



## DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS ABOUT CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE WORKS OF WESTERN THINKERS

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**Abstract.** The article analyzes the essence of the concept of civil society, the study of this concept by Western thinkers. The ideas of Cicero, Aristotle, representatives of Western New Age philosophy, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hobbes, and Hegel were analyzed in the study of the concept of a prosperous society. Also, the theories of the most modern philosophers, such as Marx, Schumpeter, and Weber, were also studied.

**Key words:** civil society, society, state, person, laws, antiquity, New Age Western philosophy, democracy, property, law, equality.

**Introduction.** Nowadays, the term "civil society" is understood in a broad sense. There are many aspects and facets to understanding this institution. Philosophers, economists, political scientists, legal scholars, sociologists, and historians analyze it from various perspectives. Despite the diversity of approaches and the ambiguity of its features, a positive connotation prevails in understanding civil society. In civil society, people can freely associate with political parties, movements, or non-political groups and associations such as artists, writers, athletes, actors, as well as youth and women's organizations, and religious groups. Groups of people who unite according to similar interests are called interest groups. Individual persons and groups of people implement their own economic and social interests that the state is unable to fulfill. Protecting the individual and their rights in various fields of life is the main goal of civil society.

**Literature Review.** From its initial formation, civil society attracted significant attention from contemporaries. In the 17th and 18th centuries, thinkers such as A. Bergson, J. Locke, C. Montesquieu, J.J. Rousseau, T. Hobbes, and others provided the first definitions and unique characteristics of modern civil society. Along with the evolution of civil society, scientific knowledge about it also developed and diversified. At the end of the twentieth century, civil society entered a new stage of evolution, characterized by significant social activity in post-communist Eastern Europe and the former Soviet territories, as well as a new wave of democratization in Latin American countries. The concept of civil society was revisited, with its main features reanalyzed in the context of global changes, including the developing processes of globalization. This prompted many scholars to engage in scientific reflection, leading to the emergence of numerous works developing new modern approaches to studying civil society.

**Research methodology.** In modern local and foreign literature, the degree of study on the problem of civil society and the factors and mechanisms for its practical implementation have been extensively analyzed in political science. To address these issues, the research utilized several methods, including: the problematic-chronological method to identify the origins of the development of civil society and the emergence of specific forms and methods of this activity;



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the comparative-historical method to emphasize the increasing difficulty in defining civil society concepts; the concrete-sociological research method to reveal the manifestation of civil society concepts in the relations between individuals, society, and the state; and the logical method to determine clear relationships between existing phenomena and processes. Using these methods together in this article allowed for a more precise and in-depth examination of the existing problem.

**Analysis and results.** The idea of the unity of citizens and society emerged in ancient times. Plato is believed to be one of the first thinkers to identify civil society as an independent organization. He discussed natural social needs inherent in humans from birth, essential virtues such as wisdom, courage, an enlightened emotional state, and the concept of an ideal human society, along with an objective critique of state power and the existence of other forms of societal life outside state power[1]. The concept of "civil society" is linked to Aristotle's idea of polis (koinoia politike - civil society) and Cicero's idea of *societas civilis* and natural law ideas [2]. Being a member of the polity means being a citizen of the state, thus living and acting according to its laws without harming other citizens.

Aristotle also analyzed citizens' lives in other areas of society: economic, marital, familial, moral, scientific, religious, where state intervention in certain levels of productive forces and relations is simply not required. Hence, it is fair to note a certain degree of separation between the state and civil society in Aristotle's works [3].

In ancient Rome and Greece, it was customary not to distinguish between "society" and "state." In Athens, for example, the main organ of political power was the popular assembly of the people. Society here was subjected to state power, whether in the form of Eastern despotism or medieval monarchy. The separation of society from the state, their transformation into autonomous phenomena, occurred during the establishment of exchange relations as a mediator linking social organisms and people, as well as during the bourgeois revolutions. Having freed itself from state oppression, the society that united autonomous entities began to be called civil society. The views of philosophers and scholars on civil defense also changed during the formation of social relations.

In the second half of the 16th century and the early 17th century, J. Locke, C. Montesquieu, J.J. Rousseau, N. Machiavelli, T. Hobbes, and others explained the compatibility of certain forms of the state, based on natural law and contract principles, with civil defense. For example, J. Locke considered that "absolute monarchy... is not consistent with civil society, and so can in no way be considered a form of civil government." As the founder of liberalism, Locke was the first to prioritize the individual over the state and society, and freedom over other values. He understood freedom as non-interference, especially from the state. According to Locke, people create civil society by entering into a social contract, establishing a whole sequence of protective structures between the state and the individual. The beginning of individual freedom and the guarantee of political independence is private property [4].

In his work "On the Spirit of Laws," Montesquieu considered civil rights as a result of historical development. He believed that civil society, a society of mutual hostility among people, transforms into a state to prevent enmity. The state is unique but does not resemble civil society[5]. J.J. Rousseau viewed civil society as a society transformed into a state through a social contract. In his work "On the Social Contract," he justified the people's right to overthrow absolutism and establish a democratically elected government. In this work, Rousseau emphasized that the meaning of a political body is the combination of obedience and freedom,



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thereby proclaiming the concept of civil society [6]. N. Machiavelli considered the state the highest form of human spirit, with the meaning and happiness of life serving it. However, he believed that a sovereign, who has the possibility and right to govern his people through fear and violence, should not abuse this power or violate the property and personal rights of his citizens, nor incite hatred among them. Thus, he discussed a sphere distinct from human duties, namely signs of civil strife [7].

Another thinker, I. Kant, significantly deepened the understanding of civil society construction. His approach to interpreting civil society was dialectical, concluding that the main way to harmonize everyone's freedom with others' freedom is to form civil society. According to I. Kant, civil protection is based on the following basic principles [8]: 1) freedom of a member of society as an individual; 2) equality with others as a subject; 3) independence of a member of society as a citizen. V. Humboldt, the basis of civil society: 1) person; 2) natural right; 3) a system of social and national institutions created by individuals. Hegel made a significant contribution to developing civil defense ideas, defining it as the sphere of personal interests. In this sense, he included religion, class relations, family, education, morality, law, and legal relations arising from laws.

Hegel paid special attention to individual interests. "In civil society, everyone is an end in themselves, and others are nothing to them. However, without connections with others, they cannot fully achieve their goals." [9] He believed that the state, which represents each individual's interests, is a higher development stage than civil society. By uniting organizations, classes, and citizens, the state rises above society, performs the function of reconciling conflicting interests, and finds solutions to contradictions. Civil society is extremely selfish, primarily uniting selfish individuals through need. Since each person strives for their own goals, this community faces various misfortunes and requires a higher "form of universality" - the state. Thus, civil society, as the highest form of human organization, serves as a connecting link between individuals and the state [9].

Hegel's idea of civil society seems unpleasant in his works. An individual within it, "with specificity, satisfying their needs, arbitrary whims, and subjective caprices, scatters and destroys themselves in pleasure... on the other hand, satisfying necessary and arbitrary needs, being subject to infinite excitement, is subject to external chance and arbitrary whims, and also limited by the power of universality." Civil society presents an extraordinary picture of luxury because it coexists with poverty and a depiction of both physical and moral degradation. [9] According to Hegel, the shortcomings of civil protection identified here should explain the necessity of transforming it into a state. Hegel considered private property the starting point of civil society. Nonetheless, he believed that the dominant force in historical development is not civil defense, but the state. However, a serious aspect of an all-round perfect state is that it absorbs civil society, not striving to guarantee citizens' rights and freedoms.

Marx disagreed with Hegel's idea of the state's priority over civil society, considering the latter the foundation of the entire human society and the driving force of historical development. He wrote that the state is a tool of political domination for the class owning the means of production. Thus, the bourgeois state, according to Marx, is a structure for implementing and protecting the interests of the economically dominant property-owning class.

The bourgeois state, which expresses the interests of the economically dominant class and thereby hinders the free development of independent individuals, excessively regulates civil society and seemingly consumes it. Marx wrote that rights called human rights are nothing



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more than the rights of a civil society member, different from the rights of a citizen. "Take a specific civil society, and you have a specific political order that is only the formal expression of civil society," Marx wrote [10]. The approach of the Social Democrats to this problem is interesting, based on the recognition of the basic policy of civil defense. With the help of power relations, politics develops the image of civil society, stabilizes it, covers all aspects of public life. According to the concept of J. Schumpeter, the state should participate in the activities of civil institutions, ensure their activities so that they do not become a destructive force in all respects and the market does not subjugate society [11]. In this regard, the social democrats considered compulsory state regulation of social and economic processes, the introduction of insurance, the highest guarantees for living, etc.

**Conclusion/Recommendations.** In Western political science, two interpretations of civil society have predominated. From the first perspective, it is viewed as a social category (universal) that represents the space of interpersonal relations opposed to the state in any form. Civil society encompasses the entire historical complex of relationships between individuals as an environment for meeting daily human needs.

From the second perspective, civil defense is presented as the historical form of the existence of Western civilization, reflecting the reality of Western culture. The uniqueness of Western culture is determined by the interaction of three forces: the independent individual, the institutions of power, and civil society itself. Their balanced interaction was based on the idea of progress shaped by the conscious development of civil society, the individual, and the state. The history of the last century has shown that the fundamental principles of civil society, such as private property and personal freedom, have proven to be more vital than others. The foundations for a modern understanding of the processes of civil society and its constitution were created by philosophers like M. Weber, P. Sorokin, T. Parsons, A. Tocqueville, and others in the first half of the 20th century.

Civil society is rational and fair social relations, regulated by laws expressing the will of the people, and a humane democratic legal state, which ensures the perfect execution of laws, and ensures that the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of the individual are guaranteed at a high level. is society.

Therefore, forming a civil society requires legislation, ensuring the rule of law, raising citizens' legal culture, and protecting the rights and legitimate interests of legal and physical persons. These tasks are the primary responsibilities of not only state bodies but also self-governing organizations, non-governmental non-profit organizations, and economic entities.

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