needing to deal with a captured department have to go through the party concerned. For instance, although left-wing parties and trade unions often compete, they also cooperate. These parties can be a major vehicle for helping unions to get their issues on the political agenda.

5 | THE RANGE OF INTERESTS AND INTEREST GROUPS

Several individual interests and interest groups have been mentioned so far; others will be identified in considering group strategy and tactics and group influence below. So, in this section, we identify the major categories of advocacy interests and organizations.

5.1 | Informal interests

As noted, informal interests with little or no institutional structure have dominated Serbian politics and remain important in the pluralist system. Being largely below the political radar, little is known about them, as many shun publicity and any investigation into their activities. However, many informal interests are legitimate advocacy organizations; others skirt the law and are often involved in corruption.

Informal legitimate interests include many institutions and organization that are part of the international community, such as the EU, NATO, the UN, and their various agencies, though these also operate as formal interests in some circumstances. Various agencies of the national government also act as informal interests, though these also sometime operate as formal interests. Less legitimate are various power groups, such as those that benefited from smuggling and other nefarious activities during the war of the 1990s.

5.2 | Formal groups—institutional interests

Formal interest groups are of three types. One type is individual membership groups, such as trade unions. A second is organizational interest groups that are often peak associations, such as an association of business groups or environmentalist groups. The third type is institutional interests, which include individual businesses, local governments, and national government agencies, as well as international entities.

5.2.1 | Individual interest groups

Examples of individual membership groups include the Association of Journalists of Serbia. Other professional groups, such as lawyers and doctors, also often engage in politics. Then there are many NGOs, both foreign, such as Transparency International, and domestic, such as several in the area of human rights.

There are also a host of civil society groups from those for the disabled to environmentalists to pro- and anti-NATO groups. Particularly noteworthy are individual interests that developed as a result of the wars of the 1990s, such as veterans (the Association of Serbian War Veterans). Veterans' groups precipitated a major division in Serbian politics and a clash of interest groups. On one side are associations that oppose cooperation with the Hague tribunal and the extradition of suspected war criminals. These are often referred to as the anti-Hague lobby. On the other side are organizations that insist and facilitate extraditions, such as the Humanitarian Law Fund and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights.

5.2.2 | Associational interests

Trade unions are one of the few interests that existed under the SFRY and successfully made the transition to the pluralist system. After the end of socialism, the single trade union fragmented into several union associations. The major associations today are the Alliance of Independent Trade Unions of Serbia, the United Branch Trade Unions (Nezavisnost), and the Association of Free and Independent Trade Unions.

On the business side, domestic organizations include: the Union of Employers of Serbia, Club Businessmen, the Association of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, and the Serbian Chamber of Commerce. Two international business lobbies are the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham), and the International Chamber of Commerce. The largest business groups are those operating in specific industry sectors with links to people in power. Particularly powerful are the energy, environmental, and transportation sectors.

Interest groups in agriculture channel their activities through business associations, business communities, associations of farmers, and farming cooperatives. The largest agribusiness groups operate in the sugar industry and corn production. For example, the MK Group holds over 50% of the sugar market in Serbia. The largest umbrella agricultural associations are producers of milk, raspberries, wheat, and corn. The most dominant among foreign interest groups in agriculture are those interested in buying agricultural land.

5.2.3 | Institutional interests

The various segments of the international community are significant institutional interests. Besides the international and regional organizations are individual governments, particularly the United States and Russia. Organizational interests also include many agencies of government, individual Serbian businesses, universities, and think tanks.

One prominent domestic interest is the various churches. There is a special place in Serbian society and government for the Serbian Orthodox Church. Other churches involved in lobbying are the Roman Catholic Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church, and the Reformist Christian Church, among others.

6 | STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Even though the wide range of strategies and tactics used in advanced democracies are known in Serbia, not all are employed and many tend to be implemented in a less sophisticated way.

6.1 | Factors determining the use of particular strategies and tactics

Two major factors shape strategies and tactics. One is that political parties are a significant influence, particularly in relation to major economic interests. Parties are often used as channels to government, as with the political goals of trade unions, and, as such, parties dominate some tactics. The second factor is that, in combination, the role of parties and the Serbian political environment, with its limited political pluralism, makes the need to use a wide range of sophisticated strategies and tactics less necessary. The increase in the use of a wider range of strategies and tactics is primarily the result of increased competition among groups for the ear of policy makers, as is the case in advanced democracies.

Nevertheless, as many strategies and tactics are both indispensable and fundamental across all political system, Serbian interests and interest groups use them. The most sophisticated interests, such as business and major NGOs, use formal tactics, such as testifying at parliamentary hearings and submitting reports to executive departments. They also use informal tactics, such as a chance meeting in a grocery shop between a member of an interest group and a policy maker.

Whereas outsider groups are often forced to use outsider tactics, insider groups can, and often do, use both insider and outsider tactics, depending on their issues, current political circumstances, and other interest groups involved, among other circumstances. So the division used below between informal and formal strategies and tactics is not mutually exclusive; for many groups they overlap. The distinction is useful, however, for explaining how various groups and interests approach political advocacy.

6.2 | Informal tactics

At some time or another, all groups and organizations use informal tactics, including major business groups, trade unions, and NGOs. But whereas institutional groups combine both formal and informal tactics, power groups and many skirting the law, use only informal tactics, operating far from public view and sometimes using bribery. This was the case with the tycoons who became rich in the 1990s, though many of them are now working with political parties to make their activities legal.

Regarding the current and broader role of political parties, their tactics are predominantly informal. One tactic they often use is to work to get members of groups that support them appointed to key positions in government to give these groups an inside track in access and potential influence.

Another informal tactic worthy of note is use of policy networks that often aid in writing legislation. An example is the law on planning and construction. Close to two thirds of the key points were drafted

by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), AmCham, and the Chamber of Commerce's representatives of various businesses. Even though the law was drafted informally, there may be a positive outcome, as these organizations have more expertise on the subject compared with public officials.

As to strong-arm tactics, they are most often used by foreign lobbies. In their subtle form, they involved pressure by the international community on Serbia after 2000 to comply with the Hague tribunal. Today, they involve pressure from the EU to comply with its directives as a condition for admission to the Union. A more direct form of strong-arming was reaction to the government's attempt to impose a deposit on plastic containers used for nonalcoholic beverages. Coca-Cola threatened to withdraw its investments in Serbia if the law was adopted. This opposition was exerted informally, as to have done it formally and openly would have been received negatively by the public.

6.3 | Formal tactics

Lately, strategies and tactics have come to involve methods that are more acceptable. This is, in part, because many institutional groups—and some informal ones—are using more formal tactics and more formal channels, including the parliament and the executive branch, in a transparent way. All the same, personal direct contacts are not only the most used formal contact, they are essential. To illustrate use of both direct and indirect tactics, we briefly look at how some prominent interests use them.

6.3.1 | Business and agriculture

Business is one of the major, if not the major, insider interests in Serbia. It uses the broadest range of tactics, facilitated by their major resources relative to other groups; plus business is well organized.

A major tool in businesses' political arsenal is the provision of information as they are the experts in various aspects of the economy. With its resources, business can enlist the aid of various organizations in both providing information and developing strategies and tactics. This is particularly so with foreign businesses. As one interviewee explained: "foreign interest groups gathering together foreign investors always have ready-made solutions ... they have the support of law firms, think-tanks and have always been more versed in using such resources than domestic investors."

Businesses also use the media and public relations campaigns to promote their causes when they encounter problems in direct lobbying. But with their major insider status and to maintain their image with policy makers, businesses rarely engage in demonstration.

Most interest groups in agriculture do not generally lobby the parliament but target government ministries and public administration officials. However, the industry also uses indirect tactics. These include blockage the busiest roads, protests, and media appearances in order to gain public support, among others. Their dominant political issue is the price of primary agricultural products, including wheat and dairy products.

6.3.2 | Trade unions

The strategies and tactics used by trade unions have changed since the end of the SFRY. In the 1990s, the Alliance of Independent Trade Unions, the successor to the old communist union, was an ally of the ruling regime. Given this situation, the union had to do little political advocacy. This changed with the establishment of new, competing unions, such as the Independent Trade Union, which have been perceived as competitors, opponents, even as enemies rather than allies (Lazić, 2011, pp. 222–223). Another development that changed union advocacy methods is the establishment of employers' associations and the political opposition that this brought.

As a result, today unions use several types of strategies and tactics. As noted above, some unions have relationships with political parties as an avenue to policy makers. Unions also do independent lobbying. As a member of the tripartite Social–Economic Council, they have another avenue for lobbying. Occasionally unions also stage demonstrations, protests, and strikes as a political tactic (Stojiljković, 2011, p. 434).

6.3.3 | Nongovernmental organizations

The strategies and tactics used by many NGOs are often determined by their donors; or in conjunction with what is high on the agenda of values promoted by EU institutions. For example, NGOs working to protect the rights of minority groups, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, are often aided by EU support. This includes financial support, pressure on the authorities to protect LGBT individuals from physical attacks by their opponents, and the like.

6.4 | Indirect tactics—protests, demonstrations, and strikes

As we noted above, protests and demonstrations are used mostly by outsider groups. An example is taxi drivers in Belgrade who sometimes block traffic in the entire city until they resolve an issue that affects them. Protests are also sometime used by insider groups as part of a broad strategy, including lawyers.

During 2015, lawyers called a strike, blocked the courts, and achieved a compromise with the government concerning notary public fees that affect their interests. Like other aspects of trade union political advocacy, the nature of their protests has also changed. During the early years of transition, protests were a new political phenomenon and were transformed from social to nationalistic gatherings. During the period of UN sanctions, an arranged marriage with the government reduced the number of protests. Then after civic protests during 1996–1997, workers increasingly used protests, withdrawing their support for the authorities (Stojiljković, 2011, pp. 454–455).

6.5 | Lobbyists in Serbia

Although Serbia certainly has lobbyists who perform similar functions and exhibit some of the characteristics of those in advanced democracies, there are several differences.

Hiring professional lobbying firms and consultants is not usual. Most lobbying by domestic advocacy organizations is performed by group personnel. In contrast, foreign firms are more likely to seek representation outside of their organization. There are Serbian consulting

firms that represent foreign companies, which, in effect, engage in lobbying, and sometimes cross legal boundaries.

Partly because of the lack of legal status and the questionable activities of some lobbyists, in 2009 lobbyists formed a professional association, the Association of Lobbyists of Serbia. The association includes private individuals who lobby, law firms, political consulting firms, marketing and public relations agencies, business and investors' associations, and others who engage in lobbying. Partly due to the association's activities, lobbying in Serbia is close to becoming legitimate and acquiring legal status.

7 | INTEREST GROUP AND GROUP SYSTEM INFLUENCE

In this section, we do not make a distinction between formal and informal influence. This is partly because it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the two. More importantly, it is because the most important assessment is what the overall power of a group is, whether it is achieved by formal or informal means.

7.1 | Elements of the international community—in a class by themselves

Most interviewees maintain that external interest groups shape domestic political processes. Out of 13 interviewees, six maintain that the external influence is greater; one that external influence is greater in strategic issues; three that there is equal influence of internal and external factors; and three maintain that the influence of domestic groups is greater. Three parts of the international community are particularly influential: foreign businesses, foreign countries, and international and regional organizations.

7.1.1 | Foreign companies

The power of foreign companies, many of which are multinationals, is based largely on their importance to the Serbian economy, but also because they have diplomatic representation by their countries. One interviewee mentioned, "I cannot remember a single ambassador who hasn't lobbied for companies from their country, they do it with an awareness that it's normal." Another interviewee saw ambassadors as "salesmen of companies from their countries." On occasion, as we saw in the last section, some companies use strong-arm methods to promote their political goals.

Nevertheless, to promote their legitimacy and not raise the ire of Serbians, foreign businesses operate in sophisticated and cautious ways, primarily taking care to act within the boundaries of the laws of their own countries. With their major resources, they can hire lobbyists and partner with Serbian businesses. For instance, many foreign businesses are involved with the National Alliance for Local Economic Development. This is a business association whose members include representatives of companies, municipalities, and NGOs, who work to improve conditions for local economic development, and for doing business in Serbia. The influence of this and other foreign organizations means that, in effect, they create economic policy in Serbia.

7.1.2 | Foreign governments

Besides exercising influence on the part of companies, foreign ambassadors and their embassies work on behalf of the interests of their national government. Among national governments, Western countries tend to dominate. In some areas, the influence of Russia and China is also evident. Some of their goals are geostrategic, some are economic, among others.

7.1.3 | Regional and international organizations

Of particular significance in terms of day-to-day influence is the EU. Besides aid to the government and many NGOs, as indicated earlier, this influence is exerted through the requirements—conditionality—set out for Serbia to join the EU. There is some opposition to the EU's role and entering the Union, as there is to the presence and influence of other international organizations, such as NATO's Partnership for Peace program, intended to increase trust between NATO and European countries and Russia. But these opposition groups have little influence against the political behemoth of the international community.

7.2 | Political parties

As we have noted, the role of interest groups and the extent of their influences are often shaped by the power of parties. For this reason, although they lack the extensive influence of the international community, together with the community, parties are one of the two major influences in Serbia's interest group system.

One base of party influence is that they control—have captured—policy making in some executive branch departments largely because they appoint their own people to key positions in government. So any interest or interest group that wants to deal with those departments has to go through the party concerned. Other bases of party control and influence include: that much of their activities are conducted far from public view, and thus less subject to opposition; their financial resources; and that many party members are also senior staff in some interest groups.

All that said, parties do not have free rein to affect the influence of interest groups. For instance, several interviewees maintained that although parties can dominate when it comes to employment, in major decisions concerning imports and exports and economic subsidies, interest groups, particularly businesses, are stronger. Another base of political leverage that interest groups have over parties is as a major source of party funding.

7.3 | Assessing the influence of four major interests

Here we see to what extent the prominence of the four most prominent interests in Serbia—business, agriculture and agribusiness, trade union, the church, and the government—is reflected in their influence.

7.3.1 | Business, agriculture, and agribusiness

Business, and to a lesser extent agriculture and agribusiness, are the best organized and the most influential. This is in large part because the government needs them to keep the economy functioning well.

Agriculture and agribusiness are influential for several reasons. One is that it is the food sector. The share of agriculture in gross

domestic product is around 9–10%, and agriculture accounts for 20% of Serbia's foreign exchange. Wheat production is the dominant sector, making up almost 70% of Serbia's agriculture. The dairy industry and fruit and vegetable production industry have the major potential for development.

Despite its influence on the government, politicians often criticize and work to limit the power of business. This reflects the public's negative attitude to this sector, and those who have gotten rich by manipulating the economy.

One tactic that most business lobbies have in common—peak and sector associations, as well as individual businesses—is use of a defensive political strategy. The more powerful among them work to preserve monopolies and existing sectoral policies and, in general, preserve the status quo in business policy. They are particularly opposed to increased taxes and regulation. This defensive focus is another factor in their influence.

Business sector associations are among the most influential in the business community. Some have influence on the general economy, such as the energy sector, agriculture, transportation, and infrastructure; others on the political process; and still others on the individual ideologies and values of public officials.

As to the influence of national business associations, a dozen years ago, the most powerful was the Businessmen Club. Established in 2002, its members included the majority of big domestic businessmen. Its primary purpose was to preserve the capital these businessmen had earned. The association largely managed to achieve that. Having achieved its primary goal, its influence has waned. The major influential business associations today are AmCham, the Association of Employers, and the National Alliance for Local Economic Development.

Recently, general business lobbying has been increasingly channeled through the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, as its new president is close to the President of the country. Almost immediately, the influence of the new leadership was evident. In 2015, a law requiring companies to pay a membership fee to the Chamber was amended. This is a major reversal of political fortunes for the Chamber as it had been losing influence to other business associations. The current success of the Chamber is a good example of the major importance that personal contacts can have in lobbying success.

7.3.2 | Trade unions

Trade unions have high political visibility; but in contrast to business, they are not generally an influential lobby. They have a huge potential in the number of members, but unlike employers, they do not have the money. So they are an example of an interest group with high visibility not matched by political clout. There are several reasons for this.

First, this weakness is a product of a point we made early about the development of interest groups after the transition. The single union under the SFRY had some influence immediately after independence. But when competing unions were formed, union leaders worked to divide the workers rather than unite and organize them, thus undermining union influence (Lazić, 2011, p. 219).

Declining membership also worked against union political power, which, in part, was the result of the reduction in the manufacturing

sector. Since privatization, trade union influence has declined further because many private enterprises do not have unions, except where they inherited them from before privatization. Moreover, many union leaders in private enterprises are bought off and so do not represent their members with political vigor. As a result, many members have little faith in the ability of the leadership to represent them, so are less willing to engage in union political activities. And as with business, union membership on the Social-Economic Council is not a forum for influencing policy.

Trade unions are not completely without influence, however. As we saw earlier, when linked to political parties, they can exert some influence in the quid pro quo of party-group relations. The government is also willing to compromise with the unions (as is government with employers' associations) to achieve social peace. Unions also have regularly used their members in protests, and occasionally stage strikes. This usually attracts public attention and particularly media attention, which, on occasion, enables unions to exert some influence on policy makers.

7.3.3 | The Church

The Serbian Orthodox Church is influential in religious issues and traditional family values. Its widespread support among Serbians means that politicians take particular notice of its political needs. After the political changes in 2000, the Church promoted three issues: introduction of religious training in schools, restitution of Church property, and bringing back the Theological Faculty under the auspices of the University of Belgrade. All three issues have been resolved, which attests to the influence of the Church. The Church's major success came in 2006 with the enactment of the Law on Restitution of Property to Churches and Religious Communities, primarily church and monastery lands.

The importance and the role played by the Church is evident in several ways. It is one of the institutions enjoying the greatest public trust. For this reason, most politicians consult the patriarch of the Church on important state and national issues. The church is involved in a large number of events such as liturgies and family saints' days that garner huge public attention and draw in a large number of people.

7.3.4 | Government

The government is not only the major lobbying entity but also a very influential interest through its various agencies and leaders. Its power stems from its position as the major employer in Serbia, control of the budget and its distribution, including contracts and aid to interest groups; and its authority to pass laws and develop regulations, among other functions. Another basis of its influence is the lack of transparency. This not only limits the role of interest groups in formulating policy, but also undermines their ability to react to government positions and actions. A good example is the Social-Economic Council where policies are discussed but the real decisions are made by the government far from public view.

But as we have related above, the Serbian government's influence is constrained by the international community, particularly international institutions and governments. This situation is not

likely to change any time soon. In addition, the community's aid to domestic NGOs and other organizations to become more effective political advocates, may also reduce the government's influence over time.

8 | INTEREST GROUPS AND SERBIA'S MAJORITARIAN DEMOCRACY

The former SFRY is seen both as an example of success and as a failure of the consociational idea. Like other communist federations (such as the USSR and Czechoslovakia), Yugoslavia was dissolved along its national-federal seams. As a result, Serbia adopted a majoritarian form of democracy.

Part of the reason was that, unlike some other successor states of the SFRY, Serbia does not have a heterogeneous, complex society with deep religious, ethnic, linguistic, and racial divides. So unlike Bosnia, Macedonia, and to some extent Kosovo, where elements of consociational democracy have been introduced under foreign influence, this was not the case in Serbia. The choice of majoritarian democracy was entirely a domestic decision.

With the number and concentration of Albanians in Kosovo when it was part of Serbia, there were reasons to consider consociational arrangements. However, with Kosovo's self-declared independence, there was no need for a system of consociational democracy.

There is a general consensus among scholars that a vibrant competitive interest group system that, more or less, represents all segments of society is essential to the development and eventual consolidation of democracy (Thomas, 2001, Chapters 1 and 15; Hague & Harrop, 2014, p. 218). Moreover, as Przeworski (1999, p. 14) emphasizes, "...a decisive step toward democracy is transfer of power from a group of people to rules." For a successful outcome, the political goals and strategies of various individuals and factions must recognize and share a common interest in building democratic institutions.

Given these necessities, to what extent have interest groups been able to aid in the advancement of Serbian majoritarian democracy? The short answer is that, since the end of the SFRY, their contribution has been mixed. Like other aspects of Serbia's political development, the interest group-democracy relationship can be divided into two periods—the Milošević years and the period since 2000.

Not only was the authoritarian Milošević era marked by the persistence of power groups operating behind the scenes, but these were largely opposed to democracy and worked to undermine it. Milošević's semi-authoritarian personalistic state did not allow for the development of group activity common in a transitional democracy. A major goal of the regime was to undermine the building of pluralist institutions, political transparency, and the rule of law. Thus, according to Przeworski's criteria, with this elite-dominated political system, there was no common interest among Serbians necessary to advance pluralist democracy. An essential element in this pluralization process, the development of formal institutionalized interest groups, was constrained, and in most cases, their role was unclear.

With the fall of Milošević and much prodding by the international community, Serbia moved to institute a pluralist democracy in

practice. As interest groups were seen as a major part of this development, initiatives by the EU promoted such activities as funding to aid NGOs and the establishment of new interest groups across a broader range of society, government consultation of interests in policy making, and the promotion of political transparency. Due to both international and domestic efforts, there has been a major expansion in formal groups, and power groups no longer have free rein as they did under Milošević. These and other developments enabled the political system to provide the rudiments of a marketplace of competing interests essential to a pluralist democracy.

In other ways, the group system has not been able to realize its potential in advancing democracy. Some of the reasons are a result of the hybrid nature of the group system as it transitions from an informal to institutionalized system combining elements of the past and modernization. As such, it remains a bifurcated system. With minimal public participation in group activity, both the representativeness of the system and competition between interests are not nearly as extensive as needed for a comprehensive interest group system to operate and promote a consolidated democracy.

Ironically, together with its major role in promoting group activity, some actions by the international community have worked to limit the role of advocacy groups in advancing democracy. With many conditions imposed on the Serbian government, interest groups have less leeway to play a role in political advocacy, and thus to advance their broader representational role necessary for enhancing democracy. Plus, with its major resources, the various elements of the community tend to dominate the interest group system. But as we have seen, several countries, such as the United States and China, are more concerned about trade, and Russia has strategic goals. In many ways, these countries are not part of the Serbian group system and not involved in the competition of interests. As a result, they do not contribute to the pluralization of the group system and the democratization process.

What, then, needs to be done, what developments have to occur, to increase the contribution of interest groups to the consolidation of Serbian democracy? The prescriptions are similar to those needed in most transitional democracies. Of these, the most fundamental development needs to be a change in public perceptions about interest groups. Only by widespread acceptance of the role of groups and individuals joining groups by the hundreds of thousands, even while maintaining a healthy skepticism of their role, will there be a firm foundation for Serbian democracy. Public officials also need to be more receptive to group activity and the value it provides in the policy-making process. Increased transparency of group activities is another important step. This will increase public confidence in group activity and make public officials less willing to engage in untoward activities with interest groups. It will make the activities of power groups less advantageous and extensive and thus aid in increasing the legitimacy of institutionalized groups.

However, not all interests are in favor of increased regulation. Even more of an obstacle is that, as some of our interviewees maintain, some interest groups do not support the development of democracy because they “swim better in murky waters.” In murky waters, the

activities and the influence of these groups are enhanced because they are unencumbered in using time-honored strategies and tactics. Moreover, even those groups that support the introduction of a more transparent system, such as those from the EU, prefer the flexibility of not having to comply with regulations and formal reporting as they often close deals informally.

9 | CONCLUSION: A HYBRID SYSTEM OF INTERESTS AND INTEREST GROUPS

In the introduction to this article, we posed the question: To what extent are interest groups in Serbia included in the public policy-making process? In conclusion, we summarize the answer and make comments on forces that are most likely to shape the role of interest groups in the future.

The contemporary Serbian interest group system is a hybrid combining elements of authoritarianism and pluralism. It is a transitional system that can be classified as bifurcated, dominated, for the most part, by a small elite and with only minimal participation by the mass of Serbians. There is no comprehensive interest group system, as in advanced democracies, which represents most segments of society in the policy-making process. Rather, there are a small number of interests that have various degrees of access to the policy process, and even fewer that can influence it.

Probably the three most important interests with both major access and the most influence are the various EU members of the international community; power groups, particularly economic elites, many of whom are tycoons; and political parties. Other interests have some access to the policy-making process and bring varying pressures upon it. These include institutional interests such as businesses, trade unions, professional groups, and NGOs. Some civil society groups also have some direct access, particularly veterans groups; but the influence of these interests is much less than that of the three major interests.

There are also an increasing number of social movements that often engage in protests and demonstrations. These use indirect methods to gain access, and they can get the attention of policy makers. But their general lack of effective organization means they are most often unable to turn this political attention into specific policy goals.

Despite all these problems, developments in Serbian politics since 2000 suggest that an increasing number of interests will have increasing access to the system. This will gradually move the group system from one that is hybrid and bifurcated toward one that is integrated. This will aid in consolidating Serbia's majoritarian democracy.

Yet, even if these developments occur, there are four aspects of interest group activity that are unlikely to change in the future. One is that groups with major resources—money, personnel, and major access to policy makers, among others—will be the most influential on a long-term basis. The second, as a result of possessing resources, economic groups, particularly certain business and professional groups, will be the most successful. Third, the combination of the first two means that there will always be bias in the group system toward

certain interests and advocacy organizations. Evidence that bias will persist is that it exists in developed democracies (Jordan & Thomas, 2004, pp. 359–369). Fourth is the continued existence of power groups, though these will decrease in number and influence as the Serbian system becomes more integrated.

The possible development is the consequences of Serbia joining the EU when and if that happens. This will have three major consequences as experienced by Croatia and Slovenia, the Balkan countries now members of the EU. The first will be the development of two related interest group systems, one domestic and the other focusing on Brussels. Second, this dual system will increase the number of groups operating in Serbia, as more groups develop to deal with EU issues and more EU-based group lobby in Serbia. Third, the open EU political advocacy process, further pressuring the Serbian government to include more groups in policy making and make the process more transparent, will increase the professionalism of many Serbian interest groups.

ENDNOTES

¹ Statistics based on Serbian government sources at <http://webzrs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/Public/PublicationView.aspx?pKey=41%26pLevel=1%26pubType=2%26pubKey=1586> (December 2016).

² According to the last census in Kosovo in which the Albanians took part, in 1981, there were 1,303,034 members of the Islamic faith.

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Minister of Infrastructure (SPS), Government of Republic of Serbia 2008–2012; Minister of Transportation (SPS), Government of Republic of Serbia 2012–2013. Interview conducted on February 20, 2016.

Secretary General of the Government of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia SFRY 1983–1991, Secretary General of the Government of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia 1992–1993 (Prime Minister Milan Panić). Interview conducted on February 20, 2016.

Economic journalist of news agency BETA, weekly *NIN*, daily *Danas*, and an associate of the *Business Magazine*. Interview conducted on February 22, 2016.

Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government from June 2002 to August 2003 in the Government of Republic of Serbia from January 25, 2001, to March 3, 2004; Commissioner for Information of Public Importance, National Parliament of Republic of Serbia, elected to this post for the first time on December 22, 2004, and re-elected on June 29, 2007, and again on December 5, 2011 (since 2009, Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection). Interview conducted on February 22, 2016.

Member of the Council of the Commission for Competition Protection of Serbia from 2010 to 2015. Interview conducted on February 25, 2016.

Program director of Transparency Serbia. Interview conducted on February 26, 2016.

President of the National Parliament of Republic of Serbia 2007–2008; Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning (DS) in the Government of Republic of Serbia 2008–2012. Interview conducted on February 26, 2016.

Minister of National Investment Plan 2007–2008; Mayor of Belgrade 2008–2013; President of Democratic Party 2012–2014; Owner of the company Direct Media (media buying). Interview conducted on February 28, 2016.

Vice President of Trade Union "Independence" 2004–2016; Member of the Steering Board of the Agency against Corruption since 2009; the president of the Agency's Steering Board 2014–2016. Interview conducted on March 2, 2016.

Executive director of Belgrade Chamber of Commerce; Vice President of the Government of Republic of Serbia in Charge of Economy and Finance 1994–1998 (Nova demokratija). Interview conducted on March 4, 2016.

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National Bank of Yugoslavia 1982–1998; Belgrade Bank 1989–2000; Kontrol Bank 2001–2001; Vojvodanska Bank 2001–2003; Yugoslav Airlines 2003–2004, Hypo Bank 2004–2012; director of public finance. Interview conducted on March 9, 2016.

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