



CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

Bratislava 2009



Trust for Civil Society
in Central and Eastern Europe

Anniversaries are not about the past but about the future!

what?

The aim of the Civil Society Forum was to explore how the landscape of CEE civil society looks 20 year after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It brought about a two-year process of reflection and deliberation with diverse people from broad backgrounds, from across the CEE and beyond. In the context of the Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe having less than five years left of operations, the intension was to review some of the concepts and assumptions developed in the sector over the last two decades and explore what new aspects to take into account for doing our work in the best way in the high-speed world of 2010. We certainly were not disapointed by all the interesting threads found along the way, and this document is an attempt to gather as many as possible of the ideas, opinions and reflections expressed - hopefully to inspire you as well!

for whom?

Our definition of civil society has always been inclusive, incorporating multiple actors - in fact many more than those we traditionally work with or those who gathered for the Civil Society Forum event in Bratislava in September of 2009. By a couple of additional initiatives such as the Social Innovation Camp CEE, the Contest for young activists and journalists and the Street Poll, we attempted to bring in a broader sample of opinions regarding civil society, and no matter whether you are working for a civil society organization or not, we hope you find the texts useful.

what are we trying to say?

In the below document we start off by presenting our concluding analysis of the Forum, coming from our position as a private philanthropic donor aiming to support civil society. These frank observations and conclusions reflect our subjective understanding and interpretation of the forum discussions and will guide our future work.

We believe that in our multifaceted world there is no single answer, and the rest of this publication contains the raw material without applying any of our filters or interpretations. There are no summaries, no blueprints, no to-do-lists and no attempts at sweeping conclusions, but solely the original writing and transcribed discourse from the many enthusiastic and intelligent people that participated in the Civil Society Forum over the past two years.

Please note: all text have been edited to be suitable for reading, and the use of English corrected for the purpose of understanding. Bookmarks, keywords in the margins and boxes with quotes have been selected and added by the editing team. These do not reflect the full meaning of the text but exists only to facilitate easy browsing.

practical tips for reading

The collection of material is vast, therefore we have put a couple of functions in place to ease the reading of this document. In addition to reading it from A-Z , pdf has good tools for navigation and we have tried to add some ways to more easily navigate the text:

- The keywords in the margins of transcripts and quote boxes through-out the articles may be of use to scan the text for interesting paragraphs
- In the left hand margin of the pdf window there is a bookmark panel with 2 icons, one for page thumbnails and one for bookmarks. Some topical headings has been added so you can reach examples of the discussion from various parts of the document by clicking on a link, e.g. what is civil society, working with business, communca-tion etc. These bookmarks are not all covering - however hopefully they may give a glance to what is there.
- The Table of Content can be found on p. 3-4 as well as appears as the first bookmark.
- In PDF you may also easily jump to a specific page by inserting a number in the page box, or you can search for keywords of your own choice through the find function (if these features not visible on the top of your document, make sure to show or reset "toolbars", which can be find in the "view" menu) .

More pictures, clips and information are available on the [CSF website](#). If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us at trust@ceetrust.org.

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We wish you a most pleasant read!



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About the Civil Society Forum - what we heard and what we think Conclusions and reflections from the CEE Trust

Two opposing assessments permeate all discussions about civil society in Central and Eastern Europe. The first one sees thriving civil societies around, represented by myriads of organizations and movements that fulfill diverse and important social functions. The second one holds that there is no civil society to speak of; it is weak; it has lost its soul, its energy, its leading position and has turned into a 'bunch of NGOs'.

We believe that the rationales behind these perceptions grow out of the fundamental change in the understanding of the relationship of civil society to "good" society that has happened over the last 20 years. There is prevalent, commonsensical and, basically, correct intuition that civil society exists to correct the failures of the state to deliver the public good and to protect this good against the predatory attacks of business. **What has become obsolete however is the idea that there is an self-evident and undisputable public good, defended by the civil society.**

This vision feeds assumptions with wide currency such as the one that perceives civil society as some sort of vigilante, ready to stand up and address any infringement of the public good, while we, average citizens, watch... Another one implies that if one is working for common benefit (and these are, in first place, the non-profit organizations), s/he does not have to convince the public in its obvious usefulness. Leaning too heavily on such empty concepts undermines the most precious asset, the trust in civil society organization.

Back in the 1990ies, the public agenda - social and economic - was essentially a matter of consensus in post-communist European countries: liberal democracy (free elections, human rights, rule of law) and market economy. Citizens, reformist political parties, foreign donors and international institutions shared this understanding and focused their efforts to make it happen. Local energies and activists received generous support in terms of money and pre-packaged solutions: norms, practices, institutions, experts and consultants, intended to speed up the process of transition. The change happened in an amazingly short term. The non-profit non-governmental organizations were among the main drivers of change in this period of shaken order, delivering in the fields of rule of law, protection of human rights, restoration of community activism, reform of public policies, revival of the drive for philanthropy, etc. etc. The Trust for Civil Society was created at the end of this period precisely with the intention to help preserve this wonderful asset.

In 2010 it is quite clear that the consensus what is good for our societies and how to bring it about, belongs to the past. Few are those who challenge seriously the democratic principles and institutions as social framework but the political agenda - the policy to translate it into livable environment - has become 'normal', that is - a contested field. Moreover, the first decade of the 21st century signaled visible change in the political systems: the weakening and blurring of big ideologies (liberalism, socialism, conservatism), which used to offer the whole package (ideology cum policy). What some call the consumer-driven political behavior (if I am not happy with my political party I do not press it to change, I change my political allegiance) is taking over the old party loyalties. The growing appeal of opportunistic, public-opinion driven, charismatic, i.e. populist leaders is the visible manifestation of this trend.

We believe that civil society is self organized engagement for something larger than yourself and your direct family. But there is no common denominator. Today we have to face reality:

the public good is different things to different people, groups, strata, even nations. Civil society is mobilizations around different, sometimes conflicting agendas: human rights watchdogs are certainly working and fighting for the public good but so are the association of farmers, who believe that the wealth of the nations depends on their survival and prosperity. Euroenthusiasts believe that unified Europe is the best prospect for bright future but Euroeskeptics, patriotic, nationalist or, often - alas - openly xenophobic groups preach that the nation is the natural condition for good life. Activists attack shelters to free mistreated animals but they meet there concerned mothers-against-vicious stray dogs. Volunteers deliver food to the poor and the homeless but libertarian groups insist that if the state is appropriating 45% of the national revenues it should put in place a system to provide for the weak.

The public good is becoming contested arena and civil society is the broad term to describe these different agendas. This is not a level playing field, however, quite the opposite: powerful interests from different quarters outside of the civil society create substantial inequalities in terms of material, social, and symbolic capital: money, constituencies, and appeal. They invest a lot for or against a certain agenda and the complaint "there is no civil society" or "civil society is weak" is often our frustration that the issues we believe important do not have a strong voice or organizational framework to promote it.

With the framework of liberal democracy in place, the decision how our societies could be **good societies for all has gradually become a matter of deliberation and competition about policies**. Therefore, we agree with many activists who believe that civil society organizations should become political. That does not imply, of course, to become partisan or to align with political parties for good. Being political means having position, stand for it and use different tools to make it real: it could mean push for change but, also, fight for preservation. The most direct path is to go straight to the decision-making bodies (local, regional, national, European) and it may happen in coalition or confrontation with political parties. But not in misplaced neutrality. The civil society has the formidable potential to mobilize its own constituencies outside of the established political ecosystem. This act, let's face it, is no less political.

Another phenomenon we witness in many CEE countries and beyond is the unpleasant connotation, related to the term NGO. It translates the vague feeling that something fake was substitutes for something real. This is a very damaging misconception. Non-governmental organizations (or non-profit organizations as is their official legal name in many countries), are one of the basic forms of existence of civil society, crucial for any attempt to bring change. The criticism is deserved, to some extent. **The sprouting of hundreds of organizations which recycle projects with nice rhetoric and negligible social effect has eroded the public trust**. However, most critics of the NGOs do work with or for non-profit organizations from time to time. To borrow from Henry Kissinger, when someone needs to call the civil society, s/he dials the phone number of an "NGO".

This reading of the social and political field entails, in our opinion, a few clear challenges for the active self-organized citizens, registered or not. We have tried to distill a couple of them out of the dozens of opinions, ideas, critiques and suggestions that we read and heard during the Civil Society Forum, and, as a matter of fact, in the course of our daily work.

Nothing is more important for the civil society entities of any persuasion and shape than a clear cause. **If an organization, network or movement cannot state in one sentence what they stand for, there is something inherently wrong**. Many organizations have developed carefully worded mission statements, areas of engagement and descriptions of what they do without an answer what do they exist for.

It is time to stop overestimating the effect of rational arguments and underestimating emotions. Civil society organizations are made of people, work for people and need support from people. Rational arguments might convince but will not motivate (enough). If organizations and movements want and need real supporters, followers, or communities, they should remind themselves that people are driven by emotions: love, compassion, joy, belonging, sense of personal fulfillment or by frustration, pity, anger, and, unfortunately greed and envy. Many good organizations have forgotten this simple truth and worry that people and media are not interested in their message(s). Understanding and endorsing is one thing; committing for the long haul - quite different. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a strong argument to use in advocacy efforts; but if you wish to win the competition for the hearts and purses of the citizens on the social battlefield of ideas - you need more.

Any cause needs support - people (numbers are political, said Bob Geldof), endorsement by institutions, expertise, money. **These days, one needs to work much harder for this support.** When money was coming from international donors, it was easy because organizations were knocking on open doors. All they needed was an intelligently written request and a few good people. This situation is changing albeit slowly. There is enough money coming from the governments and the donors to allow hundreds of organizations to do their needed work. The project culture is here to stay because this is the way institutions work. The stratum of professional, non-profit, non-governmental intermediaries will grow and evolve as a third sector with well-defined social functions along the lines of the widely spread European model of corporate representation and contractual relationships. Some claim that this is the future of civil society in Europe.

We beg to differ: there is more to civil society than representation of organized interests. The motivation to contribute to the betterment of human condition beyond the interest of the group will remain, in our understanding, the hallmark of those who claim to belong to the civil society. It might go against the grain of popular opinion, established policy or national consensus. For those who stand for this 'minority' agenda, our message is **be brave**; there are supporters out there.

The time has come for organized citizens with a cause to go out and gather other types of support, outside of the public treasury: from businesses - not because the group or organization is good per se but because together we can achieve more than we can do in isolation - both for our cause and for your business and; as value added - it will make you feel good.

- from the growing middle class - it has achieved a certain living standard and it is time to start "helping the bourgeois become citizens" as one Forum participant put it.
- from people, door to door, office to office, convincing them that if they support a cause they can turn their outrage or longing into something effective. The 1% legislation is a fantastic opportunity in CEE that other regions could only dream of.

Lastly, **be sharp**. It is definitely time to let go the idea that we can train media, civil servants and the public to understand the value added by civil society - we just have to deliver. Citizens do not think in objectives, target groups, achievables, and indicators of success. However the public will still judge whether you are managing to really make that difference you are talking about. This is especially true at the crucial moment when a good report, research, consultation, petition, policy, strategy, pilot model, website should move and produce waves into real society. The etymology of the word 'project' is a vision in your head of something not existing yet - a good initiative has from the beginning a clear and convincing idea what it is about and how to arrive at it. To convince citizens to donate time and donors to lend support there is a need of clear thinking and tactics.

To sum it up we believe that civil society is not an army of like-minded people, nor an utopian group of altruistic individuals who generously share their time and money to push forward the brave new world of good society. It is a contested field where different visions of the good society clash every day. Civil society organizations - from social networks to think-tanks to soup kitchens - are the vehicles of these efforts.

This set of assumptions has very real implications for the work of the CEE Trust. Since the first day of planning of the Civil Society Forum we have openly declared that we regard this initiative as an opportunity to check our working assumptions and approaches, to listen to what our partners and grantees have to say about the present and the future: a sort of a big and long focus group. The result of this consultation is a proposal by the staff, and a decision of the Board, to spend our last three years of existence and the remaining 25 million USD of our assets, in a more focused way.

First, the structured and widely advertised call for proposals, addressing the needs of the civil society, have outgrown their utility. We see an opportunistic tendency to recycle old and safe approaches and proposed solutions, without consideration for the wider context. The forceful entrance of the EU as donor, supporting civil society, reinforces the trend. The instrumentalization of organizations and standardization of activities motivated the CEE Trust to look in the opposite direction. We will welcome inquiries all year around, but will look for bold ideas, brave positions and strong organizations. We will look more carefully at initiatives and organizations which work for important issues, but cannot rely on governmental or business support or mobilize large constituencies.

Second, we will not indicate thematic areas with higher priority in the selection of proposals to support. In 2010 we will be even more concerned not about social needs but about the existence of actors, able to address these needs: our priority will be those with a clear cause, clear ideas of how to achieve it, a clear and public position, clear understanding of who's behind and beside them and a clear outreach and dialogue with citizens.

Third, we will give preference to organizations, which demonstrate willingness and plans how to find support, including financial contributions, in a different way than drafting the regular project proposal. The best will survive the transition that seems to be happening - from private grants to institutional ones or real citizens' support. In that process the CEE Trust will invest its last funds into organizations that clearly are maturing into organizations which will continue playing a role in the development of CEE societies.

Who represents the citizen in CEE in 2009?

There are a couple of fundamental **legends of civil society** that has occurred over time. Some claim that intermediaries such as organizations, corporations, trade unions, political parties, etc are not gateways but rather gatekeepers for democracy, while others suggest various intermediary groups constitute the very essence of democratic societies, being vehicles for civic cooperation that may counterbalance the state and protect individuals. These variations of interpretation of civil society - and more - are strongly present and has been a significant part of the last 20 years of transformation in Central and Eastern Europe.

Taking the temperature of the current state of representative democracy, the discussion continues on who speaks for the citizen in Central and Eastern Europe in 2009? Is it true that we have become "lonely citizens" with few to represent our voice and interests? This discussion will also touch upon new **mechanisms for social dialogue** and civic participation, in relation to more traditional **channels of representation**?

Rayna Gavrilova: Dear colleagues, partners and guest, welcome to the Civil Society Forum.



There are some big questions in the air, I believe, and the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall is the time to put them on the table. We used to believe that democracy and market economy is enough to have a good society. The answer is obviously "no more". But what else is needed is different things to different people – wealth, solidarity, beauty, privacy, community, whatever. The question we have to ask is who is going to provide them, who can add this value in order to have a meaningful life.

How do we work in a world with so many answers?

I think the people in this audience have one thing in common - we all believe that we can do something to make this place more livable. The difficult question and this Forum are really about how to make this happen – how to reach out to the apathetic majorities, which sit on the touchlines and wait for things to happen? How to get the message through? How to compete with the populist images? How to make the elective representatives listen? I do not believe that this Forum will come up with a list of answers. We are living in a world not with one consensus but with so many different consensuses and what it is even more difficult – with shifting consensuses. So I believe that the real practical question is how do we do our work in a world of so many answers.

We came here to have a conversation, to ask questions and to make sure that these questions deliver something. We truly believe that in the end there will be something for all of us to use later in our work - so we will make sure that all answers are available.

Civil Society discourse and history

Aleksander Smolar: I am suppose to speak about legends of civil society and this mean about perceptions, about certain patterns of self definition of the people of NGOs and civil society. This is already one of the legends, identification of the civil society with NGOs and the problems of the relation with reality. I think it is quite extravagant and very positive to have such an introduction - not self-gratulation but rather questions and problems being proposed here at the very beginning of our forum. A few words about history: the popularity of civil society as a public discourse comes from our region, from the development of independent organizations of dissidents in political opposition. [This concept] came to be extremely popular all over the world in America, in south-east Asia, but it started in our region long before '89 and I would like to propose certain periodification of this development in our countries.



During communism

From the point of view of strategies of dealing with the ancient regime I would say that the first very important movement we had in many countries at least in our region, came around '56. Based on the principle of the politic spheres, it was a revisionist movement, who believed that we can change the regimes from inside, to democratize society. A few years [we believed in] that and there was deep disappointments. In the 60s it was the discourse - economics first. Economic reforms, market socialism and the idea that we can change our economy - and through the economy we will also change the political spheres. Then in the beginning of the 70s we had international economic dependence first, the interdependence of our region, rising dependence on the west, big economic aid from the west and belief that the west will influence [our regimes].

There were in fact some facts that indicated that this was true, internal developments in our countries can be influenced with the Helsinki accords, not only economically.

The 4th [belief on how to act for change in relation to the communist regime] was society first. This was the discovery of anti-political strategy or civil society strategy, which was based on the conviction that we cannot confront the communist power directly, but we should try to diminish the space controlled by politics. It was a political strategy but at the same time the language used was antipolitical: to diminish political space. Afterwards we had an ideologization of the concept of civil society, already before '89 you can find in many articles e.g. by Vaclav Havel, but also György Konrád in Hungary or people like Jazek Kuron and Adam Michnik in Poland. [They said] that in reality this is the future, not traditional pluralist liberal type of political system, but we have discovered the new structure of politics, a new way of doing politics. In '89 there was a sort of euphoria, and I can quote a few sentences of Jiri Dienstbier (one of the leaders of the opposition in the then Czechoslovakia) who was saying during a conference with the pope in St Adolpho in August '89: "we don't need to talk about civil society, we see civil society".

Ideologization of civil society

Let's say there was a lot of mythology and ideologization [idealization?] of civil society and afterwards a lot of disappointment. This is one of our problems today, because of what was discovered much later, that in our region the level of trust [which is] the foundation of civil society is very low, the lowest in Europe. The level of self organization is [also] very low. Of course this should be discussed because it is about NGOs, but civil society is also something else, it is also informal relations which is much richer [as a definition]. Actually [the informal relations] during communist times were much richer, but it's a little bit like with the economy measure of BNP, you measure what is possible to measure and you cannot measure production which is not measured in money. This is like civil society, we are measuring what we can measure meaning NGOs, although civil society is much larger concept.

Civil society - trust and energy

[This has generated] a very big impact on global and intellectual thinking in the west and three different ideological and political currents have been influenced by the experience of our region. The left discovered in the civil society movement a reincarnation of the idea of utopia and withering away of the state – this is the society which is organized without the state, and it was during a period of deep crises of the left looking for new ideas and the human rights and civil society [discourse] became new key words of a new universalism as the old ones were in deep crisis. The concept also became very popular among conservatives and neo-conservatives because in the civil society concept, they were discovering the tool to fight against the big state and involvement of the state. There was the term of welfare society [which they] used to replace the welfare state; [meaning] that it is not the state that should take care of the underdogs, the marginalized and the outcast, but society itself. So it was ideologically manipulated as well [both to the right and the left]. The third current we can call communitarian and catholic (although those are two groups, they are overlapping but not the same) the myth and the dream about a non-individualistic society but rather a well integrated society, I will not use collectivist society, because the word has bad connotations. So these were three currents that were really influenced [by the concept of civil society]. Then

Usage by political camps

there was also an advancement of the idea of civil society, and the enormous importance attached to civil society, because of the international community and the strategy of democracy and human rights promotion by western states associated this very much with the process of globalization as well. We have big the international organizations - Human [Rights] Watch, Amnesty International, Doctors without Borders and so on, which were playing a very important role and this somehow was a manifestation of the rising importance of the international civil society as a concept.

Color revolutions - golden days of civil society?

The next steps - and I would say the summit of the popularity of the concept it - came with the color revolutions. Once again we are back in our region in the larger sense of the term, of course [including] Serbia in 2000 and the role of the youth in the organization [of the anti-Milosevic movement]. Afterwards Georgia's rose revolution and the importance of youth organizations in Ukraine during the orange revolution in 2004, and we had the much bigger Kirgiz case of 2005 - and it seemed that we really had some progress of democracy and human rights assured by grassroots' initiatives. There was a feeling of rising power of NGOs and of soft power [in general]. Information and new means of information played an enormous role, before there were two types or ways of international organizations: multinational organizations, corporations and the Roman Catholic Church which played a really important role. Protests were much more decentralized. Now that we have new types of NGOs and diminishing cost of information, internet has played an enormous role. Also in popularization of these color revolutions, these countries influenced each other very much, and there was a fear in Russia and other not very democratic countries that this model will be introduced [in other places].

New actors and technology

The last case was Iran - I remember very well that I was together with Adam Michnik invited to Iran, practically to talk about what to do (although it was coded language as an "intellectual meeting") what to do to put in question the mullah's regime. Actually the organizer was arrested afterwards and accused of trying to organize a color revolution in Iran, so this is the measure of the importance of the phenomena. To the point where their appearance was conceived by others as a threat to power, NGOs were really considered as a world superpower. Maybe NGOs contributed to democratization in certain countries, especially to those I mentioned, [at least they] contributed very much to changes and pluralization.

Competition on the public sphere - decline of civil society?

Then about the negative and the problems. I mentioned once already that civil society was a great myth and this myth has been put into question, a first sign is the real situation of civil society in our countries, the second is that everybody has escaped from that minimal or moral civil society that we knew during opposition time to politics. All big names of Polish opposition as well as Slovak, Czech, Hungarian went into politics. The minimal or moral civil society was a substitute in times when direct opposition was impossible, and all those people [have since] left. Of course there is also a competition [for people, ideas, attention?] in different sectors - the political society, the economic society, the market and the church, especially in countries where the church is very strong Poland Lithuania, to some extent Slovakia.

There is a second problem, that of donors. Civil society after 89 was built with great generosity and help of western donors, most of all American donors. We

**Donors and
direction**

know the names of all of these donors, we took advantage of their generous help and in some weaker countries the whole NGOs sector was built on western money. These organizations are until today playing an enormous role. But there is a dramatic problem here and this is the problems of agenda - what is the agenda of all these NGOs in our countries? Is it established by the NGOs [themselves] in these countries, or is it a donor-driven civil society? This is a very complex phenomena. Of course there is a lot of initiative from inside, but there are also a lot of ideas coming from the outside. "Send us your proposals" – but everybody knows what our priorities are... I remember in the 90s I was on the board of a big Russian NGO and in contact with several others, and I was surprised that all big Russian NGOs were working on two problems: ecology and the problem of local government. Those are very important problems, but there are at least 10-20 other important problems [to address] but money was not available. These organizations they were shaped by the demand, or I would rather call it the offer, by the partner/donor. The objectives of donors was very generous but of course at the same time they were shaped by their own priorities and perceptions of what is really important for these new democracies, this is a very important factor.

Creativity

Constituency

I don't want to say that there was any bad will or manipulation, no it was a good fight and with good reasons and generally with really good results. Many of our best organization wouldn't have existed without this generous help. The consequences were however, among other things that what we are facing [today]. Diminishing levels of internal creativity, looking for ideas, looking for what we should do, what our priorities really are, who is our constituency, what is the public we should address ourselves to in our countries? There is not necessarily a contradiction between the two constituencies - donors and citizens - but of course there are certain tensions. And of course there is an impact on creativity, to tell you the truth this is not only the problem of NGOs but of our whole state: agenda have been imposed to a big extent by the European Union! This is one of the reasons why people are escaping to symbolic politics, because the real choices they cannot make, they are predetermined by the conditions to enter the EU. Once again this was very good for these countries as they have modernized, but at the same time it sterilized internal politics in some way. It pushed [us] towards antipolitics, because the real political choices were elsewhere. So we in the NGO sector are facing partly very similar problems [as the state itself], and I can also say about the business community [that their existence and success] was also to some extent predetermined by banks, which are controlled by western banks and policy. During the crisis we paid the price for their objectives [established] in their mother countries. This is a bit of the problem with a cosmopolitan world.

**EU and
globalization**

I think there was a radical turn in donors' policy [lately], I think we can start in '98. There was the problem of fighting with Meciar, civil society organizations engaged more and more in parapolitical activities - it was '98 in Slovakia, '99 in Croatia and afterwards came the colored revolutions. The problem, a very important one, which is posed in many non-democratic countries in the so called third world, is that they are considering NGOs as the new imperialism, trying to impose western values upon a country which is not making such a choice. Of course this is many times because they cannot make that choice as they are dictatorships. One can say that external interventions in the global world are much more transparent than they used to be. We can also say that this

**Correlation
democracy
and civil
society**

intervention from outside contributed very much to democratization. The right to intervene and the obligation to protect, in a way it was the summit of international law institutionalization, carrying a policy of an open world overcoming the traditional concept of sovereignty. These problems are much bigger now because of China, now we have a competitive model which shows that it is not true that you need a democracy to have development, or you need civil society to have development. China is a country which at least until now is extremely centralized, where there is no space for political privileges and no space for civil organizations, and this model is extremely successful in terms of development up until now. A big part of the world, also due to old antiwestern complexes, is now turning towards china. Even a big part of the left, because of anti-western, anti-capitalism, anti-liberal attitudes, in the re-directing of themselves are observing attentively what China is doing.

There is also a new discovery which is quite chocking, and this is the discovery in our countries that democracy and civil society is not so correlated as it used to be according to Toqueville's thoughts. We have in our countries democracies that are not perfect, far from perfect, but which are quite decent democracies along with very weak civil societies. This is also a problem to discuss: what is really the relation between civil society and full-fledged deep democracy, not only formal democracy from the point of view of elections, but defined as a culture of pluralism? Of course [a culture of pluralism – democracy in its broad terms] needs civil society, but this is a long historical process apparently and it appears that we can have [some form of basic] functioning democracy without civil society. We have very interesting internal critique of civil society in our countries – one famous example is Vaclav Klaus which considers civil society “Human Right-ism”, a post-socialist collectivist discourse against the liberal individualist democratic society. We have also critique from the quite opposite camp, from Polish influential ex Prime Minister Jaroslav Kaszinski, violent critique against civil society that this is against the state [and contribute to] weakening of the nation state. [Similar to] the Jacobinian vision which is very negative, that civil society is a way of doing politics by people who are not able to form political parties. There is also critique of civil society concept from the left – e.g. in the article by Agnieszka Graff – [she claims] that civil society is an antipolitical concept and we should instead try to build a true pluralist political system with clear positions and clash of ideas, because the best democracies can function only with such a concept. I will finish without conclusions, because there are no conclusion just questions, which I hope will be not only negative but can contribute to our continued discussion.

**Is democracy
working?**

Wawrzyniec Smoczynski (moderator): The purpose of this session is to see what lies behind the concepts that are used to describe our political and social realities in the region. Because I think that there is an increased sense that these concepts are not really describing what we are living in. I would like to start with Ivan Krastev and a slightly strange question: if you were to put yourself in the position of Alexis de Tocqueville and instead of going to America would make a travel around Central and Eastern Europe 20 years after the fall of communism, what would you think would be his diagnosis? What kind of political system have we come up with, would he at least describe it as a democracy?

Ivan Krastev: First I was asked to replace Darina [Malova] which is already difficult, and now you are trying to put me in Tocqueville's shoes which is slightly



Do we know what we are seeing?

too much. First of all I will just try to make a simple argument. There is a very popular experiment, you are giving to a person very quickly in succession [a picture], and you are asking him all the time: what do you see? He says: I see a cat. After that you are putting among the cat photos some photos of a dog, and you continue asking what he sees and he continues saying that he sees a cat. After that you are putting cats and dogs after another, ask what he sees and he continues to say he sees cats. Basically psychologists use this experiment to prove that people see what they are used to see, what they expect to see. This is a part also of all this talk about democracy, unfortunately I do think that part of the problem with CEE democracy is that we see cats even when the dogs start to prevail. What I mean is that we have been basically imitating a model which does not exist anymore. If you see the normative model of democracy which was put on the ground in the early 1990s, basically this is not to be seen anywhere. In the early 90s if you were to write a book about what democracy is, you were going to write about the workers. It is not about the workers anymore (the fact of this [factory] turning into a conference hall). It is much more the consumer than the worker which is really the political force when it comes to democracy.

Political volatility

You would also be talking about political parties and voters sticking to their preferred political parties. The truth is that now, at least in Bulgaria we have what is called volatility, the change of the vote is very big. 20 years ago people believed that switching from one side to another e.g. from the right to the left, was as difficult as changing your side during the religious wars in the 17th century. Now this is like changing from one shampoo to another, there is a totally different political logic. Then for the talk about who is sitting to the left of whom and who is sitting to the right, basically I do believe that the best definition of the state of left and right these days come from someone who said that after this economical crisis the state of the left and right basically can be seen in the balance sheets of the banks, nothing left on the right where the profit is and nothing right on the left where the assets are. This definition of left and right is also simply not working.

I want to follow Alex Smolar and make 3 arguments and 3 assumptions which we made [about democracy] and which could be wrong. First of all, the meaning of the voting has changed a lot and is more an execution and reference on the government than a meaningful choice between competing political programs. Nevertheless, when we are talking about radical choices we are back in the situation which we know from pre-democratic times: it is much more about control of personnel and about integrity and reputation of politicians than about political programs. The second assumption is about civil society. We were told that the stronger the civil society organizations the better for democracy, but let's give you one historical argument: the country with the strongest civil organizations in pre-war Europe was of course Weimar Germany. Many of these organizations were the backbones of the Nazi party. When we talk about civil society [today] we are very much exposed to this, I don't see many people here from religious organizations, or people representing nationalistic organizations. Talking about definition of civil society, the Hungarian Guard fits: young and organized.

Wawrzyniec Smoczyński: the same thing one could say about today's Poland, the most robust civil society organization is the one lead by father Rydzyk,



the radical right wing cleric. I want to go back from civil society to democracy and ask Milla Mineva: we are describing our political system in CEE as representative democracies and the presumption behind that is that representation is the core idea of democracy. Do we have [active enough] citizens, as they are expected to be in the theoretical model, to run a representative democracy in CEE with all the apathy we see in elections?

Do citizens want representation?

Milla Mineva: Let me start with the question about representative democracy whether people still want to be represented. Because what we are seeing is that people are gaining power to communicate, to travel, to produce their own media content, they lack power only to produce their own political content. They are gaining power outside of representative systems, without intermediaries while the political [sphere] is still very conservative and based on the idea of representation. There is another great problem [with representative democracy], that Alex Smolar and Ivan Krastev mentioned, voting is more an execution of the government than electing a platform, as EU integration process made governments having one and the same policy. So actually we are changing parties, but we were not changing policies, The political has become un-political. Maybe we should not try to explain [the fact that] people don't want to vote with their apathy, but [it is because of] the apathy and behavior of the political parties and their political subjects?



Moving on to the citizens I would say that we have too much individuals and too little citizens for democracy. Because we are all individualized and itemized in a fragmented society we cannot form communities around interest and negotiate around interest. I would like to follow Chantal Mouffe in her argument that democracy is a process of negotiating interests and a process of negotiating the relations between liberty and equality. Right now we are in a situation where we have a lot of liberty but not [so much] equality and political debate on the common good. The citizens actually don't know what to do with their liberty. Something else I would like to change is the frame in which we think, - regarding citizens we think [subjects] within national political communities, although we are now in a phase of globalization where all political communities are inertly related, so [the question is] if we can have any national politics at all?

Wawrzyniec Smoczynski: That would mean that also in terms of citizens we are talking about cats instead of dogs right?



Milla Mineva: Yes – citizens are completely different.

Wawrzyniec Smoczynski: I have a question for Slawomir Sierakowski there is a German critique on the state of German democracy talking a lot about "Politikvergessenheit" or the kind of attitude of resignation towards politics. One of the explanations says that at least Western Europe has lost its long term goal, [democracy] was used over the 20th century to achieve certain goals such as human rights etc, and as those goals are achieved there is no more promise inside democracy or a purpose to participate in it. Now you would argue obviously that we haven't advanced those rights in CEE and we have many things to put on the agenda, but people in Poland are also skeptical towards granting rights to sexual minorities with regards to marriages and adoption etc. What would be the promise of democracy in the future in CEE if it is to attract people to become active citizens?





Post-politics?
anti-politics?

Slawomir Sierakowski: What I like in our Polish-Bulgarian conspiracy here is that we started talking about politics and antipolitics at the same time. It is very interesting to me to think that this process started from antipolitics in the Polish and CEE regional dissident movement and ended up in post-politics which is very visible especially in this region. Here post-politics of the periphery is really something because of the lack of strong social institutions. Let me refer back to what Alex Smolar said, I don't think it is a problem that dissidents from before '89 went into politics after [the fall of communism] the problem is that they went into politics with the same ideas of antipolitics [that they had in the dissident movement].



It is efficient to perceive the social reality which is built on two elements – on evil and good, on democracy and totalitarianism, its correct and it is efficient politically as well [to use] this kind of political epistemology. But if you transfer it to after 1989 and to the democratic regime, you will have a big problem to build a realistic public scene, and this is one of the founding scenes of liberal democracies in this region. If you start with antipolitics and you don't believe any more in left and right, at the end of the day you will end up with a dysfunctional conflict between elites and populists. Not between two visions of modernization, but with one always correct vision of modernization - a vision of Meciar, Kaczynski. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy because I really think that Kaczynski is a symptom of the illness of the liberal democracy in the periphery.

Forbidden
discussion
topics

In this region we really had a lot of "denkverbots" [forbidden thought] something that really is a conversation stopper. We had a very short agenda in the public sphere and couldn't really discuss e.g. about the market or about economic policy, so instead we started to discuss about history and about corruption. If you cannot articulate some problems, especially in a time of hardcore transformation, the society will articulate it in a pathologic way and this is the problem with populism. I would propose the organization of regional transformation of the past 20 years had 3 stages - one was the stage of neoliberal revolution or very ideological transformation, the second was the populist reaction to it, and now we observe something like political synthesis.

Wawrzyniec Smoczyński: If you would have a room full of dissident CEE citizens how would you put the argument to them that democracy is something worth participating in?



Civil society
embracing
political
organizations?

Slawomir Sierakowski: The problem is that you told me that we have 20 minutes to talk about democracy, however then I realized that this problem is very symptomatic. The problem is not that democracy started to be fiction because the public sphere was colonized by the market, media is just part of the business, politics is just a part of the business too - the problem is that democracy started to be irrelevant for society. The problem is that we [civil society] grow the relationship between anger and hope, and we have only the anger left, which turns out to be autistic resentment and nothing which will actually shift politics in some kind of direction or includes a political vision. So of course one of the propositions is to rethink the idea of civil society, as Agnieszka Graff states, e.g. my own NGO [Krytyka Polityczna] is not an NGO which is non-political or antipolitical – it is a political organization.



Wawrzyniec Smoczyński: So would you agree with Milla Mineva that democracy is just an invisible framework, a tool that needs to be sustained among voters or citizens? This would mean we shouldn't be looking for a promise inside democracy or something sexy about it which people should feel positive about?



Loss of the political

Slawomir Sierakowski: The dangerous promise which we got after 1989 was that we can forget about the political, the social and political field is neutral and on this you can directly articulate your interest. Chantal Mouffe says that society is never constructed neutral, it is always constructed in a hegemonic way and there is always one hegemony against another, and [I find it] good and realistic to think in that way. It mobilizes you to work and think and perceive the reality in a political way, rather than a naïve, neutral social way. Remember that civil society in Poland really functioned like a substitute or like a buffer - something that will keep people away from politics. You have to realize yourself in the private sphere, if you want to do something more, there is a small ground of civil society in which you can realize your altruistic ideas, but stay away from politics because politics this is a technical process.



Wawrzyniec Smoczyński: Going back to speaking about the divisions; one of the assumptions was for the CEE that we should also have political scenes arranged in left and right. What we see around the region right now is a divide between populists and semi-elitist parties, is this a long-term phenomena or just a reaction to 20 years of transition?



Aleksander Smolar: I think this is the illness of our democracy, and not only in the east. In a way two major features of democracy, militant activists and citizens were replaced by the technocrat - populist couple. This is not an accident, it is a problem of representation. It is also part of the globalization process. This means that most of the decisions are [taken] outside of the national domain so you [on the national level] cannot decide. This concern e.g. economy; most of the production is [situated] outside of the country so it cannot be controlled of national government. It is about the law, bigger and bigger international law [ruled from outside]. Even symbolic identification with plural identities there are much less of than in the 19th or beginning of the 20th century, [citizens] identifying themselves with the nation-state, we are not ready anymore (at least a big part of the population) to invest in it as in the past. This creates a situation where you have a feeling of very limited possibilities of decision, especially in our region where imitated development has been our faith. It was chosen to be that way, and I think it was a good choice just to imitate development of more developed countries of Western Europe. However it limited the political space and the space of political division even more.



Problems on the political arena globally

I am sympathizing with Slawomir but at the same time I think the problem which limits the space of democracy is much more complex. This is the consequence of a transformation in today's world. Paradoxically, I think that this crisis is introducing much more politics than what we had before, not necessarily with positive effects, because it will be associated very much with tendencies towards autocracy and dependence of the nation state. Democracy until today is not able to function [in other dimensions] but the national one – so paradoxically it can be also quite regressive process.

Slawomir Sierakowski: To say it in a different way, this crisis has shown that there is no hope for real reaction. It turns that people do not want to involve themselves even during this type of heated situation. I think part of the problem is the way we describe the problem, you ask us about representative democracy and representation, and I really believe that the idea of representation is another modern utopia. Like the correspondence theory of truth, I see the analogy between them, we really expect that people have their political ideas and their definition of what is happening – that we are there now.



What's so different about populism?

If you take the definition of populist politics you will see that it is the same. What is the difference between populist politics and honest politics? Honest politics is gathering people and convincing them around a program that they invent. Populist politics are gathering people by first seeing which their opinions are. What is the common activity of politicians in the region and everywhere? Public polling - they do it every day, they want to decide about their program. Do they support sexual minorities, [they decide] only after the public poll to see whether people would support the idea or not. No one wants to convince people about an idea [anymore], I really think it is just the horizon to discuss the idea of representation, it is not efficient for understanding the problem and find a solution.

Wawrzyniec Smoczyński: One small footnote, one could argue that populist parties are more honest because they are much better at feeling real social tensions and underline problems. The problem is that they don't come up with solutions. 2 reactions from Ivan and Milla.



Ivan Krastev: I have a very short point, which is important for me to put here. There are probably different political consequences [on what to take] out of this crisis, but one of them that I can see on the global level, as well as on the level of our countries is a crisis of governability of society at a whole. This is not that you have a problem of one program or another, but society is very difficult to govern, seen from the point of view of the government and also from the point of view of the people. I will give you one example. When the Lehman Brothers collapsed a year ago, two important things happened. First the secretary of the treasury of the US, probably one of the most influential economic figures in the world, came up with a 700 billion bailout plan. You could expect that the investors and the market would be reassured. Nothing like this happened, it all continued going down. The next day Warren Buffet started buying shares in Citibank, showing the other type of authority saying "I am fine I believe in Citibank". Do you expect people went buying Citibank shares? Just the opposite - they continued selling. I believe we see a huge crisis of authorities and elites, not simply the treasure of state, it's also the elites of the market itself that is not trusted.



Lack of trust in authority

This level of mistrust goes very much into politics itself. We are now much more in the business of organizing mistrust than creating trust, and this is a different game. And from this point of view I can easily sympathize morally with the idea of politicizing, but this is like saying that religion is fine: it is fine, but can you get people back to church? I do believe this is also true for the church of the left and the church of the right, it's not so easy to go back to a situation which was much more functional [before].

Relevance of left-right

Slawomir Sierakowski: Since the time when the left and right division emerged, we have not only once [been in a position of] wanting to go beyond it, but there were many times when people went back to left and right [politics]. Another thing that is symptomatic during the crisis: always when you want to gather some money from the government for very large problems like illness or hunger or disasters, they always will tell you that it will take some time, let's think about it. But when you want to find 700 million for bankers you can find it like that. It shows that it is not that we live in a world without the big other or without authority, we live in a world in which the class division doesn't correspond to the shape of the public sphere. Of course there are rulers in the world and the problem is that we cannot really counterbalance them on the political field. The problem of the colonialization of the public sphere and so on.



Milla Mineva: I would say that the economic crisis right now is good news for the political sphere, because it makes it obvious that there is an end to the free market utopia, and now it is time to have a political discussion and debate on different political projects. Right now we are talking about organizing mistrust, I am sure that this is what the elites are talking about and not the people. I'd say that depending on which perspective we chose. Of course as Mr. Smolar said the crisis revived some nationalistic discourses, the idea of the state as the redistributing power. But more importantly it makes local communities matter, it makes national communities matter. It's the right time to think about political communities. The other strive during the crisis was an attempt to make international institutions, maybe it is also time to invent a notion of the global citizen, a citizen who can influence on the global level?



Wawrzyniec Smoczynski: That would run counter to the argument that authority has gone several level downwards,



Milla Mineva: It is a global process. On one hand it is going down to small communities, but on the other hand economic decisions are not taken on the level of small communities, they are taken on the global level. So citizens should act on the same global level if they want to influence global politics, and the crisis is good news for those who want to act on the global sphere.



Wawrzyniec Smoczynski: Ivan has a comment

Ivan Krastev: Did you see how easily you jumped from this individualized consumers to the people thinking one thing and elites thinking another. When you go back to this type of polarization, you can see it in the US in a positive way, for the health reform there is no "the people" - there are different people along a different divide, and this divide cannot be reduced to economic and income distinction.



Danger of symbolic politics

One of the problems of the crisis is the return of symbolic politics. Opposite of what many people believe: that the crisis is going to strengthen the left right divide, I believe that the crisis is going to strengthen symbolic politics: ethnic, nationalist, us versus them, even classical populism such as people versus the elite. It is not so easy to recreate the dividing line [between left and right] I don't believe it is undesirable but rather the opposite, but it is not so easy to make the division and one of the reasons is nationalization. Is there a left that stands for nationalization? This is a critical issue, as this was the diving line, left versus right,

when there was a major distinction. Talking about the church but not believing in god is practical - but it is good for conferences, I don't believe it is good for politics.

Wawrzyniec Smoczynski: Friends, government are the answers [to the question "whom do you turn to in case of a problem?"]- and the internet. Doesn't this give a huge blow to the notion that NGOs are the new intermediaries in participatory democracy?



Ivan Krastev: This kind of illusion that NGOs will compensate for mistrust in politicians, is based simply on the fact that NGOs don't like to see public perceptions about them. In Bulgaria the NGOs are more mistrusted than the political parties. This is an achievement, as there are more people believing that there are people living on the moon, than those who trust political parties. Trust in NGOs in Bulgaria is below 10 %. Why am I saying this? because we are starting from a kind of assumption that we are trusted because we have good intentions, because we are here to help people and so on. This is also very much based on the perception of the others. The difference between NGOs and the [political] parties is that because we don't go on election, we can live with this illusion as long as we want. There is never failure or real success in the NGO business because it is us who defines what is success and what is failure.



NGOs, new media and disillusion

This is very critical and has a lot to do with the misconception that NGOs are producing when it comes to internet the media and so on. We are here in a room with two hundred people and we create the illusion that there are hundreds of thousands watching us on the internet. I don't know how many people are watching us, they are not going to be more than 200, and if this is the case we are producing some kind of virtual public to which we talk and who we represent. We are also starting to be so much in love with different technologies and especially the internet that it is being used to compensate for our own problem and crisis of legitimacy. Let's give you some figures that you are not going to like, The Obama administration is also very interested in showing how the internet can help people participate in policy decision making. So they asked for proposals online and also asked people to vote on these proposals. The results were 44.000 proposals which were put to the Obama administration regarding what should be the main priorities of their administration. 1.5 million people voted on these proposals. What is the result? The priority number one that came up was the liberalization of marijuana. This is extremely important to realize, that in a certain way this part of virtual reality is creating different tricks in which we can appear much more representative than we are.

The basic problem is not simply about trust or mistrust, by the way people are now much more going to court than voting, they believe that suing the government is more effective when it comes to defending their personal rights, than cooperating with the government or voting. I do believe that all these practices should be taken seriously because probably after the bubble of Wall Street the next bubble could be on the ngo-street.

Wawrzyniec Smoczynski: There is an illusion that there is representation, at least in the NGO sector, but in general in our democracy is it the case that the debate is lacking or is it simply not needed because people don't feel the need to be represented? Is it just an idea that is anachronistic?



The new green and the difficulty to create real political movements

Milla Mineva: Difficult question. Let me start with a story of the newest Bulgarian party, the Greens. They were previously a very strong internet based movement without NGOs, well in fact they hated NGOs (however, actually used several of them to make their projects more efficient). In the end they decided to create a political party and go to elections. They were really very active, they acted as a grass roots party indeed and a lot of young people came out to vote for them. They didn't get into the parliament however, as it appeared that they could not organize people through internet. They were [beforehand] absolutely convinced that they do not need to represent anybody, that they are the civil society and that they will enter the parliament as themselves.



The most interesting part was that their political agenda was of course to make representative democracy useless, with referenda on every political question. This is the agenda of a lot of NGOs, who would like to make the political process by referendum [involving] people themselves, instead of [voting on] representatives of parties. I am not saying that the way [in which] parties represent people are nice, but I do say that we need to reinvent the idea of representativity. We have to reinvent political divides, to vote for platforms, and what we would like to see as a good society. The problem with such an idea is that we have no strive for a collective future or project for the whole society. No one wants to be active in something that is not individual, and this is a problem. We still need representation, but we don't want it.

Do we really want representation?

Wawrzyniec Smoczyński: So do we really want it?



Milla Mineva: No we don't, but I am sure we need it because without representation we cannot do anything. People tried a lot [of alternative ways] but didn't succeed - until now at least.

Wawrzyniec Smoczyński: That is why we are having such a good discussion. I am opening the floor now for questions and please feel free to answer and try to formulate your questions as directly as possible and precisely.



Participant 1: The major question I think needs to be discussed is what are we asking about, how do we formulate the questions? So I think we need to go beyond [an initial point] and start asking specific questions: works for what? How do we define basic terminological framework?

Participant 2: I think it simply reveals first the state of politics and democracy that we are in. Several authors rightly emphasize that politics has a specific evil and a specific rationality within it, the specific evil being it's instrumental and manipulative side and the rationality being the one we are hoping to see where representative and elected officials solve problems that we would like to, instead of ourselves [doing it]. The second [point is about] democracy. Democracy is something that is reinvented every day and does not come on a silver plate as many expected when communism disappeared. This is the beauty and the difficulty of it. Democracy is like us who are sitting here, we have complaints about democracy [means that] we are complaining about ourselves. I think that we live in a modern world where we expect others to do [something] for ourselves within the representative framework, and this is part of the conundrum we are facing. It was most clearly stated at the beginning of the 19th century by Benjamin Constant when he talked about the liberty of the ancients

and the liberty of the moderns. The liberty of the moderns is that we are allowed not to engage in politics to be virtuous citizens, while the liberty of the ancient world was that you were considered a virtuous citizen by engaging in politics. Today you can go and mend your garden and your fence, and leave others to do it, but as Constant says at the end of his essay if we all go to our gardens, politics will become manipulative, authoritarian and alienated from us citizens. I think we shouldn't despair, both politics and democracy has been around for more than 2000 years. We have had ups and downs, it is all about us engaging whether in civil society or in party politics. I think the discussion is revealing an attempt to find, in a foggy situation, a common way forward. I am convinced that hope will overbear anger and resignation.

What about pragmatic solutions?

Participant 3: It was very inspiring to hear what we should do, but maybe we can focus on what actually can do. The real problem is that over the last ten years NGOs in CEE, in my view, is at a loss, especially now when alerting is not an issue anymore. A lot of times it is advocacy and real in-house input that NGOs are asked to provide, and that's where they are failing. I think that many NGOs don't know how to go about it.

Milla Mineva: It is very important how we formulate the questions. There is a survey which I like a lot, it is "The Voice of the People". There the question was formed like this: "do you think that democracy is the best form of government, even though it has a lot of difficulties?" 79% of the people of the world said yes.



Time to leave institutions and start looking at experience

Ivan Krastev: Democracy does not work easily. I do also believe that democracy is the art of living with bearable dissatisfaction (it is not me who formulated it so nicely). For me the main difference I want to see, is that we have been talking for 20 years about institutions, about normality and basically imitating the way that institutions [elsewhere] function. It is high time to look at the experience of people living in democracies. The disappointment with democracy is important and when you say what about NGOs, probably the NGOs are not the most important vehicle? If there is a legacy that comes from the 1989 period, there was a time for self-reflective activism. There was a time for Kuron, Michnik, Havel and others, who took very seriously the change of the context and the constraints being there. It is not simply people speaking about values, they were much more pragmatic and practical than we are. I do believe that for 20 years, we have become very good at speaking about values and speaking about institutions. Probably we should try to re-contextualize where we stand and if NGOs are not something that is going to work - let's try something different



Wawrzyniec Smoczynski: Simon Delakorda, 3 questions from the net?

Simon Delakorda: To summarize: do you think that civil society in Europe should redefine its mission in the light of democratization process and start focusing on representativity of representative democracy? How can we talk about civil society as long as NGOs do not have links between them? What is the common identity of NGOs that can be communicated to the public so that they can perceive NGOs as civil society? Is there any chance of unity? Relying on European funds is [a problem, as] the message have to be accepted of the government who are granting the funds. Is there a risk that NGOs will become an appendix of the government?



No common objective

Aleksander Smolar: First of all I don't think we should formulate an objective for civil society. Civil society has no objective, this is the reality of interconnected people acting together in a spontaneous or organized way. [Individual] NGOs they should have objectives, but these NGOs are only a part of civil society. Our way of thinking has to be different. It is exactly Tocquevillian, [at this point] there wasn't a place for NGOs, they didn't exist at that time. The problem of interconnectedness, civil society is interconnected in a spontaneous way, and I would say that Europe is much more integrated on the level of civil society than on the political level today. This is a spontaneous process.



Instrumentalization and the EU

The third question is very interesting, that of European Union and instrumentalization of civil society. It is very interesting to watch the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, when they are writing about civil society they are writing in instrumental terms. How civil society can solve the problems of the developing world for example. That they are often more efficient e.g., which is ok, but [although] it is very well that NGOs are taking care of it, it also shows the danger they are in of becoming just cheaper subcontractors. The problem of interdependence of people [is that] there must be a certain tensions between independence and at the same time [someone?] executing very important positive role for the community, national or international.

Wawrzyniec Smoczyński: As a final note, I would like to come back to the initial question and ask who speaks for the citizen in 2009.



Slawomir Sierakowski: Of course the big capital. And reacting to what Ivan Krastev said, he wants to be realistic and we live in a world where god is dead, socialism is dead, and even as Foucault said, humans [humanism?] are dead. I am thinking if this realm of cynical reason is the end point of politics or a real starting point where you can reinvent values? Another answer could be that we still have some kind of structural problems, like ecological problems e.g. the danger of intellectual property - it may be that in some time, our communication will be a property of someone like Bill Gates. These are structural [problems] to which we will have to find a collective answer, we have to reinvent politics.



Clash of experiences


Ivan Krastev: They are not speaking they are singing these days, through YouTube. The basic problem is different, when we say that there are common problems and you are going back to the same things you were fighting. If you go to places like India or China, you are going to hear that all these environmental things are coming from the west and are just new ways of globalization and colonialization, trying to deprive the Indians and the Chinese of their right to development. I don't think we will have the clash of ideologies in the same way as before, but there will be the clash of frameworks and a clash of experiences. In this world the problem of who speaks for who is going to be very difficult, because there are going to be contending speakers all the time articulating different experiences.



A battlefield of representation

Milla Mineva: I can only agree with Ivan and as Rayna said in the beginning of this session, we have shifting consensuses and divisions. Shifting entities speaks for citizens in different moments, the problem is whether citizens recognize those speakers themselves, and this will be the new battlefield.





Harnessed and unharnessed energies - time for a new approach to NGOs?

To what extent has the NGO model fulfilled its intended mission – and what is the need and place for formally **registered associations** in the future? What about the uncharted territory of individual, ad-hoc and informal groups' energies as the driving force of the civil society?

Over the last two decades, NGOs have drawn their appeal from a series of features: predictability, institutional reaction, the possibility of a track record, responsibility, representativeness. The top-down approach (from donors and facilitators to grass-root NGOs) was arguably the best way of activating civil society, but was it the only one, and where do we go from here? **Professionalism** comes with maturity, but with maturity comes mannerism too. NGOs are at all larger risk of sliding from “know why” to “know how”, doing projects just because we know how to do it and to keep ourselves in business. Is there a need and a chance to **reconnect** CSOs to the people whose interest they claim to represent?

On civil society, citizenship and the role of civic organizations

Ioana Avadani (moderator): We know from school that a question well asked is half of a good answer. Our most important resource for this session is the people of this Forum. Do you agree?



Participant: for me civil society is the amount of people we could get to come here today – how many of them can we get to actively participate.

Ioana Avadani: How many people do you think we could invite here, how many people [from our societies] do participate? How many people do you feel support you in your activities? And how many people can participate in our activities?

Mike Edwards: Theoretically everyone, but in practice not everyone. I do think it is a bit naïve, perhaps unhelpful and certainly unnecessary to believe that pure universal unformed social energy will be enough to get us where we want to go, at some point you have to achieve some focus and direction. The problem is that it is going to be partial and exclusive to some extent, and not everyone can participate in everything all the time. I see NGOs simply as a support system for broad based social energy of the kind that we would all like to encourage, not something that takes over and dominates organic processes of people coming together and solving problems for themselves, but social energy, like all energies, needs support to be sustained and channeled in useful directions. NGOs are just resources for civil society and civil society is the totality of everyone getting involved as much as possible.



NGOs are a support system for social energy

Nilda Bullain: I think the expectation was that NGOs can help build civil society, and that is what is being questioned now, because when you look at the western societies we can see that when you have good citizens they can build good and effective NGOs, and the question for me is whether it works the other way around, whether good or effective NGOs can build good citizens? The question about NGOs and civil society comes back to the concept of citizenship culture, where citizenship is broader than a voter and a taxpayer. For me citizenship means taking responsibility for your own life, taking responsibility for what happens to you, the course of your life, for your decisions and it is not so much about altruism, solidarity and freedom although those can be part of it, but it is about being a citizens,



Can NGOs build good citizens?

Ioana Avadani: NGOs have been treated consistently as a work of love, as something we do because of the goodness of our hearts. Also linguistically in some parts of the region charity means giving away because you want to. Actually, however, what civil society means is to be representing yourself, participate in shaping up your own future.



P: Helping a German minority choir of Hungarian smaller towns – is that civil society?

Codru Vrabie: To me civil society is not a thing, and it is not a concept, but it is a process. For me civil society is a transmission belt that boils up or boils down



values from the masses up to the elite, and then from the elites down to the masses, and it helps all of us grow. [...] Organizations themselves simply pick up the transmission belt, issues from the masses and bring them to the elite that are making decisions.

Ioana Avadani: Are you aware that you are using a metaphor that was used under communist times for the trade unions, the transmission belt?



Codru Vrabie: Yes, but the trade unions are just as all civil society organizations the result of 2 fundamental freedoms: freedom of association and entrepreneurship, if you bring all of these things together what you get is a number of persons concerned with respect to public affairs who gather together to solve a problem. They represent and try to push their interest. Whether it is personal very private as in the case of trade unions and owners associations, or if it is more of a public altruistic as an organization that is fighting xenophobia for instance, or fighting for the rights of animals. What you need primarily is citizens, however the question is: what turns a person into a citizen? My very personal answer is frustration.



Civil society is a transmission belt

P: Slovak extremist nationalist groups are full of joy there is a lot of enthusiasm, and yet we feel that there is something which is not really civil society. On the other hand, we have business men, in this civic initiative around the protest against waste dump there were a lot of businessmen involved. There was a lot of small wine businesses, people who were from the community, who were not NGOs not organized anyhow but just they felt that their own interest is touched by the issue and they were involved. So it doesn't fit. What is really important I think is that it is a question of values, there is a list of values we feel which are civil and which are not, I think this is something we can all agree on.

Nilda Bullain: Civil society is not just about the process but it is about the values. Of course there is one view of civil society that says there is one good civil society and one bad civil society, so those who represent different kind of values than those we represent in this room are part of civil society just the same. The other thing is about frustration when I talk about this culture of citizenship, ok frustration can be the first step maybe, in other cases there is something else. What is important is the ability to taking that frustration into something constructive, where you take initiative, you take responsibility and you follow up. When people do that the first time and they are not successful, they unfortunately lose interest and motivation, and this is what I mean by saying that we don't really have this culture, if people try once and then fail, often they say ok it's not for me, I am not successful doing this,



Turning frustration into something constructive

On the past and imported models

Codru Vrabie: 20 years ago somebody decided that we were going to shift towards liberal democracy - that means someone made that decision that we are going to import another model. With that dog came the flees, which is the civil society model probably with the NGOs that go with it.



Civil society is the flees that comes with the dog of liberal democracy

P: I am from the Czech republic, in an organization running already for 15 years, and I don't feel that I am imported from anyone I believe that the majority of the NGOs in Czech Republic I feel that genuinely rooted in genuine com-



munities, and I think we articulate certain important issues, public interest as a minority but parties are as minority as we are, and we try to influence policy and sell our ideas and I really don't feel that I am imported, although some of the funds that we have are from the Soros foundation.

Ioana Avadani: To summarize, even if the model of NGOs may be imported, the need that underlies the organization is there, so you fill this model with basic local needs.



Nilda Bullain: I am also not happy with that whole assumption about imposition and imported models, because I don't believe there is such a thing as an organic natural development of a country. We live in a very complex world, development is extremely complex and the way political and economic and social systems develop have always in the whole history been affected by a lot of factors including foreign and so called outside factors. The way it is presented makes it look like everything that is coming from the outside is not good because it is not natural and everything that is coming from inside is good because it is natural, and that is so totally not true. Coming back to the question about whether we are different at all to an association of homeowners, I don't think we are so different at all, we are all part of civil society. The only difference is the interest we are trying to pursue. Pretty much this whole group has decided to trying to build civil society, we are trying to implant some values in our societies that are organically not there, but still we are from those societies and we are trying to change it from the inside and some of the donors are trying to do that from the outside. I think a lot of times this imposition issue comes from donors who are guilty because they are trying to impose something from the outside, or the guilt felt by people who have used that money but has not been very successful.



Imported or not - "foreign factors" has always shaped development

P: We are doing a pretty solid disservice to the civil society that was going on before communism, to say that this is all imported, as we are talking about it right now, is to say that civil society started in 1989. Which I think is paternally false. Before communism at least in our community there was a lot of both charity and philanthropy going on – during communism there was activism there was change there was people associated, I think this is something worth considering. Imports happen in terms of some frameworks, but at that point what choice was there, if we do swallow wholesale free market economies and say democracy is the way to go, we got to name the flees that came with the dog. I am not saying I love what happened but I am just saying that this should not be left out of the discussion.

Civil society didn't start in 1989

Challenges and opportunities for the future

P: The Civil Society Forum managed to provoke my thoughts and hopefully everybody else's. [One of the challenges according to me] is a battle between these different types of organizations. The idea of being imported is actually important because it creates disturbances and challenges to us as a sector which cannot unite. Ivan Krastev mentioned that NGOs may be the next bubble, what I believe can be done on a local level to prevent that bubble from bursting, is to try to work in more partnerships with each other, and not with each other alone, but also in partnerships with all of the community. not to confirm the idea that NGOs are not being able to work collectively because of us [who work in them]

being too much individuals.

The myth of representativity

Mike Edwards: I wanted to comment on another myth – and that is the myth of representation being so important to the NGO world. It's become almost a fixation and unfortunately it has become a big stick, for us to beat ourselves with or for others to beat us with. In a way which is quite dangerous or can be quite dangerous to the purposes we are trying to pursue, certainly in the United States this is true, with people now being excluded from public debate because they are not "representative". Most NGOs just claim to be useful in supporting the struggles of others, and that should be the test to which they are held to account.



Ioana Avadani: Putting us in the position to ask ourselves, what kind of job do we deliver? - is very important.



Mike Edwards: People will always organize around their passions, what they enjoy, what angers them and what frustrates them, not because an NGO, a foundation or a donor is doing something. People always come together to undertake collective action to achieve purposes that motivate them. However NGOs are important to these citizen projects, it's not like they are squeezing out the life blood of real citizen action. They can be a connective tissue and a support system for civic engagement that otherwise wouldn't be so strong. You need ideas, you need films being made, you need advocacy, you need technical support you need financing in certain ways, those are all very practical ways in which NGOs can be central and useful to releasing and helping to channel that joyful self expression of citizen action. They don't replace it, they simply complement and support it. And yes, if we have lost that sense of joy and love and anger in our work, then we have lost the most important generative principle of a civil society worthy of the name.

It happens around passions



Ioana Avadani: It is very interesting to see how much reserves for celebration we have, even very thorny issues such as democracy in Belarus was celebrated by concerts and music, I think somehow we feel oppressed by our own seriousness, we feel limited by our own desire to be institutional and we somehow burn ourselves out forgetting about what actually motivates us this kind of energy.



Nilda Bullain: the discussion about joy reminded me about 2 weeks ago when we had a study tour group where we were suppose to show NGOs from Uzbekistan how NGOs work in Hungary. We organized the study tour, they went to visit all types of NGOs, from big national advocacy organizations who don't accept money from the government, to social service NGOs who are financed with government contracts, small labor groups etc. When we had the last day debriefing I had a déjà vu, because what I saw in their eyes and the words they used to express their feelings, were exactly the way I felt twenty years ago when I was in a similar study tour in the United States, maybe it was around 1993. Back then I saw what is possible and the breath and richness of civil society and organizations which were active – and now 16 years on I can say it is possible in my country. I lived to see that, it is not a wish anymore. Honestly here we are after 20 years – and I have a little bit of a feeling that we are doing the East European thing, the complaints, the veining, focusing on all the problems. I think we have gone a long way.

We have come a long way!



Codru Vrabie: If people find a value that is worth promoting and they are very concerned about, and they have trust in their own ability that they can do something, then they also have the enthusiasm to go all the way and get it done. That feeling of actually getting the work done, doing something that can change the world around you in a way that will bring you peace of mind and it is all about the people that get the job done. NGOs are just an instrument that will help us to get some money or help us get connected, but it is the individuals and their own concern that actually make this whole thing roll. And if you need funds – you have access to it, you just have to find the people who are either the concerned as you are or enthusiast as you are.



P: In my country, Ukraine, NGOs which protect general democratic values, not concrete needs as such are being funded from foreign money, this other activism is based on the voluntary base.

**A diverse
eco system**

Mike Edwards: My conclusion is that civil society is an eco system, just like a natural eco-system where you have many different life forms. Civil society is strong and healthy, not when all organizations are or do the same things or when we all speak with the same voice (because that is never going to happen) but where there is real diversity and where the connections are strong between different life forms. NGOs are an important life form in that ecosystem and I would hate for us to forget that and not make the most of it.



Nilda Bullain: I would like to pose a warning against the participation fetish, because I think that it is a bit dangerous to simplify the discussion from civil society through NGOs to civil society through participation, there is a lot of question about what we participate in and how etc, the issue is more complex.



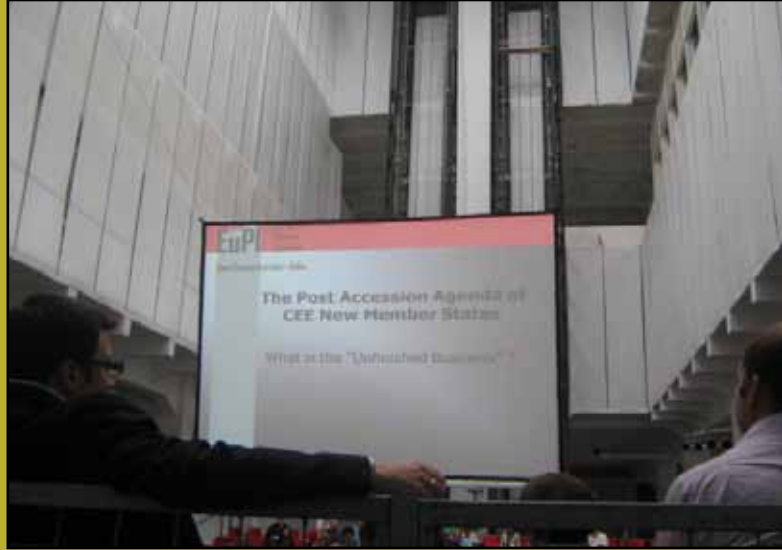
Codru Vrabie: If you simply have something to say and do, it is unharnessed energy from a civic group of some sort, - and you don't feel you need an NGOs, then don't create one.

Ioana Avadani: Let's keep in mind that it is the people that are the main fundament. Civil society, NGOs, non-NGOs, harnessed or unharnessed energies, actually what we are talking about is people and the way they promote, defend or identify their interests. And I think as long as we have people in mind, the values will follow and the organizational form will just happen.



What is the agenda after EU accession and what may be the response to the crisis?

To discuss civil society present and future, there is a need to take a look at the broader political and economic context within which civil society actors operate. 2 variables shaping the Central and Eastern European societies in 2009 are the post-EU-accession blues and the economic crisis.



Open Society Institute - Sofia has produced comparative policy research carried out in ten post-communist countries, formulating a couple of open questions: What is the next five years' policy agenda for the ten new member states? Is the transition over and the EU accession agenda fully accomplished - or there is still "unfinished business" to be done? Full report Some major points presented by [Assya Kavrakova](#):

I. The findings

- Five years, or two and a half, in the case of Bulgaria and Romania, after accession of 10 Central and Eastern European States to the EU, the process of transition of these countries is still not completed. CEE states continue to deal with the "unfinished business" of their transition agenda in the context of EU membership and the global economic and financial crises.
- The "unfinished business" in these countries concern mainly the policy areas of national competence: political systems, social, educational, health reforms and sustainable economic development, which have been relatively neglected by decision-makers in the pre-accession period for the sake of the specific accession agenda.
- The EU accession agenda did not coincide with the transition agenda, the latter being much larger. Moreover, part of the "unfinished" transition agenda nowadays has been the result of the constant shift of focus of reforms towards the requirements of the European accession.
- The biggest challenges in the post accession period concern the political system, characterized by fragmentation of existing political parties and appearance and disappearance of new ones, temptation to employ populism and nationalism as well as low and diminishing level of citizens' trust in the institutions of representative democracy.
- Deficiencies in the political domain have predetermined a framework where fragmented political parties with short-term political success are unable to commit to long-term and consistent reforms in the policy spheres that are of crucial importance for the citizens e.g. health, education, social protection and social inclusion, thus leaving those structural reforms largely incomplete.

II. The challenges

- The economic and financial crisis is posing additional challenges, there is a risk that catching-up will be reversed in most of the countries due to economic slowdown and currency depreciation. The crisis has exposed the vulnerability of public finances and is challenging the sustainability of economic development, diminishing some of the gains that accession has contributed to the economic convergence of the new member states with the old ones.
- Lack of progress in areas of citizens' concern might further increase the mistrust in the political establishments causing already fragile political systems to become increasingly vulnerable.
- The membership leverage has so far had limited impact on the "unfinished business" of the transition agenda during the post accession period. In the political domain, EU safeguards against extremism in politics are achieved through exercising peer pressure and implementing European policies, but there is no EU leverage specifically designed to remedy political shortcomings.

- In the uncompleted spheres of reform such as health, education, social protection and pensions the membership leverage – to the extent that it exists – is insignificant and ineffective as these are entirely national competences.

III. The way ahead

- The one potentially effective membership leverage on the new member states is the Euro area accession, as most countries are willing to do necessary efforts in order to qualify for the Euro. The requirements for adopting the Euro provide for prudent macroeconomic policies thus contributing to the sustainability of public finances. Meanwhile, the prospects for introducing the Euro in eight of the new EU members of CEE are still unclear and this limits the impact. Determining clear criteria for European Exchange Rate Mechanism II membership or alternatively allowing automatic entry for all new member states and then careful monitoring for fulfillment of the Maastricht criteria will increase its effectiveness in safeguarding public finances during the crises.
- A successful completion of the “unfinished business” of the transition agenda in the ten new member states would NMS require ensuring stable political systems with mature political parties, conducting and accomplishing long-term structural reforms in the policy spheres of citizens' concern - social, healthcare and educational fields - assuring functioning institutions of representative democracy that are trusted by the citizens, creating sustainable long-term economic development and safeguarding public finances.
- Unlike in the pre-accession period, when the EU played a major role in determining the development in CEE through the imposing the accession agenda, after accession it is up to each country to develop its own road map for accomplishing the transition agenda. This will very much depend upon the capacity of national stakeholders to administer reforms from the driver's seat. As this capacity differs from country to country, its development on a national level will determine the winners from the laggards in the CEE region in middle-term prospective.



The economic think-tank INEKO was invited to the Civil Society Forum to reflect on the current economic crisis and how this may affect the work of CEE civil society. Some points made by **Peter Golias**:



How may the current economic change the environment in which civil society works:

1. *Economical and societal developments:*

- Falling foreign demand and industrial production
- Outflow of Foreign Direct Investments
- Falling exchange rates, more expensive loans in foreign currency (Hungary)
- Growing unemployment and social tensions
- Growing public finance deficit, tendency to hide public debt (PPP projects)

2. *Political developments:*

Growing popularity of extremists threatens democracy, populists who do not solve problems because it is difficult and/or unpopular to implement reforms try to escape into extremism. Extremist notions leads to social tensions and signs of public unrest and xenophobia: e.g. recent attacks on the Roma minority in Hungary and Czech Republic, anti-Roma protests in Slovakia, growing tension between Hungary and Slovakia etc.

3. *Financial developments:*

Decreasing support from local private sponsors who face falling profits and cut down their support for the civil society

How should civil society react? What are the challenges highlighted by the crisis?

1. Economy and society: Identifying real problems and promoting real solutions

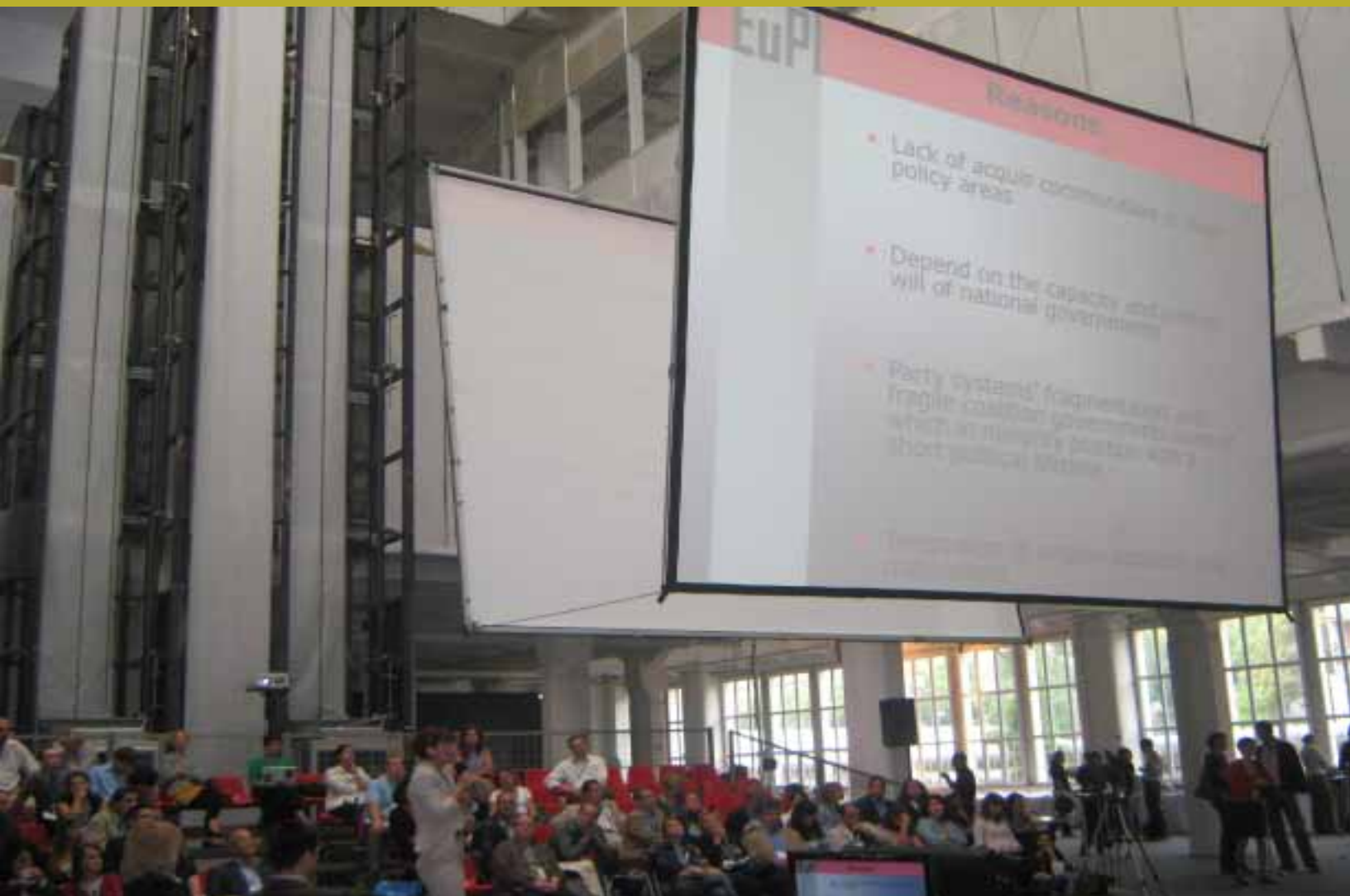
- A. Short-term measures – consolidation of public finances, sustaining countries' competitiveness, help to vulnerable people (unemployed, disadvantaged, poor, etc.)
- B. Long-term structural reforms – sustainability of public finances, improving business environment, privatization, transparency, pensions, health, education, etc.

2. Politics: Fight against populism and extremism, e.g. through:

- A. Public education
- B. Monitoring promises and their fulfillment, explaining whether promises are good or bad
- C. Fact-checking of arguments presented in media (facts work better than experts who can be attacked by populists)
- D. Showing (potential) brutal impact of extremism on innocent people, etc.

3. Sponsors:

- A. Focusing on non-private funding (i.e. government, EU, etc.)
- B. Focusing on low-cost projects dealing with immediate (short-term) problems
- C. Using in-kind support (such as voluntary work, free expert capacity of local private firms and/or municipalities)





Inspiring active citizens

What triggers or blocks the involvement of individual citizens in public life, how can civil society activists reach out and **mobilize others**? Do we rely on the involvement of the active, or do we work to **engage passive citizens** - and how can this be done effectively? **Volunteerism** is a fundamental aspect of civil society, however getting it to work is tricky in today's rapidly changing societies.

Moderator Christina Rigman (Mod): We are talking about activating citizens and our main question is: Is civic activism shrinking or reshaping? After we think we know almost everything we can about the present we will take a look to the future: what can we do as of now to influence how things will look in 20 years time? What are we doing about this? (By "WE" meaning civil society organizations but also "US" as individuals.) What motivates people to participate?



When you feel the issue or feel you can make a difference you are more likely to act

Participant (P): I'm not sure why shrinking and reshaping are the only options, what about increasing? Maybe, it's just the Hungarian experience but there is this thing called critical mass in Hungary that is getting bigger every year. 50,000 bikers is what they claimed participated in one protest. To look at answer what motivates people to participate, in the case of critical mass which is a bike protest; it's just that people feel the issue. There are enough people who are biking who feel the issue around the biking. So, when an issue is close to you, you are more likely to take action. When you feel you can make a difference, you are more likely to take action. There is also the whole "party" attitude. Also, I believe, the LGBT protest, the gay-pride protest in Budapest, is getting stronger.

P: I would support reshaping, too, but actually I would support them both – shrinking and reshaping, both are happening. The critical mass is a very good example it's part of the reshaping because it is a very simple and clear issue, which is able to gather many people and take those people out onto the streets - even those who wouldn't have done it before. It also manages to bring people who were interested before but who have had disappointments. It's good because the reshaping is that many people who define politics according to its bad reputation, might go into activities which are not directly defined as political, critical mass is also political but not in the same way. For example, anti-globalization movements around the turn of 2000, they were expanding, I think there's some energy.

Mod: OK, so we have supporters for increasing and reshaping.

P: When you say shrinking or reshaping it's presumably in comparison to something else, some national ideal high point of civic activism in the region that is now receding? So, what is the high point notionally, is there one?

Mod: This is a good question for scholars, there has been a discussion in the theoretical field that there isn't a particular amount of participation that does good or bad for democracy, it's just the participation in itself that is needed. I don't think we have a reference point, it's just based on our own feeling and it is connected to the future, do we think it will reshape or shrink within the next 15 to 20 years?

Civil society is not shrinking

P: [From academic research] I'll tell you what is shrinking is people participating in elections and in the political process, but this is not civil society and civil society is not shrinking at all. What are shrinking are protests, the willingness of people to participate in public actions. If we want a starting point, if we compare to socialist period, then it's expanding, it's really reshaping as well as expanding. If we think of it as political activity, then it is shrinking, so it's a matter of perspective.

P: For me, the reference point would be when the changes began in the early

A lost battle to motivate people?

1990s, when you could see more people taking to the streets and demonstrating about everything: wanting change, wanting new governments, wanting new social agendas etc. This is where I suppose Americans and other Westerners, saw a little bit of sparkle in our region and said: "Well, this is where democracy can be grown from scratch". Whether they were right or wrong, I don't know, but currently, I think there's a very low level of active participation at the grassroots level. When you look at local organizations in small places, they're really struggling to motivate people to do anything, I don't know what the reason is. One of the reasons could be, that in the beginning (again in the 1990s) there was money given to NGOs to activate people, to keep them going and get them involved. Now big donors are moving away and people are not seeing the real motif to get involved. The real challenge would be for local NGOs to actually prove to people around them, to their constituencies, that there's a cause to fight for. Increasingly that looks like a lost battle. Perhaps, we should talk to donors about rethinking their strategies if donors are actually shaping agendas, if they still can do it, they should put their cards on activating people, local people.

SMS charity and Facebook groups

P: I totally agree that the reference point has to be the beginning of the changes, the so called velvet revolution, when people hoped that there would be enormous change. So, they went onto the squares, fighting for a different way of life, they had a common cause. Now we are facing a totally different situation, I would label it reshaping, not shrinking because it's different, we are facing the appearance of small, diversified groups, which have specific interests and defend very specific causes. I am afraid that we are still obsessed with these normative concepts of what civic action should be, enormous protests, common political good and so on. Now we are facing something different - a normalization of civic activities. For instance, recent surveys about the SMS charity in Bulgaria show that people are just give money by sending SMS to different causes. It's a civic activity but it doesn't fit our frame. Also, the causes we see on the Facebook, there are a lot of people gathering there and discussing. They debate on their own, probably in small forums and not with publicly shared values but they debate! This is very important because they share engagement. I think that we shall more and more observe this appearance of small groups using different ways of expressing civic acts, and we should be sensitive towards them not just putting them aside from the point of view of NGO activism or large political protests.

Not numbers results

P: As a grantmaker organization representative, I could maybe answer your position. We are looking at this civic activism, not by amount of initiatives that appear, but by the result it creates. That's the most important thing I guess for a grantmaker. In Lithuania, I just can see what's happening, there are different NGOs, different causes, different informal groups who have their own small interest groups and fight for their own causes. This diversity is very good but the final result is the most important, and only a few of them are really constructive and productive. When you have restrictions, then you have protests because someone wants to be free. And now that we have this democracy and we are free to express ourselves, now what? What can we do to inspire people to really be constructive and oriented towards the results? Not only supporting as many as we can but actually less but stronger initiatives.

P: Two words like hope and frustration can be two motivations of why people

Signs of
people losing
hope

are active. What I see in the area where I work is that because of the actions of the political parties, many people don't have this kind of hope. Last week, for example, the mayor of our neighborhood resigned, we have a local newspaper and we went on to the street and asked people: "OK, now we will have new elections because the mayor resigned, what do you want from the next mayor? What do you think is the most important issue that the next mayor has to work with?" And people said they don't want to answer, they are not interested and they don't care anymore because the next person, whoever it will be, will just steal money and do nothing. So, they don't even want to touch on this political participation agenda.

Mod: we should try to focus more on the other kinds of participation.

P: What is reshaping is not the amount of activism, but the reasons leading to activism. I think participation can be a result either of enthusiasm or of frustration. In the early 1990s one could build activism on people's enthusiasm and inspire people to go to vote or to research their public officials, now probably one can rather build activism on people's frustrations. As a result, activism is going more towards either keeping public officials accountable or to other less political areas such as environmental causes, or like the example of the movement started by people using bicycles.

No shortage
of volunteers

P: So, what are we doing about this? My impression is that there is no shortage of people who want to volunteer, we have more people than we can manage ourselves, who want to volunteer in our region. I remember from my previous position when I was working with human rights, we advertised a volunteer position making clear that we wanted someone to work for free and do press officer work for us. We had 50 applicants - 50 people who wanted to volunteer, it might have been because they were motivated by different things: some people may have wanted it on their CVs etc - but there are more than enough people out there who want to volunteer. So, do we know how to handle volunteers? We should also make a distinction between volunteering and getting 5000 people out on the street, that is not so easy at all, but trying to find volunteers is not difficult.

More peer
drive, less
leaders

P: Compared to the 1990s; today's civic activism is a lot more peer driven and there are not so many formal leaders as it used to be in the 90s. This explains also the greater diversity of causes because virtually everyone can become the leader of a cause and to start an own group on Facebook, and afterwards go into the streets if the situation requires such action. We observe this in many different spheres, at least in Bulgaria, starting from ecology and going to gay and lesbian movements etc. We observe a lot of action with people who get together for a cause which is close to them, not necessarily led by some political or formal NGO leader, but just people with common interests. The leaders are somehow generated by the process and that's why I would call it a peer driven process. I wouldn't say it's outside of politics, as Milla mentioned, because the personal is political as we know. It's probably outside of the political parties' actions but it's not outside of politics.

P: We can't say that we are not talking about politics and political action, it may not be about voting, but it's actually political participation. If you send a letter, or an e-mail, or make a call, or join a cause directed at politics - actually



also the environmental topics are political just like all the others. The question is, how to get this activism because there is trend of people saying: "Yeah, we are not interested, the politics are not doing anything anyway so why sign a card, there is no use." - how can we actually activate citizens to take this step to get this mass of activists? Maybe it's our communication that is wrong, but I don't see a solution.

P: An important note to highlight the importance of technology, relatively recently even during the American presidential elections and

the elections in Moldova, technology has been playing an extremely important role in motivating and reaching out to citizens. It's free, easy to use and it's reshaping how citizens and become more active in their local communities. I was tempted to respond to whether or not the donors can impose strategic priorities and begin to think strategically where they want their funding to go - I'm a firm believer that it's important to leave it up to the indigenous organizations to identify where their priorities are, it would be our mistake to think that we know the local scenery and the local environment better than they do.

Technology helps outreach

P: There are different dimensions according to which one can understand different forms of civic action or volunteering, and one is distinguishing between bonding and bridging volunteering. Bonding volunteering is when your main motivation is to help people of your own social group, and bridging volunteering is when your main motivation is to help people beyond your own social group, both of which are valid and good. Another one mentioned is the difference between the frustration motivation and the enthusiasm motivation which I think, looking back over the last 20 years, is quite important. Perhaps the frustration motivation began in 1998 or something, or '99, and in 1990 a more enthusiasm motivation, perhaps in '91, '92. A third dimension perhaps more important than all of those, is the difference between the perceived immediate need and the kind of timeless motivation because you've always done it, a kind of transcendent motivation. If you're trying just to activate people hoping that they will right now perceive the need which you see as absolutely pressing, maybe people just don't see it like that. You can look e.g. reactions to Chernobyl in particular in Western Europe, people perceived it to be a massive pressing disaster, or climate change nowadays. Certainly people don't do it for fun, they get involved because they see it as being an enormous pressing need. If you're trying to motivate volunteers or activists, it may be useful to think along these three dimensions, which are the individual people you're trying to appeal to, where are they standing right now? Then there's the point of how are you trying to attract people, it's something that can help overcome some-

Bonding volunteering or bridging volunteering?

thing that is frustrating to them, or because it's kind of fun to be part of?

P: In terms of motivating people, to act, to be active, I would like to give a specific example from our experience as an organization: one thing that motivates people to act is to be sure that their voice is heard and it might really change something.

Success is the best PR

P: Whenever we manage to bring successful stories in front of people, this builds some trust in their power to bring about change. It worked also for the group that becomes the success story, because they wanted to do more. I think, this is a good approach.

First priority is to get people onboard

P: In the Bulgarian context I do think that the first step should be about engaging people not about activating them. Once you have people on board, with their thinking, with their readiness, with their motivation, then it is not that difficult to trigger them into doing something, trigger them into action. I think engaging people is incredibly difficult, however, especially now when there aren't many programs which encourage civic education. This is difficult because there is this understanding both by external donors and by our own government, that we have passed this phase where we talk about democracy and about citizens' participation. No, we haven't, we're still there. We're not ready to take that second step, and try to solve bigger problems in our society such as education, health, whatever. I think that civil society is not ready to make that big step because before we can do that we need to motivate people, we need to engage them and I think this is where our priorities should be.

Corruption is flowering

P: In Romania about two years ago, there was a big debate about redirecting 2% of the income taxes, to associations and NGOs. Many people, even my mother, couldn't see the advantage of this simple action; she couldn't understand why does she have to do this? I agree with you, people don't understand why they have to be active and why they have to help others and they are still thinking, Easterners especially, where corruption flowers, that everybody is stealing.

Have we lost the culture of conversation?

P: About culture of citizenship and talking about engagement I think we should go deeper than that. I think we've lost a culture of conversation. I'm listening to all of you and I'm sort of an outsider to civil society, to be engaged it has to be about a question that matters to these people. You were talking about Barack Obama, the power of his technology almost disappeared when he became president. What about sustainability of engagement, it is very nice to have a conversation and people are getting very excited about something but in three months if there is nothing, the energy is not there anymore. His great challenge is whether he can keep people involved. The engagement issue is super important but you also have to create spaces in which engagement can happen. If you're going to have a conversation, you have to listen very carefully to the people with whom you are having the conversation and decide who should be in that room strategically so that the conversation is diverse.

P: There is an apathy that has happened over the past 15 years, there was some engagement and energy but then things didn't happen the way people were hoping and that's what we are facing now. I was looking at the session title (mission possible) and my first question was "What mission?" If we are not

Activism for what?

able to say what our goal is in 10 years and look at what we want from this activism - how are we going activate people? We will never be able to activate anybody, if people don't have an idea of where it is we are going - it is activism for what? Just for the sake of activism? The goal is to get to the point where we don't have to do this. We have to start from: How do we get there?" "How do we activate ourselves and people around us to get to where we want to be?"

The problem is that people dont think they can achieve something

P: I don't think that people do not feel engaged; the problem is that they do not believe that they can achieve something - so the point is whether our message will be heard. The problem with these small groups on Facebook or others discussing and debating their own needs and issues is that they don't know to whom to address their message and they do not believe that they should get an answer. Our problem is how to push the institutions to answer them. I don't believe it's a matter only of educating people, of course it's important pushing,



but this activating and engaging them for me is like the communists putting consciousness in the heads of the poor masses. I hate this discourse. We could try, everyone of us who feels engaged in some cause to push institutional reform, when there is a petition message even of Facebook, the institution to which it is addressed should answer. It's a matter of institutional reform and it's a matter of institutionalizing a specific mechanism of e-government and e-democracy, because this is the future, these debates on the internet.

Too pushy? Missing the goal?

P: Two things: the first one is results and the other one is trust. I would say that our society as a whole and also us as civil society have come to a stage where we are also results oriented: we have to do this in the next half a year because the donor, partner or the grant says it; we have to rise 15% of the civic engagement until year 2009 e.g. Because of that we are rushing and trying to achieve the goal and the result - that we actually miss it. Because if you go to the basic human nature level, I think that people feel when you want to push them into something and this is why your mother may have said: "Why should I give this 2%?" because she might have felt that civil society is pushing her "Give us money and we will do something with it!". I think this is where the trust comes in, the human trust. I would say that civil society would be more successful if we would set a goal and try to achieve it in the long term. If you're doing something long term, people notice you and you can acquire more trust from people. If you're doing something for 6 months, you're just getting the PR's message out and

the project is over. We should come back to our roots, become more human and do long term projects and smaller projects. As a media (institution) we observe civil society and everybody wants to change the world. Why wouldn't you change your neighborhood and do it long term?

What do we do with people coming to our organization wishing to get involved?

Mod: I picked up a few points about empowerment and results, which I think are important considerations. What is the result of the participation? Because the result has a very high motivating power. If people see the result they would feel more empowered to participate and to sustain the participation. How do we as civil society organizations make the results known and use them to motivate people to come back and involve themselves again? Then about capacity, there are many people who want to volunteer, but what do we do with them if they come to our organization? We have to think of a solution, either to empower people to organize themselves or to have better collaboration with institutions which can take part of the participation that we cannot manage. We have to do something about it. Then the pressing needs and the long term, as you were saying. I mean that the discussion about global warming has been going on for a long time, but it was just picked up by people and became a motivating factor and turned into a pressing need when we saw that things are really changing. Maybe we have to present things in such a way that people will understand that this will become a pressing need, even if it just seems like a scholarly conclusion of some article at this point. Then education, which is very important, it may be that instead of putting all our efforts into getting people to participate, we can put our efforts in getting the proper education for people. Everything is connected to us and what we can do about it.

P: I have a question: how many of the people in this room ask their audience that they're trying to engage what they want to talk about? How many use audience research to determine what you're going to be doing with your time?

P: In Lithuania we have only few initiatives by NGOs who are doing this civic society education and discussions for pupils in schools which are very important. For the future generation my personal opinion is that the first gun against all the problems is education. Nazism, low civic engagement or participation is all lack of education, and when people realize what impact it can have they can think and just act. Otherwise brainwashing and convincing them, affecting their opinions is not effective. The person has to come up with it by him or herself so education is really very important.

If is powerful when we students make it ourselves

P: We are students and we make this event for students where we talk about freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of media and so on. We invite people that we think are important to share their opinions and talk with the students and after these meetings people from the public tell us: "Yeah, it was very good, I learnt a lot and I think it is very beautiful that you do it here". These people came the next year and expect from us more and more and they feel engaged. I think that when we students make this, not only the institutions or the Ministry of Education, it is maybe more powerful. We are the same as them and we can see the hope they have.

P: It is very important how we organize this education because now in Bulgaria, for example, there are programs for civic education in schools which are officially implemented. When we developed our last project related to civic edu-

Reshaping the questions

cation we realized that in all of the cases some people usually from the Ministry of Education, said: "People in schools have to study this or that in order to be good citizens, for example you have to know how the European Union works". We went to the children at school and just asked them: "What do you want to know about the society?" and simply the answer was: "What is this institution for, and how does it work for me personally?". When we reshaped the question we realized that there is no need to activate people, they're active, we didn't need to go and push them to participate in this or that but just reshaping the question made them active. There should be civic education, but we have to be clear that it shouldn't be the old way of: "let's make a test and check this and that", it doesn't work and it's contra productive.

Self-confidence

P: I think one of the elements of education is not just the subject, but to give self-confidence in any kind of activity. I would also be careful with this myth that only educated people can be very good citizens and defining what is good or bad. It's not quite that easy, for example in Hungary there is this right-wing party which just got into the European Parliament, and one of their supporters is an organization of medical doctors, which shows that well-educated people are supporting an extreme-right party.

P: My point was not that only educated people can be good citizens, but my point was when you know then you can do something with your knowledge.

Learning by doing

P: An educational psychologist says that ways to really learn for long time are experimental and learning by doing. Just teaching people in classrooms about what civil society is won't have any kind of long term impact at all, if they don't experience the values of civil society. So, it should be learning by doing, active participation.

Mod: How will civic activism look in the next 15 to 20 years? Will it be just as it is now, or will it be different? How will it be different, will people participate more in e-governance and use more technology or will they do it the traditional way? And where are we, the civil society organizations?

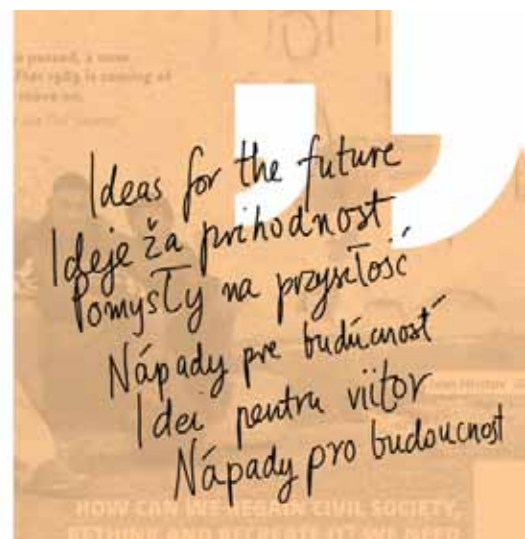
The role of civil society is the facilitator

P: I looked at the questions and I was thinking what I'd like to see and what civil society's role would be to make that happen. For me civic activism is people engaging in their everyday life and making a difference, basically empowered to make a difference in their own communities. The role of civil society in that change would be to be a facilitator in an empowering role. I would see civil society helping the communities get to this stage where there is this participatory democracy happening in their society and facilitating the process that's where I'd like to see us in 20 years.

P: I think NGOs should also work with the public institutions to be sure that they are open for citizens' participation.

P: The point is how to get there in the future, because the active citizens you al-

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ready have, the volunteers, the people who are coming already, it's just about keeping the relationship. The problem is that if we want participatory democracy, then how to make it closer to the mainstream mass? We're trying different things but it is still not working ideally.

P: Let's not dream about the future, let's think about how it will really be because it's very tempting to say: "everybody will be happy and participate" but let's try to keep it real, ok?

Institutions guarantee democratic principles

P: Going back to reality, it won't be so easy getting rid of public institutions, we shouldn't forget that together with groups which are self-organizing for common good, there are other groups which are also self-organizing very effectively but for some other causes e.g. extremist, nationalist, radical groups. They exist today and they show us how effective they can be when they want to oppose something. I think these groups will not disappear in the future when education increases and civic education is more effective, unfortunately. The question would be how to balance and counterbalance their action, and this is the continuous role of institutions as a guarantee of the democratic principles in society. In the future I expect even greater diversification of civic activists, having in mind that they will be both positively-minded groups and negatively-minded or groups which are defending extremist causes which we don't consider part of a good society, but they are eventually part of democracy.

Massive splits and tensions inside what we call civil society

P: I think it's a very good point, sometimes you can't predict the future because it means so much shaping by all kinds of things that we have no control over, whether they are environmental problems, political or geopolitical changes. And what is getting to us right now is climate change and the need to get more energy from alternative energy sources. It's happening already, grass-roots citizens' movements are making a major road block on the way to renewable energy by blocking these kinds of things [wind farms and lower tech energy sourcing in local communities]. I think you're too simplistic by saying the good civil society and the bad civil society, I can see a very high possibility of massive splits and tensions inside what we call civil society.

P: A very important role of the civil society and NGOs is to control the mentioned institutional reform, for example, in Poland we do have quite good law that doesn't seem to work and it's really important especially on the local level. It's obvious that participation is the future, but we need change and evolution of the institutions to be sure that the people and institutions do have the tools to make it right and that they can use it.

Are we setting a good example?

P: I believe that civil society needs to stand up and speak their message strong and firmly; we should make a stand as opinion makers and leaders and do it in a charismatic way. Our NGO function as a form of media, and what happens when we take the camera to NGOs asking "Say what you have to say!" - they are afraid! How can we support active citizenship and expect for people to educate themselves in this area if we are not an example for them? We have to become opinion makers and charismatically address the people.

P: Young people need examples, not just ideas and that's what I would like to see in civil society, not just nice ideas but actually building something. I'm working in an environmental NGO, we have fantastic protests, strong lobby etc,

but, for example, 30,000 persons in Budapest could start to build a bicycle road themselves, not just asking for it. We have to start not just spreading the ideas, but really to build something.

We need people - not just through consulting them, but allowing them to be part of decision-making

P: In relation to your question: "What could we be doing in 20 years time or hopefully less?" I think, and this is a slightly controversial point, that NGOs and the third sector more generally, should be professionalizing itself more than it is doing it now. The reason for this is that more and more it is getting in contact with officials, governments, with people who steer the legal apparatus, the professional apparatus etc. These people come up with arguments that are well-thought out, even scholarly at times, and if you don't have the expertise in the third sector you are very weak, you don't have the tooth to respond to at that level. Having more professionals in NGOs I think is a good step forward. It doesn't mean that ordinary citizens don't have a role in NGOs, on the contrary, but we're talking about different levels of communication. The other thing is the need to involve communities and ordinary citizens in NGOs more than what we're doing now, it may sound banal but participation is the key word. Finding the tools to get people into the structure of NGOs, allowing them in, not only listening to them in a sort of consultation, but allowing them to take a real stake in what we're doing, to be part of the decision-making process and of the action. Another key word is partnerships understood in very broad terms, you could think of coalitions and grouping together more informally, but the more involved in partnership structures non-governmental organizations become, the more powerful they will be. And I'm meaning trying to reach out to different fields of expertise. We should listen to each other, understand what everybody does, get together, act together. Finally on the donor's role, I take your point that donors should be flexible and allow the NGOs to determine their agendas, but bear in mind that there are other donors - the governments - that are pushing the sector into something that they don't want to do. Unless there is this other side where the civic side of NGOs is encouraged, they will all start doing social work and what is determined by the EU and lose sight of what they can do otherwise.

Support each other before expecting others to join

P: If we start talking about donors, I think NGOs have to create the program and then looking for donors who fund the things that we are doing, not the opposite way. About professionalization it is also about credibility. In the future the connection among NGOs has to grow closer, and we have to support each other first among ourselves, then we can expect others to join in. If we don't understand the problems other NGOs are addressing, how do we expect some completely different people to understand it and get involved?

Being clear to donors

P: I'm struggling with this one-kind-of-side-fits-all conversation. Just to be very clear, when we are talking about whatever future action, we need to be specific because in each country it is going to be very, very different. The region is so diverse, in one country NGOs have no problem to you give a clear account to media and in another country they have a problem to be open to media and so on. There has to be a very engaged discussion from both sides and not being afraid to push donors, it is possible to tell them: "No, this is not what we need to be doing". The more civil society has that ownership of what needs to be done, the more we can reshape donor agendas.

P: I'm really afraid of seeing the third sector as professionals, professional citizens

English has become the main capital of being an active citizen

is the most terrible thing I can imagine for the future and I hope that the third sector will become more citizen than professional and I hope they will have less connection with each other, but more connections with their communities. The first NGOs [in this region] were professional English speaking, usually translators actually and English became the main capital of being active, being a citizen, being part of the civil sector as well as a very good job opportunity. I hope that in the future the third sector will go back to the volunteering activities, to building communities; creating social bonds in its neighborhood, let's leave the [global] world aside.

NGOs will disappear?

P: We are speaking of the internet generations, in 20 years, today's students will be 30-40 years old. Civic engagement will happen on the internet, public sphere will be different. I do believe that the battle will be between the official points of view of different institutions, and many, many points of view which will appear on the internet. The point is whether they will clash and or there is a chance of institutionalizing this dialogue. Every politician has a blog and explains how important he is, but the point is that they have to react to different messages. The future society will be a very, very diversified society with a lot of messages. People on Facebook or on the internet in general discuss global and personal issues, there are strong defenders of nationalism, but on Facebook people will probably discuss global problems in transnational discussions. Who controls the public sphere will be very real issue; this is another battle we shall expect. I hope that NGOs will disappear because everybody will take care of his own work and we shall witness different ad-hoc groups which struggle for their cause at that moment and hopefully we can try to institutionalize the mechanisms of this dialogue.

In 15-20 years it will be very similar to now

P: At the risk of sounding very banal, I suspect civic activism in 15 to 20 years will be very similar to what it looks like now. Professional NGOs, increasingly professional NGOs, good links and poor links, strong and weak links among organizations, and between organizations and citizens. It will be nice if communities divorce from NGOs, and become more actively engaged to resolve things around themselves. Where do you turn when you have a problem? The last woman [of the Forum street poll] said: "I turn to my neighbors, the resident group. I had a problem they resolved it, and I'll do it again". For me that's civic activism and the professionalization of NGOs is not civic activism, but it's a part of the whole spectrum of players and actors. Technology is going to be different, procedures are going to be different and the opportunities for civil organizations or for others to engage, to act, to communicate and to link may be very different, but ultimately I just expect that the conditions are going to be very similar to what we see now. The same discussion can take place in Bratislava or in Bucharest or in Tashkent in 20 years and I think they will be discussing very similar things.

Structural funds

P: A potential threat that we are seeing in Romania which could reduce the role of NGOs as facilitators for public participation, is that we have many NGOs relying on and hoping for structural funds. Structural funds are managed by the government, and having financial resources only from structural



funds in fact means to implement the government agenda - which is not bad. It's bad, however, if an NGO reduces itself to that because citizens participation or activism or agitating people is not on the government agenda. I see many NGOs who used to watchdog and to advocate for different causes now are organizing trainings using structural funds - easier resources, easier projects and forgetting their mission.

P: I just have a question: "How many of the countries can vote in public elections by internet? The point is yes, technology plays an important role and it is a fact. Today they're serving more like a way of communication, a tool to communicate. Now what could be done for this e-democracy?"

P: Identification is not a problem at all [for eDemocracy] it's a technical problem. We are facing more political problems because the government doesn't want electronic voting and electronic participation, it is a political problem.

Direct goals and small issues

P: The question of funding came up a lot, of course it's an important issue but two comments: our organization which is originally a green organization but we do a lot of community action and media programs as well, applied for different projects this year and I think we won only with two programs mainly supporting the institution itself, make research on how our work could be better. It is not for a direct cause, but for the organization itself, The other thing I wanted to say, perhaps connected to it, is that we talk about values and also in Hungary discussions are too much about some kind of values, connected to emotional problems and feelings of fear, aggression and I think this takes things in a bad direction. Finding direct goals and small issues is a way to get out of this problem, an example from our local neighborhood project the best element being a flea market. People bring things from home and exchange them, volunteers are there to help out, it's a zero cost action and it started to generate local activity, people meet there and they not only exchange goods, but information etc, so, it's not only about the funds.

NGOs doing what government should do

P: I have some fears about the present, for me civic activism is part of the NGOs and the third sector, but nowadays many NGOs are taking up roles that government should do. They are getting governmental funds for doing it and these NGOs who might have started in small villages as real civic activist initiation, are now becoming too professional so that the civic part disappeared.

Moderator: To very quickly draw some conclusions and last comments.

P: I think that that phenomenon of organizations becoming increasingly professional is very probable. You can also say that 15 years ago organizations, this is something that the Mott Foundation was responsible for, turned into NGO resource centers and evolved into professional administrative bodies. Is that an ideal outcome? Perhaps not. Is it an ideal outcome for organizations to become government contractors? Perhaps not. Will they be replaced by other organizations that will emerge with a mission to fill the gap? I think so.

What about those who have never heard about the internet?

P: A comment about e-democracy, in a country like Romania there are about 7 million people who never heard about the internet, who don't know what an NGO is or even what the Parliament is. I think that's where civic activism must go have a total approach.

**Confident only
in cyber space
- not in real
life?**

P: I expect further dislocation between the public reality, physical reality so to say and the virtual reality, the cyberspace. There are a lot more cyber-based groups which interact very actively, than groups who meet and do something in reality. Many people feel quite confident to interact in cyberspace, but they never meet in person and never undertake action. I'm expecting in the next 15 - 20 years that this tendency will be much stronger. In a way the physical public sphere will not correspond entirely to the virtual public sphere and there will be different kinds of activism.

P: I believe that, no matter if we like it or not, we are going to shape the present and also the future. Our focus and actions today and tomorrow will determine our common future, and civil society's future.

Mod: It is very positive to take the responsibility on our shoulders.





Citizens and Politics

Are the **ballot box** and perfectly organised campaigns by well established NGOs the only ways for citizens to take part in the national political decisions? What about spontaneous groups, innovative ideas circulating in the **blogosphere** or YouTube, tweeting Iranians, online petitions and Facebook groups? Are we heading towards a **global citizens republic**? Will today's generation of English speaking technology users change the way politics works? Or will the world split into two halves – millions of activists and billions of passive citizens? The meeting space between citizens and politics is very often an area for civil society and civic engagement.

Moderator Julian Popov (Mod): I personally don't know what exactly will happen with these recordings; probably they will be put in a box and buried under the factory to be taken out in 15 or 50 years. I went once to Chelyabinsk tractor factory, this use to be the biggest tractor factory in the world which was already collapsing in Chelyabinsk it was 1998, and they took me to a museum and in front of the museum there was a wall with a capsule inside and a message from Leonid Brezhnev supposed to be opened by the Komsomolsk youth of Chelyabinsk in 2048 I think. The factory was privatized by a Bulgarian guy, I was very proud of that, and I asked "how did he manage to privatize the biggest tractor factory in the world." They told me: "he was a businessman, when we believed in communism and working for the communist future, he was doing business". I said: "what kind of business can you possibly do in the Soviet Union in the '60s and '70s?" and they said that he was the director of a coach restaurant in a train for 30 years and managed to save money from tips to buy the biggest tractor factory in the world, which apparently produced 20% of the tanks for World War II.



How can citizens influence policies?

Our subject is Citizens and Politics and we have to define it somehow, one way to define it would be to explore and discuss the way citizens can develop and influence policies, participate in politics and influence political decisions. I like very much this strong instruction that we should not complain and we should not describe our programs and projects. To make our discussion a bit more fruitful and specific I took the liberty to ask three speakers to say just a few initial words based on their experience and views about how individual citizens and small groups can organize themselves in order to influence political decision and politics.

He didn't manage as US Vice-president - he needed to start a public movement

Participant (P): To share my experience with the Climate Project, primarily an American organization but also a global one. Has anyone heard about it? No. (voices from the room) Anyone know The Inconvenient Truth film by Al Gore? (voices from the room) Yes. The film was an unexpected success, the producers never thought it was going to be a niche film but that there was an overwhelming success in America and internationally. The idea about the Climate Project actually came out of the success of that film, and that they could replicate the direct contact Al Gore had with his audience, with the slide show that the film is based on. There was training of a thousand volunteers to deliver this inconvenient truth live to the various audiences from the communities they come from. They announced it in 2006, in the summer 12 000 people volunteered to give the climate presentation and now this community has grown to over 25 000 who have been trained primarily in the United States but also in other countries in Europe, in Australia, Canada and who have reached millions of people. I find it an interesting example that somebody who was actually the Vice-president of the United States, which is a pretty powerful position, who signed the Kyoto protocol and then came back and was demolished in the Congress and in the Senate - and then realized that for something to really it had to change at the ground level. So he shifted to building a movement through this Climate project where there would be enough bottom up critical mass created for the top politicians to respond to it. However, Al Gore has a very interesting statement, he says it is important to change the light bulbs - it is essential to change the political framework. While awareness-raising is happening on the ground obviously the ambition is to go upwards again. The way I see this whole exercise is about creating enough political critical mass to enable the change at the top.

When it comes to climate change and a lot of issues we are concerned about, really we cannot make a sufficient difference unless we change the framework of policies, legislation, funding streams on the very top. This is nothing new but I find it very important, that a top politician has learned this lesson and got involved in this kind of activity.

The other thing I find also interesting about the Climate project is that normally with environmental issues, it is the usual suspects that we as environmentalists talk to, we are often accused of preaching to the converted and we are actually result marginalized because we move around in the same area. What Al Gore through his personality managed to propel him to this star position in 2006 with the Academy Awards and then the Noble Peace Prize, and in this way he managed to create channels into other parts of society which so far were inaccessible to this message, whether it would be top business leaders, religious leaders. In the training I participated in in Nashville, we were 200 and there were all kinds of people, from high school students to retired senators, bankers, athletes a very mixed group. How we can achieve this breakthrough without having the personality and charisma of Al Gore still remains a challenge. but if we want to any kind of critical, meaningful mass, it is not enough if it is just concentrated in one capsule of the society, it needs to be happening across the spectrum.

Mod: I think we'll manage the charisma of Al Gore, probably that's not such a big problem. Now I would like to invite Igor Janke for a very brief recording for the future.

P: I am journalist and I work basically in traditional media – newspapers as well as radio, sometimes TV, but three years ago I started to do something on the internet. It is not so big as Al Gore's initiative, but is very much about the relationship between citizens and politicians. Three years ago I launched my own blog, at this time it was the first blog launched by a journalist, back then there were no blogs and bloggers in Poland, and I was very surprised to see that it was such a big success, I had about 800 000 visitors monthly to this one single blog. Then I got this idea to do something with it, and I invited 15 different journalists from the very left to the very right, among them Slawomir Sierakowski as a radical leftist but also some radical rightist. We created a platform and I asked everybody to give their comments on events going on. At that same time we took the crucial decision to open it for everybody, anybody could join us and launch their own blog, and we were surprised because there were thousands of people who did very fast. Now we have about 7000 bloggers, who have about 20 000 commentators writing every day their comments on their blogs. Every day we have at least 100 to 200 normal articles written by citizens, so we created a place where professionals and non-professionals can meet and discuss politics.

We have a group of journalists, a group of politicians and the biggest group which are normal people, scientists, teachers, doctors, and very different people living in different places. All of them have the same rights; they can publish in the same way as very well known politicians or journalists. We also invited several NGOs and smaller websites to join our platform and have their own blogs so that they can also join the discussion, almost everybody who is speaking about politics is on this platform. Never before have people had the possibility to speak to everybody, even 5-10 years ago if somebody who is not a jour-

Environmentalists not only talking to themselves anymore

7000 bloggers, 20 000 comments and every day hundreds of citizens writing articles



nalist, a prominent academic or politician wanted to say something publicly, they could write a letter to a newspaper and had a very small chance to be published. Now all people can write and many of them are as popular as the most well-known journalists or politicians. We don't know their names, some of them sign their blogs with their own names but many use nicknames saying that they wouldn't do it if they didn't have the possibility to be hidden. Someone is homosexual and is working in such an environment that he wouldn't like to display it, somebody loves the law and jus-

Today media cannot avoid uncomfortable topics as they appear in the blogosphere

justice party and Kaczynski and his office doesn't like the party so they are afraid to speak publically etc How it is influencing media? A few years ago media were able to avoid some subjects because of their policy, business interests etc. now if something doesn't appear in the official media, it will for sure appear in the blogosphere. Even if media doesn't speak about something for one or two days they have to eventually start writing about it when it has appeared in the blogosphere. The most important blogs are written by normal people because they are read by politicians who really have to take it into account, it's the best focus-group with a few thousand people who continuously discussing current issues and it gives citizens a much bigger influence on politics than in the past.

Mod: Now we have one more case – Daniela will say talk about how a few people can change or disturb big things.

Geopolitical issues

P: I come from Bulgaria and I manage small NGO that has more of a regional character in my home city Burgas on the Black sea coast. This is in brief the story of a referendum. Referenda are rare phenomena in Bulgaria. Bulgaria is the only country of the last two enlargements that entered the EU without a referendum related to accession. It is also a story of civil society in Bulgaria, and the inferiority complex of my nation, we think we can do on our own brilliantly but we are very bad in collective action and self-organizing. Now, the referendum was about a Russian pipeline, there is an agreement struck in 2007 between Bulgaria, Greece and Russia to transport crude oil from Novorossiysk to Alexandroupoulos via Burgas. These types of energy projects are going to dominate the agenda of the NGO sector on the Balkans as we happen to be in the transit area between the sources of energy and the market. These projects will directly impact human rights and environment and in this insane project oil is coming from the Caspian Sea in Russia and is loaded on tankers here and they arrive in Burgas; the oil is unloaded, saved in reservoirs for some time and then transits down a short pipe it is loaded on another tanker here and goes on to the West. This project presents great environmental risk because of the technology chose by the Russians, the Black Sea is actually called "black" because it is rough and they want to unload on the open sea and in open ports, however these are specifics and technicalities of the project. The point is that for the first

time people were self-organizing, coming together. We decided to have this referendum and thank God our local government was in line with the people's agenda and they made an official decision to call a referendum because our legislation is not very favorable if people want to initiate it. The referendum was organized, 52 000 people of the total population of 200 000 voted and 99% of them against the pipeline. Then we had another referendum in a smaller city Sozopol and now this year in Pomorie and about 80 000 people in total voted against this pipeline. Now we have a new government in Bulgaria which is re-considering the project, and I think also the Russians are reconsidering because it doesn't make sense economically, only geopolitically as the Russians probably want to pass through an old friend's territory instead of passing through the Bosphorus. Unfortunately however, we are not encouraged by this, because according the Bulgarian legislation our referendum in Burgas is not considered valid as the 52 000 people only makes 27% of the voters and for the result to count 50% of the voters have to vote.

**Direct
democracy
is very
important as
a tool**

This might be discouraging to some people but not to everyone, we saw that there is strength in our organization, people volunteered to make leaflets, to distribute them, to motivate other people to vote and to be more active as this requirement of 50% focused our campaign to make more people vote. From now my organization are going to work on an improvement of the Bulgarian legislation and one of the points we wish to change is this requirement for 50% quorum. As a conclusion I would like to say that referenda and direct decision making is very important, my example was from Bulgaria, but also on the European level it is very important. There is something that is called the European citizens initiative ECI – this is the strive of many European organizations to enforced what was written in the European constitution and now is in the Lisbon treaty about the right of one million European citizens to make proposals to the European commission which would proceed to the European parliament, giving Europeans the right to make proposals. I personally believe, maybe because I am Bulgarian that governments are kleptocratic by nature and people have to have instruments of control. I don't mean that every decision has to be put on referendum but there have to be mechanisms for checks and balances. Woodrow Wilson once said that referendums and direct decision making is similar to the gun of a farmer, the normal farmer normally doesn't need it, but whenever he sees a threat the gun behind the door can help him save his family. I'll finish by mentioning that referendums are just one of the possible forms, there is also popular initiative where people don't wait for someone to ask them what they think, but they may initiate a law or a decision. Finally another important mechanism is the possibility to recall elected politicians; if you are disappointed they have abused funds or committed crimes, there is no need to wait for four years, but by collecting signatures you can start a procedure of recall.

Mod: I would like to emphasize one of the many points that Daniela brought to our attention, the idea that energy roots and supplies will influence not just political decision and economic development but also obviously affect the future development of civil society actions. Not only when these civil society actions are directly targeting energy projects but also indirectly because energy supply is vital factor in our societies and part of our economic development. Do you think that these cases and statements sufficiently well describe the relationship between citizens influencing policies and political decisions? The floor is yours.

Lets do nothing, the invisible hand will take care of it

P: As we must think of what we are going to do in the next 10-15-20 years, my opinion is do nothing - the invisible hand will take care of everything. If you don't trust this way at least do nothing wrong. Not all politicians are leaders, what we need as citizens are to breed leaders otherwise we will never get anything done. With the type of platform you are talking about we can bring out what are the most important issues and maybe even identify the type of leaders we need to get things done, but I wouldn't try to change the rules of the game because every time you change the rules of the game you give the crooked politicians time to adapt, they are faster than us regular citizens. I would rather work on refining our capacity as citizens to bring up the priorities, the most important issues to be worked on and to breed up the type of leaders that will get things done and sack the type of politicians that use the rules for their own benefit. Not necessarily change the rules unless it's really crucial to do so, in terms of referendum if you ask me, I wouldn't drop the 50% requirement but perhaps include another requirement and compute that percentage out of the number of registered voters. Because there are lots of people who by age or mental facility are allowed to vote but they don't want to. So than you put another formality in place, that one has to register to vote and then you will definitely get 90%.

Should citizens be campaigning to change the rules of the game?

Mod: This is quite an interesting and controversial point you're making, I would like to ask whether you all agree? First, should citizens campaign for the changing of legislation and changing the rules of the game? Then the point about registered voters, people who have registered their votes and expressed their willingness to participate in political process during formal elections, are they the only people eligible to participate in other forms of citizen initiatives?

Politicians are also citizens

P: I would like to make a mental exercise to think about what the word citizen and politics mean, for me citizens do make politics as even politicians, now everyone will kill me, are citizens. We divide politics from citizens because in our culture and history this divide exists, but we should start to think that we all make politics and politicians are also citizens and we should try to forget about this divide and believe that we can all make politics.

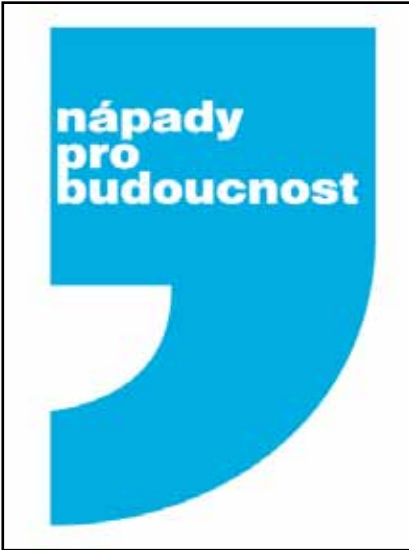
Mod: Every single person eats so you shouldn't divide people and eating but there is a certain division.

P: Going further on this idea, in all the discussions here there is this division between us and them - but who are them? They are actually a product of our decisions and our societies.

Mod: The subject is not Citizens and Politicians; it is Citizens and Policies...

In CEE we have the expectation that we can do nothing

P: Politics. My question is why regular citizens avoid getting involved in politics? Politicians have such a low percentage of trust from the population. OK, if you don't trust politicians, what do you do? Do something. In our societies there is, I don't know if it is applicable to entire Central and Eastern Europe countries but it is applicable in Romania, we have the expectations that we can do nothing, we complain and somehow we excuse the politicians for their behavior. If they are strong and powerful they can afford to do anything. If I get strong and powerful, my behavior will be the same, I will behave as a politician.



Mod: Are you saying that in your view citizens, individuals, every person in voting age or below do not engage in shaping political decision just because they feel they can't change anything? If you just hate politicians, that's fine but you can have an engagement with policy decision on a very local and specific level

P: To become a politician is the easiest way to influence a political decision, right? Why do people not become politicians?

Mod: Do you share this view that the best way to influence politics and policies is to become a politician?

P: A couple of observations, this discussion needs to distinguish between politics and policy. I know that in our languages, in Slavic languages there is no distinction like in English, while these are two different processes. Today most of the population in these countries still don't know the distinction - [for them] politics is politics done by dirty politicians [on national level], or [something concrete] on the municipal level e.g. building a bridge. You have a segment of society that understands this distinction but the broader society is yet to come to that level. This immediately opens the issues and distinction of ideology and partisanship; I think that Central and Eastern Europe is still growing in the direction of having certain values that are not necessarily linked to a political option. For policies you have to make certain choices which might not have anything to do with politics regarding the cause, expenses, and choice projections. We have this myth about influencing policies among NGOs, it is becoming a mantra not only here, but probably even more in Western Balkans and more difficult places to work like Ukraine or Moldova. I think NGOs are facing a block from things that they've been doing before, meaning development or humanitarian work, and now they think systematic change would help. This is where they draw their legitimacy. We talked a lot this morning about legitimacy of NGOs and we talked a lot about the legitimacy, which is drawn from representation. What we didn't mention is the legitimacy, which may come from expertise and competence. The processes of [producing] policies very often require competence. You talked about energy, sources/transport and you engaged in a very tight web of experts that has to do with oil, numbers, the direction of state etc, frankly if you want to be engaged in geostrategic, geopolitical or energy discussions, you will have to come with a bit of muscle! When we talk about citizens and politics and using NGOs as vehicles, I would rather be pluralistic and maybe think of other strategies, not only representation but different strategies of legitimacy for NGOs.

Mod: We should also distinguish between citizens, civil society and NGOs because they are different things, in this case it is not a referendum created by one NGO, it is catalyzed by one NGO but it's an engine for the whole energy. Probably this synergy between an agent for change and a clearly defined problem plus a popular mood that is shared between members of the community is one of the recipes for moving and influencing policies. Do you agree with that statement that NGOs and civil society exaggerate its role in shaping policies?

P: I am young so I am still representing a very idealistic point that we can influ-

Distinction between policy and politics

Celebrity endorsement, journalism and referenda they all work in different ways

ence policy and politics as well. These three examples of three different activities and three different regions have been very nice: the first being a kind of celebrity giving a message, then the discussion with journalists and moving on to the public and then this about public referenda. There are different ideas, they can all work together rather than working against each other, and I totally do not agree with the statement that we shouldn't do anything. I believe we have a really huge role to play and we should do something, we cannot only wait that for the economy to solve the problems. We have to make sure that is worth to discuss and push from bottom to the top, there are some legislation and new policies needed. We have example from the UK with the Big Ask campaign, this was really a bottom up initiative through sending postcards - an activity that really came through. We have the climate bill introduced in the UK and these are activities which come from the bottom up, spontaneously, they have rights, they are successful and they have a role.

Mod: I would like very much to put this question in a vote because there was one view that citizens should not get involved too much into changing the rules, and then the exact opposite., that people should campaign through NGOs or individually to create initiatives that eventually may lead to major legislative changes. .. Ok the side of NGOs and citizens and civil society engaging ac-

tively in changing rules and legislation is winning.

P: If citizens don't have the power to change the rules, who has? It's a matter of a social contract after all, we have empowered the government or whoever is ruling, so we have the right to have our say. In practice the situation may be different, but in theory this is the concept of democracy.

P: I think everybody understands that I just wanted to provoke a discussion here. Let me post a concrete example however: based on the existing

Romanian law in 2006, people with seeing impairment (the blind to put it bluntly) did have access to public information and were entitled to have it delivered in Brail format. Some NGOs decided, well, it's not very clear in the law, let's have a new law that makes it very clear, and they succeeded - the Parliament passed that law. Three years later with a new law in place, including big sanctions for the institutions that do not provide information in Brail, you still cannot get it in Brail. The point I am trying to make is instead of changing the rules, look around and see who are the people who can take the lead and actually deliver change, because that's more effective, and that's where citizens may trust NGOs to change policies even if NGOs and/or citizens may be extremely disappointed with politics.

Mod: You said something about developing political and civil society leaders – that that is one of the major tasks and missions of civil society, is that something you share, we should invest – as citizens, civil society, NGOs – into leadership development?



Changing the rules doesn't mean actually delivering the change

Reclaim
the power
we give to
politicians

P: I agree with what you said, it is really important to have better politicians in order to live in better society, but I think we also shouldn't forget that we have to improve citizens, because if we compare by numbers politicians are much fewer than citizens in a country. If we don't invest in educating citizens and empower them, the few politicians that we have in power will not change. I think it is very important to reclaim the power and the authority we give to politicians to act on our behalf, through education but also through making people aware that they are responsible for their own life and for the problems on their local level to be solved. Not to expect the authorities to solve them.

Mod: So you think that one of the key missions of civil society organizations is to educate and make people aware of their rights?

P: Yes, exactly.

P: We are talking a lot about empowering people, I think what we are really discussing here can be called the dilemma between representative and direct democracy. Is it our policy to make it more direct or more representative? In Europe, and not only in Europe but in the world, there is an accent on representative democracy. If politicians, and the people who vote for them, are rational during the period of voting, but not so rational between elections, probably this is a problem. This is another question for NGOs, whether we are doing something with the people and for the people - or we are doing something instead of the people?

The issue
has to be
engaging
+ timing

P: I think the question is not whether we should or shouldn't try to influence politics, because I don't think it's actually our choice. We are doing it constantly, it is inherent in what civil society does, it is in the core of who we are and the existing situation, we respond to it in different ways, whether we are successful or not is to a large extent beyond us, really. What we can do is catalyze the discussion about particular issues, to see whether there is enough response in the society. We actually need to, or do already operate in some kind of marketing environment. We can be considered as missionaries who want to change the world but if nobody wants to buy our idea obviously we will fail. On the other hand, in true marketing they say, there is a laser-like alignment between the one who offers and the one who is receiving - so if we are at the right time and the right place with the right cause then - bingo! Really influencing policy will happen, which we heard from the UK, it wasn't because of the NGOs and the strategy, it was because the issue was right and engaged people in a fundamental way. The NGO was just the catalyst.

Mod: Can we say that one of the main roles of civil society organizations in relation with policies and political decisions is the role of catalyst?

P: In my opinion, yes, we can help create - through education, awareness and so forth - an environment where we light the match and see whether something happens.

P: "Should political parties be NGOs?" We used to think that in our region, in the post-soviet block, civil society is something that is supposed to oppose the state. I don't think you can have a strong civil society without a strong state,

NGOs are not non-political organizations

we should not think about both these spheres as only staying opposite to each other. I don't think we should improve the standards of politics by looking for leaders, it sounds to me like surrendering to a pre-democratic way of thinking. The easiest way to think about the standards of politics is always this "let's find someone who is educated enough and has that mathematical solution how to build highways in Poland", it's a kind of technocratic utopia. Counting on charisma is the most traditional pre-democratic way of legitimization according to Max Weber. In Poland we used to think that NGOs are not only non-governmental organizations but also non-political organizations, and I don't think this is good. It is a reproduction of an apolitical way of thinking, and this apolitical way of thinking is one of the reasons why the political standards are so bad. The negative selection is one of the most crucial mechanisms creating bad, boring, ritual and alienated politics. So I am very much for NGOs being engaged in policy, in politics, influencing directly and indirectly. Political parties should be created as NGOs, not as marketing agencies or apparatus or something else, it should be a socially well rooted institution, transmitting opinions like a pyramid, from the bottom to the top, in a lively way.

P: On direct and representative democracy: each type of democracy has its own limitations. We have to find a way to conciliate both of them. Not to forget, in some countries in Central and Eastern Europe, democracies are not yet mature. For example if we ask the wrong question in a referendum we might end up with a very weird and not democratic decision

P: The same in England!

Majority decisions may be hurtful to minorities

P: If we ask about "Do we want segregated education for Roma people?" I bet that the result will be negative in Romania. We might end up with some decisions made by majorities that will affect deeply minorities. Political parties on the other hand will never raise this issue because there are different types of mechanisms, peer pressure as we are part of the Union. We shouldn't consider representative democracy demonized or something out-of-date

Mod: It was obviously that we have to develop both sides.

P: I am a sort of a defender here of silent politicians who are not here.

Politics are 2 things - setting agenda and taking decisions

P: Maybe discussions direct versus representative democracy is easier if we think that politics means two things: taking decisions and setting agendas. Democracy should be representative when we come to taking decisions and more direct when it comes to setting agendas. The problem of current democracies is that the agenda doesn't belong to citizens and politicians don't take decisions.

Mod: Good point

Solid analysis is needed

P: Not to forget another role, we've discussed a lot about NGOs as a catalyst for citizen's initiatives; we should not forget that civil society could also be an originator of "know-how", of data and of analysis. We live in a society where there is very little competition of solid analysis, at universities you see that researches are still kind of abstract, the government when making decisions are not well researched etc. Maybe it's a special niche, but we should not forget that NGOs could have this role, it could be producing new knowledge and oth-



er times packaging knowledge of experts in a language which will be accessible to the general public.

Mod: Do you think that in our region NGOs do this sufficiently? An example: if you go to the European Parliament you will see it is packed with various NGOs, lobbies and other people who do exactly that: generate lots of research and serve members of Parliament, who don't have enough information as they

have only two or three people helping them so they need this high-quality information. Do Central and Eastern European NGOs provide information on which basis politicians can make decisions and move agendas?

P: Shortly, the answer is "No"! Not sufficiently. There are NGOs which do this, and they provide excellent examples, but when you look at the volume of analyses, data or knowledge needed out there, you see that it is really a very small portion.

Mod: Do you think that NGOs should put more emphasis on developing a knowledge base and providing of policy-related knowledge?

P: In some areas definitely. There is no competition out there, at universities, in public administration and political parties there is nobody to provide expertise - in a country there are "usual suspects" who have monopoly on a given subject. I work with think tanks - they sometimes are very good in analyzing options and miserable in [translating them into a public action point]. On the same floor we worked together with colleagues working with accountability organizations, which are very well equipped to communicate messages to the public but sometimes are caught into a trap where their message is based on values. These are good values, no doubt, but unfortunately politicians are skillful to trap them often at an early stage of the debate and discount them on the level of providing technical expertise. In my donor's head I would like to see them working together. Organization embodying the two features, they are very rare.

Mod: There is an embarrassing gap between the think-tank type of organizations and advocacy organizations. Then there is the gap to politicians and the Parliament, this gap should be bridged in some way. Is there somebody who doesn't agree with that?

P: I disagree, I subscribe to the lack of expert discussion, or deeper discussion / informed discussion: sometimes citizens want to be involved in making decisions, but politicians, even if they have good intentions, don't want to leave it up to citizens because they think citizens don't understand enough. I don't think that media in the Czech Republic at least, fulfills this role. The discussion taking place on important issues in the media is more about whom than really about the content, the problem and possible solutions. There is a lack on part

Think tanks good at producing knowledge, bad at translating them into action

of media and NGOs should help to make discussions on political issues more content oriented.

P: I think nobody is fulfilling this role, politicians don't fulfill it, and the media does not unfortunately, at least in Poland to less and less of an extent. Also NGOs just don't give sufficient knowledge.

Mod: To summarize, we defined that civil society organizations could act effectively as catalysts in our environment and achieve something when the situation is right and the popular mood is in place. We also identified the problem of NGOs not producing sufficient information for policy development and decisions, and this gap is not just among NGOs, but across the board; media is becoming more and more commercial, universities and think-tanks may provide information but not in a way that could be communicated well. Then, there is another type of organizations that are very good with communication and marketing, but they don't connect with think-tank type of organizations or academia from which they can take more elaborated ideas. There is a chain that seems to be broken between clusters of thinking people who develop something that other people can't understand and others who promote values which are not linked with sufficient research. Then we have academic organizations often working in a very closed way and this produces a picture of an NGO sector which is not working very well together

P: What do we expect from the NGOs to challenge these perceptions?

Mod: Right, yes, we have to ask ourselves whether this is a mission for NGOs or should we expect someone else to do it?

P: Anybody who wants to get involved in a policy making has to come with arguments. Where do you draw the arguments if not from research and from expertise?

P: It's not only about identifying the solution correctly, you represent for example an NGO that is representing people with disabilities, and you have to issue an opinion on this specific field, how do you know what it is the right political decision if you do not do some research? If you go in front of politicians and decision makers and you do not do your homework properly or know the field very well, you will not have the credibility in front of the person who you wish to convince.

P: For example organization that works with disabled people, they really have knowledge about their needs, but I think it's also a matter of connections, more than one NGO has to provide knowledge and action, those dots mentioned before, between think tanks, NGOs, media.

Mod: Are you saying that we should invest more effort in organization or networking?

P: In communication.

P: I am very happy that we are so correct, that civil society should influence politics and civil society should deliver knowledge. I agree with that, but the

NGOs can be information providers but should connect with those good at communicating the ideas

Producing thousands of papers that no one reads

problem is that we live in a very complex world and we shouldn't count on expertise just like that. We shouldn't count on that if we deliver knowledge to politicians the decision-making process will conclude at something better. We live in risk society, in a society in which you have one expertise and then another and they stay in discrepancy. This is why politics is so important, because it is a fight for hegemony, also between [subjective] expertise, you can always find experts on the both sides. It is a problem of democratization and the process of delivering and creating expertise. As for the think tanks, there are lots of institutions, classified as NGOs or academic institutions or never mind, they produce thousands of papers and no one reads them. Also in this aspect politics is coming back. For a think tank to really influence politics or policy, you have to have institution which has an idea - not only how to produce knowledge but also how to communicate it, how to deliver it in the public sphere and how to create advocacy. Why we don't have proper think tanks is, I believe, because it's very hard to create it's much harder than we used to think, it is more than gathering a couple scholars, some money and a place: it's like creating a new culture.

Mod: How do we see all these problems and the roles of individual citizens, small communities, are they prepared to act in a decisive way against the big power? If we look 15 or 20 years ahead, what do you think are the key problems and issues in the relationship between citizens and policies / politics?

Can new tools bridge the gap between politicians and citizens?

P: I would like to see a lot more informed discussion, that the public is not content with some populist claims of politicians because but say we want better decisions based on better background. Secondly I want more tools developed, there is a lot of frustration amongst politicians that citizens don't want to get involved, and there is a lot of frustration among citizens that nobody asks them to get involved, so I think that there is a need to develop things in-between like polls by local government, public discussions, on-line voting, just to bridge that gap of communication both ways.

P: You are right, but we have never had such excellent tools as we do now to communicate, debate, vote, choose, and gather knowledge.

P: It is not too much, the question is how to gather it, how to select and gather appropriate knowledge, the knowledge is there, but how do we use it in a proper way?

P: I think we will use more and more this common knowledge in the future, resources will be in different places but be connected [to each other] and will have [specific] people to communicate more efficiently. Probably the politics in the media will be completely destroyed and look differently, for sure much more specialized, small institutions being experts on different issues.

P: When I look in my crystal ball, at the relationship between citizens and politics I think in 15-20 years we will have reached the bottom of the populist



sentiments, because I expect that citizens will get disillusioned also with populist politics, it already shows in on the local elections that people want something in return, something tangible, services, products, I think people will get more pragmatic in this sense.

Mod: High penetration of communication and knowledge will actually decline the level of populism?

Ownership of EU opportunities

P: We live in a time when opinion polls are leading the game, everybody wants to look at the opinion polls and accommodate the strategy. I am unsure how much it penetrates to rural areas, but people who request a bridge will expect the government to build it, otherwise they will have more powerful tools to replace the government by peaceful democratic means. This is where I see a role for NGOs, they should continue having conceptual, sometimes esoteric debates, and I see them becoming more and more practical. I wish for Central and Eastern Europe to have a sense of ownership over the EU, the European Commission has a lot of powerful instruments and money and countries in this region see this as Brussels influences them, rather than "Oh, wait a second, we are also part of this and we should influence them".

P: Anthony Giddens has very interesting vision, he says in his latest book Politics and climate change "Somebody called me and said to me: I am in traffic and I said to him: You're not in traffic, you are the traffic!"

Political parties will cease to exist

P: Not necessarily in 20 year but I believe in maybe 30 or 40 years, politics as we know it will die. Political parties will no longer exist and what we now call politics will be called simply policy making or decision making. You will never see majorities making decisions but you will see minorities getting together to get things done, and these minorities may include NGOs or not. The business sector will have a higher or more important role than NGOs in decision making and a lot more "non-citizens" will be involved in decision making

Mod: Who do you call "non-citizen"?

P: I did not mean, foreigners but I mean the people that don't necessarily think of the public affairs of their city all the time. People see an issue now, they act upon it, then they are gratified and go about their business.

Mod: So citizens who are not politically active, working with single issue - ad hoc policy?

P: Like instant citizenship, takes five minutes, getting things done maybe over Facebook and then goodbye.

Mod: Also if you have any issues that you see will be dominating the public agenda in 15-20 years please mention them as well.

P: My vision of the future is a society made by citizens who take decisions on their own, there are no politics and if there are, they act only as a reference

Mod: What if they have to take a collective decision, not about whether to get married or not, but whether to start a war or not – that is not exactly an

individual thing.

P: Everybody should have a say whether to start a war or not start a war, I don't want someone to take decision on my behalf and to make this possible I think the consciousness of every person should grow.

Mod: The Obama of 2029 will ask on Facebook "Shall we attack or not?"

P: The role of NGOs and civil society organizations is to help in this process, to make people more conscious and more aware of how to act and that their action is needed. So basically I am in favor of what our colleague said: "politics will die."

Hybrid democracy

P: Representative democracy will not die away. It is as old as the steam engine and the only way to have democracy. However it can be made better through something that could be called 'hybrid democracy' which is representative democracy perfected with tools of direct democracy, the checks and balances of the government. We, NGOs and civil society, should move in a direction of demanding explanations and ask politicians, ruling parties etc to give reasons for their decisions. One efficient way to do this would be to introduce obligatory referenda for certain amounts of tax-payers' money, so the investment in certain projects has to be done with the consensus of society. The only way to make politicians give you reasons is that they want your "Yes" for their project.

Mod: It is not by coincidence that during my grandmother's generation, Bulgaria was called Switzerland of the Balkans, probably what they meant was this referendum culture.

More and more informed citizens

P: From my perspective we will have more and more informed citizens and voters in politics and policy making. I have the impression that politicians are not yet ready to deal with that, the traditional way of doing politics is working rather with elites or representatives, but these days knowledge is not limited to a bunch of people. Discussions on very technical issues are going on among regular people.

Mod: Politicians are not prepared to work with informed citizens?

P: Right. And the political system is not only up to politicians, it's up to NGOs as well, whether we will be able to develop this mechanism that is another thing. If we don't give satisfaction to these voters, we will see a withdrawal from public life of the city or the nation or the EU, and we will have election turnouts of 10%

P: I will add two points for the future: transparency and more participatory approach to decision making coming from the civil society

Mod: Think of one key, leading, central, public, world, global or national issue that will be the important and on the agenda of civil society, political work, and the public in the next 20 years? One word, or two on issues, not technical problems.

Voices from the room:

- Aging society.
- Climate and energy.
- Communication.
- Climate and energy.
- Sustainability
- The immunity of Adrian Nastase, the former prime minister.
- Development as in modernization
- Education
- Learning Chinese
- Economy and the world cup in football.
- Natural resources extinction
- The label for year 2028 will be "My way" (Frank Sinatra)
- Lack of resources – not only natural but also fresh ideas, new technologies etc.
- Ability of society to address problems of marginalized groups like Roma for example.
- Gap between the globalized citizens and those left behind.
- Participation.
- Demography

Mod: Thank you for the time, the thinking, the effort and I hope that our final report will be useful for the near and further development of civil society.





NGOs and the state - a relationship of clients, partners or opponents?

What is the reality of NGO-government partnerships in the diverse countries of this region, are NGOs **contractual implementers** or **advocating for change**? How do we maintain independent voices while depending on sustenance **funding** from government sources? Where is the space for supplementing each other and what is the cross-sector experience of coalitions? The purpose of this discussion is to explore how EU mechanisms impacts NGO-government relations and what the interaction is on the practical level in the various CEE countries and to outline the key challenges and opportunities for effective interaction of NGOs with governments at different levels.

Dusan Ondrusek Moderator (Mod): We know what happened in the last 20 years. Now, we want to turn to the next 10 or 20 years, if the prognosis and vision are describing some future possibilities, what does it mean for us to do in the next 3 or 5 years? The relationship between the state and the CSO is very diverse, in parts of the region, for various issues, it's complimentary. In some cases we have the overlap of services; in some we have models of substitution and delegation of some services to CSOs. In some cases there is no communication at all. We would like to first hear from you what we need to change in the relationship based on your current experience from this region.



Basically civil
society has
grown up

Participation (P): I would not really generalize; I would start with the Czech Republic and the situation I see now. First in the Czech Republic the relationship between civil society and the state has gone through 2-3 phases. In first phase, basically civil society has "grown up;" it took 5-7 years. A lot of that development was really about establishing civil society organizations as service providers and in that time the state was not a real partner of civil society organizations. Then slowly, in the second phase, the state started to realize that civil society is not the enemy, it is not a bunch of incompetent emotional individuals but it's a genuine partner which can do some things more effectively and cheaply. This change in the mindset of the government, was a direct consequence of EU influence, and the consequence of the failure by the state to do a lot of things. In the meantime, civil society has grown from learning to provide services, gaining a trust in constituencies, learning how to work with media, and has developed to the level where it shifted towards proposing systematic change and really started to formulate policies. This development which I believe is relatively positive, has been facilitated and helped through the availability of flexible funds and through the influence of the EU accession process. Right now, I think we find ourselves often in a situation when there is more space to influence politics than the capacity of NGOs to really advocate well. There is lack of capacity of civil society to advocate professionally. In the meantime, the flexible funds have disappeared and now we face serious negative consequences for civil society because the only available funds are basically state funds, which corrupt in many different ways the way civil society behaves, acts, speaks etc. The other option is EU funds which are also devastating in making a negative impact. If you know how to advocate, there is nobody to whom you can advocate because there are no stable governments. Another important development is the parallel development of the service provider branch of civil society and the watchdog type branch of civil society. To come back to your question: is civil society organizations partner or watchdog critic of the state? Basically, healthy civil society needs both, although there are a lot of problems of providing funds for the civil sector in general; it's much more complicated and hard when it comes to the watchdog organizations.

Mod: You are mentioning the Czech Republic example, are you speaking about the whole sector or your experience in the development aid area specifically?

P: I am speaking about the trend over there in Czech Republic,

P: I think [that in] defining the roles and the relationships between the state and the civil society or NGOs, you should clearly distinguish three levels of the state: [elected] central, [elected] local and public administration, because they

3 levels of state: national, local and public administration

have very difficult, sometimes complex and sometimes complementary relationship with civil society. Unless we distinguish these roles, it will be very difficult to discuss without mixing too much. Secondly one of the angles from which we can see transition is the redefinition of the purpose and sense of shared values and shared interests. I think what we see now during the crisis in particular, is that we have increasing needs to rediscover the common space and the common shared values, and I think civil society is one of the actors that can provide this. There is strong competition on these three levels of the state on who's supposed to be defining and defending those common, shared values. Unless we have the civil society angle and build some kind of partnership, we are going into one of two extremes: either just autonomous individuals with difficulty to survive or some kind of collectivists' project, which we have already seen. So, I would think that we can discuss what is the optimum balance between those two different levels and the ways that we can reach different roles in defining those common purposes and common goals.

P: It's symbolic what's happening between the state and CSOs; if the distance is too big we have to shout, if the distance is not so big and take all necessary steps, maybe, we don't need to shout so much.

P: But if become too close, we might have no difference.

Mutual trust

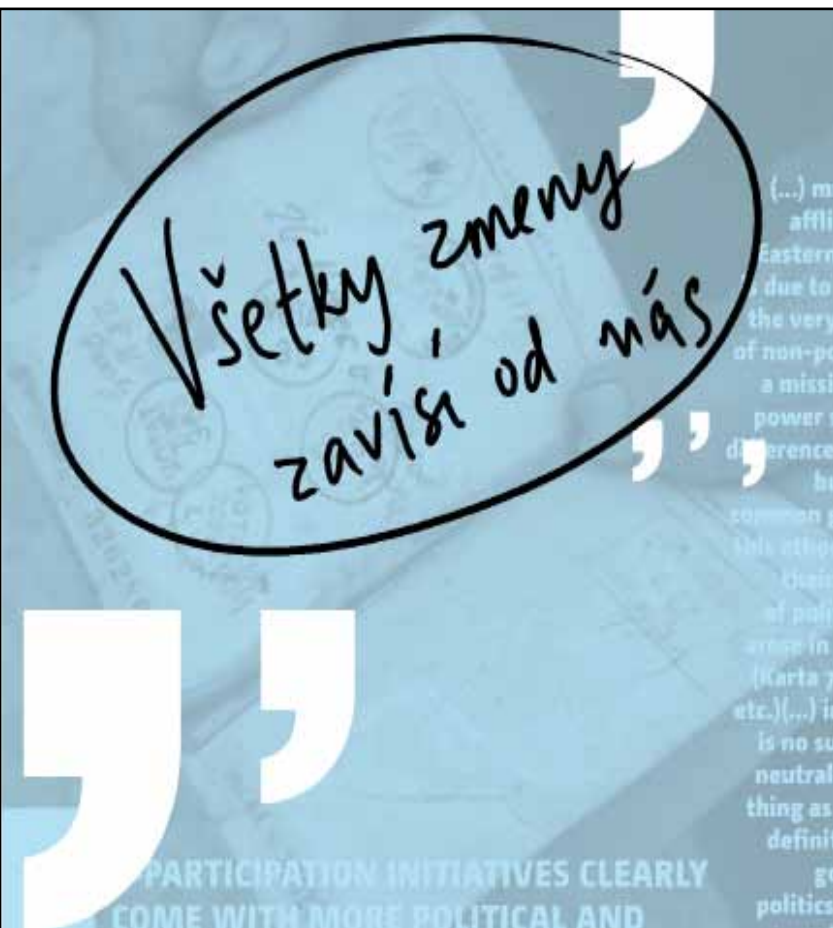
P: I think that one of the important issues is to see whether the mechanism of the interrelationships between the state and the NGO is developed enough, in some countries, it has already developed but it doesn't work properly. It means, sometimes it stops, continues and then stops again. In other countries the mechanism, for NGOs and state authorities to collaborate with each others, in order to achieve the same goal doesn't exist. In many situations NGOs and the state have the same goal to achieve something, but the proposal on how to achieve it may be different. So there should be mechanisms for interrelationships between NGOs and the state plus, there is a need to develop mutual trust between them so they can work together better.

P What I have seen among mechanisms is: in order to achieve the goal the NGO propose collaboration to the state. It means, they work together, draft regulation for example, and the most important thing is the involvement of the representatives of the NGO in decision making and the legislative reform process. If restriction exists in such instances, then the state will decide something on behalf of the society without involving society itself.

Mod: So, one concrete mechanism is to create a joint working group of the governmental and the NGO experts, in the legislative reform.

Making policy makers accountable

P: I am coming from a civic group and therefore, my idea is linked to what I'm doing. For others who for example work in the social or environmental field this may look different. From my perspective, we have to look at new means of making policymakers accountable. First, there are some mechanisms that help them appear efficient, sophisticated and making us believe that they are accountable for their work, which in fact is not always true. Secondly we should also try to change, at least in Romania from where I come, the general perception of NGOs as being biased, representing more a political platforms than their own views. I find it quite intriguing as the matter of objectivity and non partisan-



ship is the key elements for making us have a voice with an impact upon policy makers.

P: I want to add regarding legislation and legal framework, which are actually the base for any kind of relationship between the NGOs and the government. An example from the Czech Republic: after the reform of public administration in 2000 there are much better relationships between the local and regional governments with NGOs in the region. I believe they started to think differently about it. On the other hand, on the central level, the preparation of the new Czech civil code and discussions about the law on public benefit status and public benefit organizations, are quite lively in Czech Republic, and there is enough space for NGOs to be part of it. The problem is that it's difficult to find somebody to do it, I get the feeling that there is

no union between the NGOs on what they would like to have in this law, and when there is no unity of NGOs, it's very difficult to go into some kind of confrontation with the government. Another point is that there may be a prepared law, but it's completely out of question to lead it through parliament and - two completely different stories.

Paternalism and feudalism

P: I'll be blunt but I think there are two words that describe the state approach towards NGOs in our region, and they are paternalism and feudalism. While there are rules and procedures regulating partnership and cooperation between the state and civil society, civil servants mostly implement these regulations if and as they please. Attitudes like: "All right, I can partner with you, I can support you if you do it on my terms and my terms only" are common. The approach is the most fundamental thing that needs to be changed. And on the fact that NGOs have different opinions and see things differently in terms of regulation, I think that is natural, and it will be always the case: my usual example is that antiabortion groups and feminist groups are both NGOs and they will never ever agree on an abortion law.

Consultative processes rarely work

P: An additional issue since we were speaking about participation of NGOs in making policies and in legislation and in my country very often these relationships don't work well. NGOs are beginning to take part in different consultative councils with different ministries, increasingly what these councils do is: an official opening ceremony and they never get to real work. Real problems are not solved in such councils; they don't work in practice in Bulgaria. The second issue is because consultation with NGOs is important for the EU, it forces governments to do it and there are many cases when we receive a draft regulation or a policy by a ministry and they ask us: "Can you give us a comment on these

50 pages by the end of the day? "This is not consultation, this is what needs to change. Related to state funding, in Bulgaria, especially now with the structural funds, EU funding goes through the state, through ministries which means that the ministries choose who should receive the funding or not. This process has resulted in a lot of NGOs created by political figures or mayors of municipalities and they receive the funding. Because this is a lot of funding, the state has the power to decide which part of the NGO sector would be active and which not

The state is made by elected and nominated people

P: In relation with the state, in my opinion, we have to change our approach to the state. The state is made by elected and nominated people. They look at us, the civil society, like the father is looking at his child, thinking about the general good as well as about their specific interests for a mandate or for a year. Our approach should be to understand their thinking, and we have to prepare first of all our NGOs' offer to the government: What do we offer to the government that is added values; that they need for solving public policy issues and for the general good? If I ask everybody around this table what your offer is, I don't know how many of us can say what it is. Looking at NGOs working in my country in Romania, they don't know how to offer their services to the government and not all of the NGOs are prepared to discuss with the state. There are NGOs more or less oriented towards giving services to their constituencies, and there are NGOs with strong voices, related to the government. In the end NGOs have to structure themselves in different sectors or services, find the best leaders and the best voice to discuss with the government. We have to learn how to discuss with the government, we have to learn their administrative language if we want to register some victories. So, we have to do a lot by ourselves in order to change the perception government has of NGOs, showing the added value that we put on the table and why they have to listen to us.

What do we represent?

P: I agree, if we really want to change something in our relations to the state, maybe we should start from some reflection on ourselves as an NGO sector. From my point of view, one of the crucial things is the question of legitimization and what we really represent. If we answer to this question, then we can try to negotiate our position not only as a service provider but as a real partner. What we are finding now, for example in Poland, is that yes, the state recognizes us, they are giving us more money than they used to a few years ago, but they are also more and more asking: who are you, who do you really represent and how can you prove that you represent them? They say: we have the mandate to build a system, we are representing people through elections, but who are you? I think this is a crucial thing that we have to answer to, and there are some ways to do it. Especially in the European context, what we can use, in my opinion, is the principle of subsidiary. This is a value that we should focus on if we want to prove that we want and should be treated as a partner by the government.

Expertise without representation

P: I wish to link to the two previous speakers because I would see those two challenges slightly different. I see a very close link between the "specific offer" issue, the specialization of NGOs, meaning NGOs are becoming experts, more think tanks than civil society representatives, and the legitimization issue. If you are an expert, then perhaps you are not exactly representing anyone anymore? This is really a major movement right now and a major challenge for us in terms of developments in the NGO sector: what avenues are certain NGOs taking, are they becoming experts? Are they representing anyone? Are there differ-

ences in terms of how they should be governed, their legal framework etc?

Maybe we shouldn't look down on beekeeper associations

P: About the nature of civil society and the role of NGOs within that framework, which needs to be explored and understood better. It has been kind of an inductive exercise [so far]: we go out and do what we do; whatever works - we do more; what doesn't work - it takes us a while to recognize. I think, we would benefit by some vigorous examination of what is the proper role of civil society versus the state. Maybe it's taking us back to the basics of civic education, but I think this meeting is one of the first times that we've really examined this thing as a group. There was a case in the Czech Republic, I think, when the government decided to start funding NGOs. There were lots of complaints in the group working on watchdog efforts that a lot of the money was going to beekeepers associations and alpinists' clubs etc. These types of organizations don't do anything, they are just local, and I think we look down on them in some way and maybe we shouldn't. Maybe we should try to learn a bit more about what they are doing and the function that they play.

Independent despite governmental funding?

P: We have to touch on [the issue] to what extent NGOs can be independent if they are dependent on funding from governments? I'm an activist in my heart and participate in organizations but more and more organizations cannot voice out messages from their constituencies because they depend on the state [for funding]. I am observing now in Bulgaria and maybe also in Romania, a so called tendency of "capturing the civil society", which means that many "Gongos" and quasi NGOs are absorbing money from the European funds. The question is how strong are advocacy groups or service providers NGOs to make this transparent? [How to] send a clear message who they are and to distinguish themselves a little bit from ad hoc NGOs appearing in the last two years? This is a very crucial question with regards to legitimacy and how NGOs are gaining public support?

Don't try to include everybody

P: You say that we have a serious problem with the EU funding going to Gongos. Then create a platform of non-Gongo NGOs - don't try to include everybody there - and through that platform establish a watchdog system, which will systematically criticize the misuse of funds! Believe me, in three years time you can make a change in the society. I really think that the question whether "we" can - not everybody can do everything. The same organization cannot be a critical watchdog and service provider and a constructive advocate vis-a-vis the government. There has to be a division of the labor also within civil society and among NGOs when you look at its complexity, somebody today described it as an eco system, then we can really significantly influence policy making and achieve a bit more, first maybe in countries like the Czech Republic, then in Romania and Bulgaria. Don't be pessimistic about our powers.

Would division of labor really work?

P: I don't think division of labor would work. As mentioned, if I provide services for people with disabilities, and the legislation in this case is not working, there is something wrong with it - if its not me doing something about policy making, who else? Whom should I divide my labor with, if I'm the one who works for people with disabilities? I don't think division of labor works and this is one of the problems we face when we relate to the state.

P: My understanding of the division was more about that both roles are needed, but maybe not necessarily done by the same people. Maybe, the organization

may split, sometimes the organization is transformed from service provider to watchdog or opposite. Both roles are necessary and we may be more efficient if we are specialized.

Understand who our partner is

P: Our task is to learn, even though I may dislike it, to understand who our partner is. Our partner may not be ideal, well-minded civil service, but a more or less corrupt political system. Basically we have to learn from business how they do lobbying and e.g. use the media to make critical point, use quiet advocacy and use tactics to achieve something.

Mutual transparency in CS

P: I think we cannot use the example of business in advocacy. The priority in all relationship between NGOs - no matter if it's advocacy, service providers, or watchdogs - and the state is transparency. We need it, [first], from our side, so that we are transparent among each other (not to hide information about calls for proposals, for example). [Secondly], we need to force the state on every level to be transparent and to hold it accountable. Transparency is the beginning of



real partnership. One of the core values of NGOs is that we are open and want to create a better world. A better world is when everybody participates, and without clear information available to everybody we cannot make informed decisions. The decision may be different for different groups, but still we need to have this common level of public information about each other, this is the way to hold these fake NGOs and fake grassroots organizations accountable.

Human nature exist also among NGOs

P: This transparency among each other in the NGO sector, I like it, but find it very idealistic. This is not human nature, we are all human beings, we like advantages; we like to be better and have more than others. I'm sorry, but it's human nature and it's not only like this in the business sector, among NGOs it is exactly the same. I would love it, but it doesn't work this way in society, because society is constructed of various components that are all human beings.

Mod Moving to the second area, some good examples on how to achieve something are already mentioned, like creating a platform, consultative status, internal educating. What more concrete examples could you bring leading us to real partnership?

Need of legal expertise

P: The civil sector needs to develop legal expertise. If you want to influence the state and parliament, you need to be able and capable to formulate in legal terms. Not every NGO has a lawyer but a bunch of NGOs can find a good lawyer if they work together. Many things are not decided anymore in domestic politics, because they are decided on the central European levels, so NGOs need to develop capacity on how, as a group, they can influence policy in Brussels. None of us can do it individually, but some of us in a group can develop mechanisms and basically influence domestic issues through influencing Brussels. Sometimes in Brussels they will listen more to you than your own domestic policy makers.

Improving
argumentation

P: This is again a different type of the problem, do we really have connection? Are we really connected with those groups acting on that international level in Brussels? I have a feeling that they very often are doing their business without any connection with what is going on in specific countries. You mention that if we want to influence government we just need legal expertise, I disagree, what we need are arguments. Without arguments we are just simple lobbyists, lobbying for something that is suitable for us but not lobbying for some general and public purpose.

Consulting
governments
time
consuming

P: One thing that I have noticed: consulting the government requires a lot of effort. You need to really devote time and this is something that a lot of NGOs don't have, they like to shout something and then they go on to another problem. The other problem is the business attitude of NGOs: very often you don't get paid when you provide advice on legislation and this means that certain NGOs lose interest in doing it.

P: Do we have any real examples from countries with official consultation as a working mechanism, regular, ongoing, sustained?

P: I have an example from Lithuania, which doesn't work in practice. There is a law defining that the state, the authorities, and the government should have formal consultations with civil society within a month before the law or the decision being adopted. It doesn't work in reality.

P: I am thinking about Estonia, they are quite developed in implementing consultations and involving citizens in the decision making processes.

Sources of
legitimacy:
specific expertise
or representing
members

P: You have to be very clear when you are an actor that wants to consult the government, from where your legitimacy comes. There are basically two sources: one is you, the expertise that you have in place and that's why they are interested in consulting you. The second is that you are representative: a membership organization or that you have your own branches which you represent, and that's why you are actually interesting for the government. Those are the two sources of legitimacy in Bulgaria, and we have this problem: organizations, which are more or less representative, do not have the expertise in place. And even though they are a [desirable] partner for the government, because the government can legitimize its policies through them, they are not very useful in terms of providing specific advice. Organizations that have expertise are not representative, that's why they are easily dismissed by the government as they are simply not interested to listen. I am wondering if in some of the more advanced European member states there are examples of combining both: representation and expertise, for the sake of having a stronger voice and being heard by the government.

Mod: Do we have such an example of a country where they have been more or less successful with having NGOs that are at the same time representative and can serve as experts in the consultative process toward governments?

P: To some extent in Poland, we can say that in the area of legal professions, NGOs have worked as monitors since the 1990s, they have been heard and right now there is ongoing reform of the organization of legal professions. Some

representatives of NGOs are part of the process, acting as experts. Whether the outcomes of these reforms are successful and positive, that's another issue, but it's an example. Having said that, I also wanted to tell you something from my experience of the legislative process: I wouldn't be surprised if there weren't too many examples around our region with really good combination of top expertise and representation. The problem is that very often, even when the state does provide consultative mechanisms, it's difficult to collect the necessary expertise, and this is why, I think, the comment on specialization is quite to the point. Funnily, even in the most organized and funded areas, such as finance (I used to work for the finance sector, in the regulatory process there), even there you have full consultation and facilities provided for the associations that represent different interest groups in the sector. They all sit around the table and deliberate, and the ministries are happy to hear what they have to say. The only problem is that these guys, again like many NGOs, don't have time to elaborate on topics in need of discussion with the government. So, it's really hopeless how those consultations came out.

P: It is my feeling that we are talking about NGOs as a consultancy companies. Some other roles should be associated in the discussion, such as watchdogs putting some pressure on the government, etc. I hope the discussion will not solely be about how we can better become consultants for the government.

Mod: My understanding was that [we are talking about NGOs] having consultative status in reforms and regulative changes; [of] their representatives being invited to panels and expert groups not only with the possibility of commenting, but also sometimes elaborating on the new regulation. In some countries this is regulated, in some countries it's not, and there is good and bad practice in this field.

P: I am sure there are a lot of successful examples, I know of one from Hungary, just from this spring when an NGO was actually preparing a resolution for a so called climate law in their Parliament. In order to have such successful achievement a very, very important factor that is not new to any of us although we don't mention it, is that the government and their representatives need to be interested in what you have to offer. The combination of expertise doesn't matter, as long as the government doesn't want to listen then don't mind the message you put in front of them, no matter how clever or intelligent or feasible economically and socially it is, it cannot get through.

Government has to be interested in what you have to offer

P: There are mechanisms and techniques for vigorous and efficient public consultation, which have had really good outcomes and changed policies. Maybe the strategy for public consultation has to be organized in different stages, from the concept phase until the very end of the regulation process. We have to learn good mechanisms for advocacy, working with public consultation, and to know the legislative process in our countries as well as at the European level. We have to use the so-called Economic and Social Council where we as NGOs have chairs, at the national level and at EU level. We have to use tools to interfere with the state or with the government to influence public policy, we can do it. To be good partners and not children in the relationship with the state, we have to learn a lot about advocacy.

Improve advocacy skills

P: I just want to add an argument, I think the main and most important thing in

Need to identify common interest

the relationship between an NGO and the state is to know how to approach it. There are many NGOs who are successful today, and they know how to approach governments. If there is a conflict of interest, you can't implement anything. If there is a common interest, then you can negotiate with the state authorities in order to implement a proposal which has the same goals, but how do you do it is not by looking for problems and saying that the state cannot solve them, but show how the NGO can help to the authority to solve it. If there is an additional interest by the NGO, like receiving money or do something else, then nothing can be done. As an NGO member you need to put yourself into the position of the state authority and see what they can accept, what they like and don't like - and the approach should be based on that.

What about the future? Grounded expectations, not fantasies

Mod Now we want to speak about how you would like to have this relationship in the future? How will the situation and relationship between the state and the NGOs look in next 15 to 20 years? We would like to hear realistic, down to the ground expectations, not fantasies - we know very well what happens during the past twenty years, and there might be a difference between what we were dreaming about 20 years ago and what we achieved. Let's have realistic expectations how these relationship might look, and what are the crucial things to keep in mind. [Group discussion] I need to interrupt your discussion, sorry, but please, let's listen to each subgroup and hear some of the main ideas.

European legal frameworks for NGOs?

P: We were discussing legal framework and the possibility of preparing something like a European level legal framework for NGOs, some kind of basic principles. Will national governments be pressed, maybe from the top [by the EU], to deal with the situation in their own countries, maybe there are some principles from more developed civil societies in the other EU states that could be used.

Building trust is a long process depending mainly on us

P: We've been talking mainly about building trust and we hope that in one or two decades the relationship will have more trust, especially from the state towards civil society. This is a long process and depends mainly on us. Hopefully the state will understand that there is a space which is filled by civic activities and initiatives, they will create conditions so that these initiatives can be born and flourished, and there will be a friendly environment for this.

P: We were maybe more pessimistic. It depends; we can't know what the politics are going to look like in 10 or 20 years. The hope is that civil society [will be] able to react and [adjust] the way it works to address the politics of the moment. When



the states are authoritarian, it's the watchdog role that is primary; when they are generally liberal with the small "l", and then it's more capacity building and service delivery. So, it depends on the direction politics take. One thing, however that we could state as positive and inspirational is a goal to increase the efficiency in the system, e.g. it's much more efficient to have a consultation on a particular law at the beginning of the process, than when the law is already passed and creates a lot of problems and you have to make a big campaign to overturn it.

Advocacy groups having problems finding funding

P: In our group we discussed some pessimistic and some optimistic visions. The optimistic includes good communication and consultations between ministries/state institutions and NGOs, more synergies between NGOs based on individual contacts and being able to penetrate different structures. Probably the pessimistic view is that more and more NGOs will become professional NGOs and consultancy groups, and there will be less small grassroots NGOs with constituencies behind them. Also how advocacy groups will find alternative ways of funding and there is fear of what kind of advocacy groups will emerge in the future, e.g. nationalistic movements, or other extremist kinds of advocacy groups.

Young people doing things differently

P: I think there will be another type of self organizing happening quite outside of this NGO sector. Most of this NGO sector, in my opinion, might go towards professionalization, which completely deletes what it is about. As subcontractor to the government, it [the sector] can do some good work which is OK, but the movement type of NGOs that we believed in some years ago will be a different type with young people doing things differently. The question is whether this will be the good or the bad civil society and what would be the motivation factor: racism or doing something good? European funding will be shrinking and this will be a big challenge for good service NGOs because then what, where do they find the money? Important issue is how to identify alternative funding, and assess what will be the damage when the European funding shrinks.

Mod: So, we have some more optimistic and some skeptic or pessimistic scenarios, so what does this mean for us in the near future, over the next 3 to 5 years? What do we really need to focus on? What is needed to do in order to have real partnerships and to avoid these pessimistic scenarios?

The money question

P: One of the easiest issues to focus on, although not necessarily to solve, is the money question. Now NGOs are raising funds locally with mixed success, but it's not all about government money and it's not all foundation money anymore. There are some corporate funds, there's membership dues, there is event fundraising and I think some attention to these alternative ways of feeding organizations would be helpful.

EU developments matter

P: I am not an expert in the region but don't you think that whatever happens to the EU will have an effect on the role of NGOs? If there is a constitution, will there be more cohesive policy within the EU? That would certainly affect how NGOs will develop or how they have to develop, and how to interact with the state. Just an observation: I think that what NGOs have to do is to cooperate and interact more with the government, and the same has to happen from the government side, in order to be more effective in implementing the future EU policies within the country.

Exchange of staff

P: We are an environmental NGO with a public participation program, and we try to write a common project with a university to teach future officials at local, regional and national level how to discuss with people and how to motivate people to participate: methods, tools, when it is possible, when not etc. So, I hope this can be an idea for you all.

P: One alternative mean could be for some NGO representatives to work for the government for a while, or maybe [have on administrative positions] people who have the experience of working with NGOs. If such a person has a good position in the administration, [s/he] could understand and help to support NGOs.

P: Coming back to the issue of building trust I think it's about proving that an NGO or civil society organization can build their own sustainability, even independently from government funding, that they can involve constituencies, prove that they work effectively and produce results - that they can communicate their impact and mobilize stakeholders around the issue. It's a long process, but I think it's important to show results, to communicate them and aim to build trust, persuade, convince.

P: I would like to see during the next 20 years that developing proper relations between NGOs and the state becomes part of the agenda, of the policy of the EU. It is already happening somewhat because of the Lisbon treaty which includes a discussion on civil dialogue.

Transparency and accountability of NGOs

P: The EU is an economic union, not a civil society union. It seems thought, that there can be some way to introduce issues such as civil society, but it may be too idealistic. I would say that transparency and accountability of NGOs - that NGOs really act transparent enough, that they gain trust from their partners and it doesn't matter if it is government or if it's business sector - I think this is the only way.

P: In the next 3 years, I'll recommend for us to organize ourselves and develop our common links, common strategy on how to work with the state, organizing a small "civil society army" in relation to the state because they have to know we are here and we have a lot of things to solve together.

P: One thing I want to add to the argument of NGO-government relationship part of EU policy - a first step is to make this issue part of [national] policy. So, whenever there are elections, this will be one of the issues that are promoted and talked about by politicians, not only judicial or economic reform, but also the relationship with citizens and with civil society.

P: I would like to see in 3-5 years groups of citizens asking some coalition of NGOs to represent them and to lobby for them and their problems in the government structure.

P: Some sort of training program, academic program for NGO leaders, NGO management, some of that has already started but to make it more wide spread.

P: I would add a training program for public official [on] civil society.

Litigation case for misuse of funds

P: I would like to have one good litigation case of misuse of funds having to give them back to the state. Maybe, because of some whistle blowing from NGOs from the inside that we know they are being misused and we want it back as citizens.

Watchdog work will remain crucial

P: I think it's very important to create independent funding for critical but highly professional NGO watchdog work because having the level of sophistication of corruption that we have on the political scene today, you really need on the other side some critical watching with high levels of professionalism following everything for years. For those types of things you could never have trust from the governmental side, so to provide long term sustainability of this type of critical thinking it has to be created differently than just waiting for the state to provide the funding. Another thing, today funds are controlled by the state, perhaps it should be the effort by the NGO sector to somehow move this money as much as possible to agencies. Out of the hands of the civil servants in ministries because people in ministries change and you are so dependent on them, when you have set up specialized agencies to follow certain issues, you get bigger space for maneuver. For a significant part of civil society it's extremely important to join forces and tackle corruption and radicalization. These are two important issues of our society, corruption is undermining the basic trust in political institutions and as a consequence of the economic crisis we are getting radical forces, being well organized and mobilizing public discontent. Today the neo-Nazis are ready to mobilize themselves and dedicate their weekends to activism; the NGO sector is not ready to dedicate their weekends to try to mobilize counter activism.

P: On NGOs and the state working together: first thing is that when I talk about involving NGO people with the government, it may also be government officials going to NGOs to work together. The second thing is when the government drafts legislation, because everything starts from the legislation, if there is a gap in the law between the government and the NGO versions, they should work together to find [and close] the gap. The third thing could be to ask the ministries for some money of the budget, why not?


Let's not miss the train for next programming period of the EU

P: Very practically the new programming period of the EU is coming, and if we miss the train a lot of the priorities of those that we claim we serve might be missed. It's very important to have this type of action groups in the country, more coordinated who participate in a meaningful way in the consultative process so that the priorities that are needed are there. It's also really important to

have real monitoring and shadowing to see what was the damage of not using these all these structural funds that were for people in need to the full extent. We need to do monitoring, we need to do assessment and in order not to be screwed individually, it's very important to work as a coalition. There is a need of citizen feedback to the EU about this funding, and I do believe some of it can be changed.

Mod: Thanks to all of you for your ideas.



A person wearing a white shirt is holding a grey parrot on their hand. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape with a horizon line. The text is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

Keeping up with the changing world - how can we guarantee the viability of civil society?

What are NGOs – citizen based interest actors or subsidized project businesses? Who do they serve? How can we keep **civic identity** and **values** under the pressure of a contract-driven culture? What about change, new leaders and joint action beyond projects? Reaching beyond the discussion of financial sustainability and looking at other issues is crucial to ensuring the long term **viability** of civil society organizations.

Moderator Pavlina Kalousova (Mod): This session is called “Keeping up with the changing world” and when I think about how to apply this to the NGO world it can be quite a crucial issue. Before coming here I was moderating a discussion between the Czech government and the NPO sector about the new law that’s being prepared. 90% of the NGOs are not in support of the law. I would say that’s not because they don’t like the idea, but they just refrain from liking anything that is new and they are afraid what this will bring. It reminded me of the discussion we had about the One Percent Law four years ago, it was not passed in the Czech Republic because the NPO sector was afraid. One of the arguments for this fear was that if the law were passed the NGOs might lose state subsidies. What is happening now during the financial crisis is that the state is reducing the subsidies, and there is no One Percent Law in the Czech Republic. This kind of lessons we are learning every day, that not liking change might not be a good argument for us to do nothing. I prepared for you a story, which has four main characters: two little mice, two people, the maze and the cheese. The story is about change and I will tell it to you later. First we will divide into groups and write down three things that are changing in the world and three things that are not changing.



Group representative (Gr): What changes: legal frameworks, forms of NGO interaction and means of communication, the way NGOs act, becoming more professional, more like businesses, and the way NGOs deliver their services.

Universal inequality of assets does not change

Gr: Three things changing: sea levels because of climate change, communication technologies and the balance of global and local, we feel more connected to the global world and less connected with the local. What does not change is: death, the level of happiness of people and inequality in terms of assets.

Demography is changing

Gr: In our group we think economic systems, communication and civil society are changing, because people are older and in relation to the economic systems we are out of money. What is not changing is people’s basic needs, inequality and racism for example.

Gr: Points that are changing: climate, economy and technology. What is not changing: basic personal needs for e.g. food, basic human nature also referring to emotions, everyone can feel happy, sad, be aggressive, and the third point is that change is constant.

Mod: Thank you, and now which are the biggest drivers of change? [Summing up:] People. technology, business... Now how can these changes and these things that do not change interfere with your professional and private lives?

Lead change or adapt

Gr: After the discussion about what is our role as different NGOs, the summary is that you can either lead the change like innovators and entrepreneurs, being upfront and driving change. Some of us work with NGOs who are trying to influence what happens. With technology, on the other hand, we were generally saying that we have to adapt to it, we follow it, we cannot really influence it but we try to keep up and adapt. With regards to the non-change we said change is constant and we just have to accept it and make peace with it. We cannot ignore it but also we cannot do much about it. Our NGO tries to take advantage of the challenges and keep up with modern technologies, us-

ing modern communication. We try to be more efficient and actively transfer the economic system as well as stabilize the bridge loans to other NGOs. With regards to climate change we try to inform and change our behavior like for example with the heating system. Our NGOs are not taking as many risks as we did before. ¹

Civil society has a role in monitoring use and abuse of technology

Gr: Regarding sea levels which are changing we think that civil society does a lot of advocacy, conservation, preservation and recycling programs, alternative energy plus helping communities live with higher sea levels. With regards to communication technology civil society looks at how to make use of it and some civil society organizations provide technical support. We also thought civil society has a role in monitoring its use and abuse perhaps. The level of happiness - we struggled over; since it's not changing we thought we could try to convince people that they should moderate their materialism and consumerism because it's not going to make them any happier to try to raise the level after a certain point. We had some really good ideas about changing death as we talked about NGOs role in improving the quality of life before death, making death easier and dignified, addressing people's fear of death and preparing for the afterlife.

Gr: We were discussing values, needs, forms of delivery and communication and what organizations are doing in these fields. We are protecting and promoting values, we are helping respond to the needs of people and, talking about communication, we work a lot in the area of awareness raising and educating people. We are also responding by creating new forms of organizations, new structures that should address new problems and issues.



Mod: If you see businesses and their strategies, they are all talking about change as a good thing. Most of the marketing of businesses and global corporations is based on change and what it brings to our life – and it's positive. When you read programs of the political parties, how they will change our lives – it's positive. When you listen to the new music it's about change and it's trying to make us happy. However, if you listen to NGOs and civil society, sometimes we talk only about the dark side of our lives, we use complicated heavy wording, which is in some kind of opposition with the rest of the communication people are hearing. May be we could also think about positive things, and how we can talk to people in a language that they can understand.

Organizations are not resistant to change they are producing it

Participant (P): I would disagree that there is such a negative and pessimistic attitude and resistance to change among organizations, I would rather say that the organizations are producing the change; they are stimulating others and showing other people that change is something good. We work with our beneficiaries and society that might be resistant, because introducing something new is always difficult. But I feel that saying that business believes change is positive and civil society says that change is negative, I wouldn't put it as black and white.

Mod: It was my role to make it black and white, I was not saying that's what they do; I was talking about how they communicate. Now to the story about the mice and the cheese. So if you don't know the story I will just make it very

A story about cheese, mice and people

brief. These are the four main characters of the story, 2 humans and 2 mice. Once upon a time there were these four characters that wanted to be happy, and they knew that they were only going to be happy if they find the cheese in the maze, so they were running in the maze looking for cheese day after day but they couldn't find it. One day they ran into something called station C, where they found a wonderful storage of cheese, it was delicious and they loved it. They were going there every day because they knew there was enough cheese to satisfy their needs, and they thought they are happy because they didn't have to run through the maze all day looking for cheese. They just knew where it was, so they didn't put a lot of effort into it, they didn't dress or put their sneakers on, they just went in their slippers because they knew that the cheese is there. The storage of the cheese was diminishing and one day they realized that all the cheese was gone, there was no cheese anymore. They didn't know what to do. Anyway, the mice behaved naturally and said ok, the old cheese is not here, so let's find new cheese. And so they started running in the maze and they found new cheese in station G, which was a much bigger storage than station C. They found camembert, mozzarella, cheddar and all kinds of wonderful cheese and it made them even happier. The people instead of going after the mice, started to analyze. They were questioning who did this to us, how did we deserve that someone took the cheese from us and they became very hungry. They were very upset because somebody took away their happiness, and instead of going to find new cheese they got stuck in the old station, wondering who took the cheese. Let's talk about how the NGO sector may look like in 10 years if the old cheese is gone and there is no other cheese. What does the new cheese look like and how can we find it?

New partners, establish a social enterprise, change profile or focus

Gr: We came up with four suggestions: number one is to find the cow to make our own cheese - via income from a social enterprise, playing in the market etc. Number two is to become friendlier to the mice, who obviously have a superior intelligence since they've got new cheese - that would mean finding more partners who have resources, which we don't have, improving communications, our good name and legitimacy. The third is to change ourselves into mice and enjoy the cheese together, that would mean becoming a business or a government contractor. The fourth is to switch our need from cheese to chocolate and look for completely different resources; maybe some we don't even know exist. Chocolate is more attractive to some of us, particularly since I am allergic to cheese, really.

Gr: What will happen to people if they don't adapt and go looking for cheese, our conclusion is that death will come for this particular NGO and this is the main outcome. One donor disappears and then this might go further to affect other donors, and the rep-



It is a market of NGOs, some will survive

utation of this particular NGO and other NGOs as a sector in general - so this is a danger for the whole sector. We have to be flexible to respond to changes and isolation is one more consequence, which might come up. I believe that organizations should be competitive, and the better organizations should stay in the market and organizations that don't operate well and don't fulfill their clients' needs or respond to change appropriately should go. We should also try to educate donors, so if donors or funders or institutions that invest choose areas that are no longer important or valid, we also should try to tell them that this or that is not a problem in our community, it is not really a problem for this group of people.

Gr: We basically came up with three things: to learn how to make your own cheese, or convince people to bring cheese to you by organizing them, or, finally, to convince factories that make cheese to provide you with a portion of their cheese - so corporate social responsibility.

Increasing local funding

Gr: For us the new cheese would be people acting at the local level - funding becoming more local and being dependent on private individuals or civil society initiatives being more self sufficient maybe in the shape of making a social business. The new cheese is more social engagement from individuals also in the shape of corporate volunteering or volunteering during your retirement. Cheese that grows locally and is not imported, never runs out.

Mod: Is this in line with the changes that are happening outside? What are you describing – the new cheese or the end of the old cheese? Does it connect with your discussion of the economic systems, sea levels, global-local, aging, means of communications, environment, professional NGOs? What kind of tools do we offer to the others to participate?

P: One of our points was to improve communications, outreach, sense of social roots and legitimacy - all those things you need if you want more people to participate in your activities. Financially, I am not sure but we've tried for many, many years and it hasn't worked, it's difficult

Mod: What kind of recommendations would you give to people or NGOs to get from here to there?

Constant monitoring

P: NGOs should constantly monitor their work and make sure the solutions they propose are not harmful in the long term. Constantly monitor their objectives and their mission, the methodology and the solutions and connect their capacity to change according to the analysis. Don't analyze just for the sake of analyzing, use local resources, be creative with the resources and make sure that you become sustainable.

P: We thought of three strategies how to deal with cheese becoming less available. One way is to diversify resources, including social enterprise like "eat not only cheese but other things also". Reach out to large number of people and come back to your roots if you started as a grassroots NGO. This way you are less dependent on large grants from foundations, government subsidies or corporate financing if you receive support from private citizens. Finally, increase the capacity within the NGO, keep the human capital - if you have people trained how to find cheese and they leave this is not good, try to keep people

and upgrade them.

Mod: Other ideas: stay curious, be persistent, stay focused, take advantage of changes and technology, keep learning, take risks and look out for local possibilities.

More visibility in society

P: NGOs should try to be more visible in society, speak more about themselves: what they do, how they do it and why they do it. Be more proactive and innovative. Learn a lot from business models, Engage more individual donors instead of relying on grants or institutional donations, and cooperate among each other so that you can build a sector that has a political voice and can influence legislation.

Move with the cheese and enjoy it

Mod: To finish the story, these are some of the important moments that happened to the people because the mice went out and found the cheese. Some recommendations from the people: the more important your cheese is to you the more you want to hold on to it. You have to smell the cheese often so you know when it's getting old because keeping old beliefs like the cheese in storage C, does not lead you to new cheese. At the end when people realized that either they are going to die or they have to move on to find the new cheese, they realized that the best thing you can do is to move with the cheese and enjoy it. This story is called "Who took my cheese?" and is used a lot by corporations to teach people to deal with change. It was given to me by a CEO of a company that had to restructure the whole company and was saying that people are going in the hallways complaining how it was wonderful before the changes, and he realized that he had to teach people that change is not bad, it is normal and natural.



A person's hands are shown holding a blue pen over a newspaper. The background is slightly blurred, showing a laptop screen and other papers. The text is overlaid on the image.

Civil society, old media, and cyberspace - too much talk, but no communication?

Is it easier to have a mission than to have a message? Why is it so hard for NGOs to **formulate effective messages** and speak the same language as their audience? Is **virtual communication** killing messages and blurring responsibility - and in the end with so many **diverse platforms**, why are our messages getting lost? A crucial point for the survival of civil society is to turn "NGO speak" into effective communication!

Moderator Petko Georgiev: I want to start with just a few basic issues that I see as key in terms of the relationships between the NGOs and the media. The title of this discussion is created after a song of the Bingo Boys, that you might remember – it was a hit a couple of years ago – Too much talk and no communication. Well I think this is the situation that many of the NGOs are.



A lot of talking - little communication

If you look at what they do, they are talking a lot – they have websites, they publish reports, they meet at conferences, they have their internet places where they communicate with each other. So there is a lot of talk going on. But my impression - and I think that many of you might share this - it is that there is really very little communication. There is very little that reaches a wider audience outside those closed circles, those shared micro spaces where NGO people communicate. So I would think this is one of the major problems or issues that need to be addressed.

Expanding platforms

Another observation as a starting point for this discussion, we have seen in the last ten years a real revolution in the area of communication, mobile phones, the internet. They have changed the world beyond any kind of imagination. I guess most of us cannot imagine working and living without an email and without the cell phone. So the platforms for communication have expanded and they are no longer limited to specific people but accessible for anybody. We don't have the excuse of the limited space we had ten years ago, when everybody could say, well we got all these great ideas and the national media is so controlled and commercialized and so on, they don't want to listen to us. No! No more excuses. The space for communication is more open than ever and it's becoming even more open. So if we are looking for reason why are communications going nowhere we should start looking into our own way of communicating first?

An ocean of information that lacks objectivity

Technology has, as always, gone before imagination of people how to best use it. We've been hoping very much that the internet and the communication revolution gadgets that we have today will expand outreach and contribute to more and freer access to information. Instead of that, we have received an ocean of information that lacks objectivity. We have sacrificed our own private space and privacy because of those communication means and at the same time we are limited and don't participate in that wide share of information space. My opinion is that societies are getting more and more fragmented and people prefer to communicate only with those who are like them. So more or less whoever you put as a friend on Myspace are the people you want to talk to. The rest we don't care about, and they don't care about you. I think that's a problem. Social networks eventually expanded our way to reach people that we consider part of our own circle but have grossly limited our ability and our time and motivation to reach out to other people.

Another question is about the content of internet communication. Is it a blessing as most of us thought it might be, the freedom we have to express ourselves and reach unlimited amounts of people? Or is it a curse because anybody can publish anything? And you have no way of knowing if it's true or not, you have no way of knowing whether it's verified. Once you read something on the internet you have to do your own research to find out if the text has anything to do with the reality. So this is a new dilemma of irresponsibility versus freedom in communication. Just a few years ago we were dealing with censorship and

limited access to the media and now we have another issue – unlimited access to communication and the responsibility issue of what is published the content of forums chat rooms and so on. Anybody is free to publish whatever they like and of course they are not aware that big brother is actually watching them and people have ways of finding out who has written what.

You don't
have to be
representative
you have to
have a message

Finally I would like to say that effective communication - and I am talking now from the perspective of NGOs - effective communication has nothing to do with how much an NGO is representative. To be effective in communication you don't have to be representative for anybody, Coca Cola Light does not represent anybody but yet they found an excellent way to communicate their message and become popular. You have to have a message and you have to know how to communicate that message, these are the basic issues, it's not about being representative. This is a problem as well, because people who are only representing themselves are generally more effective in communication than very well organized groups of people. Now time for your comments

Participant (P): It's striking for me how much energy communication requires and I am asking myself how much energy am I ready to put into communicating.

P: I think that even if we are lost in this ocean of information we still cannot ignore things like Facebook, Twitter etc. and try to use it for the best means or purposes.

P: I am amazed with the tech revolution we are living in and the world that's changing every day. I am interested in manipulation. I try to ignore Twitter and Facebook, but it's like a few years ago we tried to ignore cell phones, but I think I will have to try to use it.

P: Another problem is the interest of the audience, probably because there's not enough time to invest, the [NGO] shows are boring and nobody watches them.

P: That it's about inability it's not about time.

Aggressive attitude online **P:** I am kind of afraid of the aggressive attitude [of anonymous comments online], so I don't read comments to my articles. I was told that I have to reply because if I don't get the feedback, I will not know what I would like to talk about here. [I feel that media] accept me more as an individual, as an expert than as someone who's representing the movement. And even though I used the background knowledge of the movement the environmental NGOs and international networks, they [the media] don't want me to represent anybody.

Mod: The internet can help with providing a tool for transparency for NGOs, but you have to learn the rules, because there are different rules for the online world. First of all you cannot choose your audience – you never know who reads your stories. This is why you have to adapt.

P: We are struggling with the [problem] how to present very complicated legal issues in a relatively simple manner. Like freedom of expression versus the dignity of individuals or crime prevention versus defendant's rights - these are very dif-

How to present complicated legal issues in a simple manner?

difficult delicate issues this is problem A. Problem B is that our main target groups are not too sexy from the point of view of the public, how can we convince the majority society that marginalized groups' problems are real problems which concern them without being populist?

NGOs as a news source

Mod: I think it is important to see how journalists consider NGOs as news source. If the content provided by an NGO is not newsworthy, then it has difficulty to reach mainstream media and be in the news. Probably we have to differentiate between the general presence of an NGO on the internet and content / campaigns. Also we need to understand how media works, probably that's how NGOs can improve their presence and acceptance in the media.



P: [Communication] is a gateway to philanthropy, participation, volunteerism, everything that makes the people understand why NGOs are there and what are they doing. We face really heavy obstacles on how to present the idea of civil society organizations, how to work with journalists to transmit these kind of ideas - how not only to have a message but get the message heard by the public. How to choose the channels and how to use them in a proper way.

P: If you look at the top Twitter profiles in the country or worldwide it's not people with causes that are the most effective communicators, it's often people who are advertising themselves. This is a big challenge.

Don't need to reinvent the wheel

P: We don't need to reinvent the wheel. There is so much already out there that can be used – we don't need to reinvent a new Facebook or Twitter, but make applications and RSS feeds and work on [what is already there].

P: If you bring a message you also have to bring ideology and that's what all the NGOs are discussing about. E.g. it is really hard for the media to get the right numbers on human trafficking in let's say Eastern Europe, getting [NGOs working on these issues] together and providing the media with real actual numbers would be the right way to combine NGOs and NPOs with the media.

Media is captured by businesses

P: I would like to share the difficulties that we face in our work with the media, which is many times captured, not anymore by politics, but by businesses who are controlled and well linked with politicians. This is many times shutting the voices of civil society on very important issues.

Communication helps create lacking constituencies

P: Communication helps civil society to create constituencies and this is something that is lacking both vertically among NGOs and between civil society and the people.

P: Evil forces can use the same tools for exactly the opposite purposes.

If you are not on the internet you dont exist

P: If you are not on the internet you do not exist, if you ignore the internet someone will fill it with content anyway and you will be absent. You have to do it – there is no choice.

Mod: I'll give you an example. If I am doing a story on human trafficking which we do from time to time in the program that I produce I would turn to a couple of very professional NGOs in that sphere in Bulgaria to give me the data, to give me opinion. They are newsworthy for me, because I know they have the

Journalists need experts in their address book

expertise. And I don't see any problem in that, journalists operate in a very simple manner. We have an address book and e.g. with regards to crime each of us has four or five names tops. When there is a story concerning crime we call those people, we don't start searching for new sources but usually call the sources that we already have. Only if those sources are not sufficient for our work we would start to search for new names. So if I am an NGO - I try to put my name on the address book of those journalists that are writing about my problems. Once I am in their phone book I am represented in the media. It's really very simple. Media will call me once and if they find me interesting they'll keep calling me, if they don't find me interesting they will never call me again.

P: I have the feeling it's not the media's first interest to raise awareness but to have a certain action and a certain point. In this very fast living world we just have time to care about one thing.

P: I think it's important to be present on the web because when journalists need a cover story they search the web first. I have an example of a Hungarian who used to write a blog in English explaining politics in Hungary. He would publish it once a week, he wouldn't have very high amount of readers but every now and then he had foreign journalists talking to him because he was the easiest one to find online. He was the first person they would talk to and he would tell them where to look for more information and whom to ask further. So in a way he was on a shared telephone / email list of all journalists in the world by being present on the web.

Positioning

Mod: It is about positioning yourself. I know it's a marketing thing but it has to be applied. This guy has positioned himself perfectly to be the contact point of people outside Hungary who are interested in current developments.

P: I think there is a change in the conception of what journalism is and what's news production. You may produce professional production however most websites nowadays have a place where you can watch videos - everything is published on the internet and internet users can choose what they like to see, compared to what is shown on TV.

Generation gap

P: I think that there is a very clear generation gap; I don't think many people under 20 watch TV these days. And I don't think many people over 40 read the internet daily. So we have two parallel worlds: in the kitchen and in the dining room you have two people living in the world of TV and the next room their kids are living in a different environment - the internet. And they don't really overlap that much.



Mod: NGO representation on the internet. As a journalist I have a huge problem with this. Open any NGO site, it has some information about the organization and it's full of success stories. Success stories and contact information. Neither of this works for a journalist. As

Success stories and contact information, none of this works for a journalist

a reader but also as a journalist I have learned not to believe everything that is written on an institutional or NGO website. This is a problem for NGOs. Have you ever heard of a project that has failed? We started this project but we messed it up, it didn't turn out well. No, every project is a bigger or a smaller success story. If you read the internet it is full of success stories of projects that are dead and forgotten a long time ago - what do you do with that?

An interactive blog can create interesting communication

P: A potential solution for this can be a blog where we accept all comments. On our organizational blog we have very interesting communication between potential beneficiaries and the foundation, as well as new ideas for our project.

Mod: NGOs that open their projects to free and open public evaluation that's innovation.

No technical language, rather images photos and engaging messages

P: There are some rules here too however, e.g. do not blog texts with technical NGO language on your website! Just use short paragraphs, images, photos of your project and send engaging messages: how can you as my viewer help me as an NGO or how can you get involved in our actions: as a volunteer, as a donor, anything. It has to be engaging. [Instead of] only providing success stories you could also tag and have hyperlinks that connect you to other sites. This can bring not only the success stories but also the sad stories and the reasons why you work for this – this can be done by good tagging. Google's doing it and it's a way of future public pressure, a new skill: search engine optimization and tagging.

P: It's free, anybody can tag themselves into Wikipedia.

P: It's a whole science; there are companies that make living out of it. It is much more complicated.

Opening a shop on a side street

P: Putting everything in your NGO language as someone said on your website it's like opening a shop on a side street in a suburb, while actually you want to be center square of the city. Go where the main action is on the internet, make sure you have articles on the issue you work about on Wikipedia, that it's up-to-date and has all available information there, maybe linked to your reports. Think of a way you can use YouTube. The second most popular search engine on the web after Google is YouTube. People like to watch things. Forget your website. It should be there but it's not that important, what's important is that the message is available where people go.

Mod: Most of civil society by default wants to influence public opinion and through that have an impact on public policy as well. Public opinion is still, and will be in the few years to come, formed through the mainstream media. How can civil society and NGOs work better with mainstream media? Why is it so difficult for NGOs to produce news stories and understand how to put their content where it really matters? Ok, Google has a worldwide audience of billions but if you want to influence a specific public policy decision in your country, what you really need is the headline news of your national TV. Google may help but it won't do the trick.

P: I think that it's not a matter of not knowing how the media works, because I think that it's fairly easy to understand, NGOs are now more and more employ-

ing people that have a media background to work as press officers or media experts or even media consultants.

Good news
doesn't count

P: The NGOs that are able to attract media attention are the ones that fight human rights, freedom of expression or they do very provocative actions - for example Greenpeace, Amnesty international, Human Rights Watch. Good news from NGOs doesn't count.

There is
news and
no news

Mod: I personally think that the media does not operate in the categories of good and bad news - there is news and no news. I will give you an example. If the government increases the pension by 10% I think every national newspaper and TV will start with that story if there hasn't been a major earthquake that same day or something like that. It's a positive thing to have pensions going up by 10% and the media will not discriminate against that news because it's positive. It's not about good or bad, it's about promoting stories that concern people. They will start with the pension story because it concerns a vast majority of the population. Even if the media doesn't formulate it that way, they prioritize their stories according to what part of the audience the particular story concerns, and whether it a forms of novelty or threat to that part of the audience. It is much more difficult but there is a technique of promoting positive stories.

Bad news
are catchy
it looks
dramatic

P: Can I disagree with you? Another example however, from Budapest, Hungary: about 200 people set the TV building on fire - it was on the news for weeks. When 50 people blocked a bridge it was again in news for weeks. But when 600 people on bicycles demonstrate peacefully twice a year, there is just a small mentioning on the 10th page [of a newspaper]. Bad news is catchy, a building on fire - it looks dramatic. A bunch of people demonstrating peacefully it's not catchy.

Skip NGO
vocabulary
real people
and stories
are better

P: Just an idea how to sell your NGO story to the media: sadly journalists often work on the minimum effort into a story, basically if they are going to a press conference they publish the written material they were given. You should be prepared for this - and not with the NGO vocabulary - pick up a person, because an NGO benefits from working with real people e.g. with unprivileged kids. For a journalist it's not that easy to come into contact with this kind of person and if you work with them and say you have contact (of course if they are willing to cooperate) this can be something that links you to the media. Making a personal story is always easier to show than just numbers and stuff.

Mod: I think it's very logical for NGOs to distribute their messages through individual human stories. NGOs are supposed to be working with real people so why do they need to talk the language of statistics? Media is more and more looking into individual stories when they want to present a certain piece of news, and a good news story will always start with the particular person's story and then go on to the facts. So if an NGO helps a reporter to find out the personal story that will help him or her do better TV or newspaper stories - this will help the NGO get their message through. Work more with personal individual stories!

P: Another thing that could help NGOs to get their message to the wide public is to use their business partner. It doesn't matter if it for a specific project or a general partner - but someone who knows you. Business people are usually more



skilled to communicate with media and promote their products - so these people could really help us to get the message through and by using their contacts mainly (it's all about using contacts and phonebooks).

P: It may be good for NGOs to adopt some of those marketing skills from the corporate sector.

Use marketing skills of the corporate sector

For example the cigarette producers - you see what kind of stuff they are able to promote, it's bad for your health, it's killing your kids, its full of poison... And still they are very good at promoting it. We NGOs are supposed to be promoting things that are of value to citizens, so if we were able to use the same skills, even if we don't have the same budgets, we can use the same skills, there is no reason why that shouldn't work.

Decline of traditional media

Mod: Will there be journalists in 20 years? Is there a need for journalists?

P: I think there will be space for journalists in 20 years, but it will look very different. The decline of traditional media is a fairly hot story of the past few years. One of the things we [were thinking] initially is that with the internet there [will be]no need for media outlets because anyone can publish anything. However now we start to realize that that's exactly the point. If anyone can publish anything there is actually still a strong need for somebody to build up credibility, someone who you can trust. Someone needs to look at every day and curate the news for you, so, at least in my mind, there is no question that there will be journalists in the future. What kinds of news outlets they will be working for is a whole other issue. Someone spoke about YouTube; the strength of the media on the internet today is that they can merge various things , written content side by side with video content, even with chat functions, etc. and this is the type of stuff that you cannot do with the traditional media.

Mod: So there will be a need for journalists in a different technological environment but in the same functional role.

P: Ultimately I would say yes. As a journalist you have to deal with the various formats, probably you have to have one person as TV crew, radio crew etc, but someone needs to follow and make sense of the news.

How can we build public pressure?

P: How can be we build public pressure in 20 years? This is interesting because its the overlapping part between media and NPOs – publics pressure.

P: I don't think the professional field [of journalism] will die, even if citizen journalism content can be of good quality, in most cases it's not. And it's very personal, it's not always in the public interest.

Mod: If you want to look forward it's always interesting to look a little bit backwards. Remember what the situation was just 15 years ago: one public state channel TV, just a few newspapers in this part of the world, all of them controlled by the state. Also in Western Europe the situation was similar: public TV, maybe with two channels, public radio maybe with two or three channels. Those who remember those times, we hoped that once that monopoly's broken and we have more private and commercial channels, all of a sudden there will be a much bigger choice or variety of programs that you can watch . It will be a much better and freer media environment. Now I find myself surfing the channels, I have 65 of them at home, with digital platforms you probably have hundreds of them, I surf through the channels and very rarely I can find something worth watching. Technology may provide you with millions of channels and terabits of content on the internet, but it will not necessarily provide you with something interesting to watch, something worthy of listening to or reading. So let me phrase another question: how are NGOs and civil society participating in the creation of quality content which is worth watching?

How are NGOs and civil society participating in the creation of quality content which is worth watching?

P: About journalists as curators, this is a very difficult question and one of the great things that internet communication has done has been to reduce the power of the information gate keepers. This is crucial at the moment. Then there's the question of responsibility for the content. Two examples: a travel guide book from the last century - a very responsible travel guide talking about Egypt and the Egyptians, and it said Egyptians do not wash; they have a low sense of morality, etc. etc. This was content, which had been through all the committees and approved to be published. Another example is the scientific consensus in the 1970s that animals are unable to feel emotions. This conclusion was managed by peer reviews and as no scientific information suggested the contrary, it was allowed to be published in scientific literature. This was [back then] supposedly responsible control of information – but in fact it was totally wrong. I think that the strength of internet is about choice, and not having one outlet curating the news. There is value in the vastness of information.

Responsible control of information is relative

P: About the future, I think TV will die and I think that news will be paid for. In a world with so much information, you will have to pay for it in order to get the relevant one. I am pretty sure about this.

P: I think we are not first people debating the future of the media. When radio was invented people were afraid that human kind will forget about reading books. When TV was invented they thought this is the end of radio. I don't think TV will ever die because the average person does not have the time and the resources or the motivation to search for news and to search for content. There will always be some technical tools call it a TV station, a program director or a multimedia portal which will be digesting content for you. People are busy, they have full lives and they are getting busier and busier and have less and less time. If you are a doctor or some other professional you need to hear what's going on around you, but you don't have the time to search on the internet all day. You still need someone to digest and to give you the essential part of what's going on. And who is that guy - is it a blogger who is responsible only

TV will die, news will be bought

for his own values and ethics, or is it a news organization, maybe different from today's news organizations, but who anyways follows some kind of professional code of conduct and knows when something can be promoted as verified news, who can differentiate between news and opinion and feel obliged to give a balanced view of the different opinions. If this dies I think society will lose something very important because we'll go back to the time of party newspapers. News won't matter because you will always find something to support your thesis. If you don't find something to support your thesis, you always have a shoe to take off and throw at somebody.

Mod: What should civil society and NGOs do in practice in the next years to improve, I think we have a consensus that they need to do something.

Form is gathering importance

P: I think one of the things that is happening to media presentation is that the form becomes more and more important. Everything needs to look pretty and it needs to be short because people don't take time. This leaves much more for reporters to do, much more time is needed to deal with the background information, take out just the short important parts, be representative of both sides and not biased and so on. If there is a specific topic that an NGO covers, they could really help out - because it's their field they know the stuff and can probably do some of the work.

P: Can NGOs change the media? The problem is, even if the message is the right one, the presentation in the media is not always correct. E.g. a journalist may ask: why are there so many NGOs, doesn't this weaken them and prove them useless? If this is the first question, our task is to teach journalists. Probably with a university course. There is major lack of understanding about NGOs and civil society.

Mod: I understand but I don't agree. Civil society and NGOs are even less popular than governments and if NGOs don't trust the media please believe me the media don't trust NGOs - and with good reason. I don't think NGOs should at all try to put educating the media on the agenda. It's an impossible task - the media are what they are. We must learn to use them and work with them as they are, this is a major principle of PR. If you haven't been heard, it's your problem that you haven't been heard, it's never the problem of the recipient. You have to be able to choose the right wording, the right time, the right environment, the right media, the right carrier of your message in order to be heard. You can't change the media. Efforts like this have been done. So many NGOs, so many donors have funded their own media outlets or taken a media outlet and funded it for years and years placing their messages without any complaints because they are paying the bill and everything they want gets published. The result is less than zero. Such publications lack credibility with the public, it's not the solution to re-educate the media, "let's teach them about NGOs, let's teach them about civil society". No. They are what they are.



Educating the media is an impossible task

P: We as civil society organizations are in disadvantaged position because many before us and many around us have destroyed the image of NGOs. We are seen by the media as project-driven, donor-driven, closed society organizations if you listen to the worst side of it which exist out there. When you

talk about a good initiative that your NGO has carried out it's only logical and professional for a reporter to ask you well how much did this website cost, and who paid the money? And if a website costs ten times more than what it usually costs on the free market, which is often the case the NGOs, then society and the readers have a good reason to ask why is this? How did you choose the company? It may seem very petty in your eyes because you've done an excellent job and it's a great website and many people have worked so hard, but from the perspective of the media there are other issues which are big concerns. As somebody who is actively involved in institutional non-corporate PR I think it's impossible, don't try to put it on the agenda to educate the media. It just won't happen.

How many people have the guts to stand up and start talking?

P: When NGOs are talking about why journalists don't understand them, why donors do not understand them, why company leaders do not understand them, why the neighbors do not understand them, it is just because there is such a small overlap between society and NGOs. I honestly think it is useless for NGOs to expect that the media would do something, or for journalists to expect something from NGOs. What I would expect from us as NGOs is to stand up and start talking; how many people have the guts to stand up and start talking in the NGO sector?

Mod: To summarize: talk more. Be braver and proactive in communication. Don't stay on the safe side. Avoid NGO and institutional jargon.

NGOs shouldn't have to stay on the safe side

P: I hate when people start, it usually happens in Brussels, commenting something on a panel with: well to stay on the safe side I would like to say that... Maybe someone working in Brussels have to stand on the safe side, but we as NGOs and media should stay on the other, we should be more bold in what we do.

Train media regulatory and ethics commissions

P: About trying to educate journalists, we've had a bitter experience with that as well. I think what NGOs can do - and are obliged to do - is to train media regulatory commissions and media ethics commissions. An example from Bulgaria [is], where the bulk of the mainstream media violate their own code of ethics, which they themselves created and signed, on a daily basis and the press and the broadcast media commissions have done absolutely nothing about it.

Mod: Very good idea. Work more proactively with the self-regulatory bodies of the media when there are violations of the values that NGOs are protecting. Because these regulatory bodies often only react when they have been officially addressed by somebody. It's good to write letters to those regulatory or self regulatory bodies about issues that you see in the media, and they can react.

P: I would like to tell you about a project that been going on in Poland for several years. It's a web based platform called ngo.pl and it's an NGO portal. It's tailored information for NGOs but also for wider public and there are civic journalists, professional journalists working outside mainstream media who work for the portal. There you can find information about interesting projects, interesting results of projects, many success stories, great projects that people do every day not only from Poland, but from different countries all over the world. I think this is an added value. It's not to replace mainstream media, but as NGOs very often cannot reach out with their messages, they can tell their story to the civic

Interactive and informative NGO platforms are useful

journalist and this person would cover the story and people can read articles and add something. It has a forum, it's very interactive. This is also a very good resource for the media and through this portal you can find experts in different fields, experts from NGOs - it works very well and it could be replicated in different countries I think.

The risk is that it becomes a closed circle for NGOs

P: Yes there is a platform and I am a user of this platform as well, but the great danger with something like this, is that it becomes a closed circle for NGOs. It has a lot of different interesting information, but it's written only for us. I am quite sure there is not a lot of people from outside of the sector who are interested in writing or reading the information on this site. It's a great difficulty to become a platform not only for NGOs, but make it attractive also for people from outside.

More interactive media and more listening to viewers

P: What I think NGOs can do in the future is to try and reach out to the public, try to be more direct, for example use modern technology. We see new things coming up, for example you have this information channel TV channel and there are viewers sending pictures and MMS - we could do the same, ask the viewers, listeners or readers on the portal to come up with a story, give us information and we will give it to the media.

NGOs don't have the patent of truth

P: NGO should talk more but also, as just mentioned - also listen more. Listen to the public. I think the problem is that NGOs think that they have a patent for truth and everybody should listen to them, however this is not true all the time. If we are more open and use all this new technology to listen to the public and ask the people, do surveys asking the people on the streets what do you think about this new idea or this project? Then we can do it better - and then media may listen to us.

Not working with media may undermine your work

Mod: You mention that the NGOs don't have the time to work with the media and with the public. I think this is something that a highly specialized NGO can afford, if they are running a hospice or providing another social service they don't need to communicate with the media that much. But if an NGO is active in a policy area and it is policy oriented: research, human rights, environment - not finding time to work with the media means undermining your own work. The product of an NGO is not a perfect report on an excellent website, the final product we are looking for is a changed policy. Even the best report won't change anybody's policy if people don't hear about it, if they don't learn about it, if they don't debate it. Not working with the media for an NGO that has any policy agenda is like committing suicide, it's spending money to no avail. Working with the media, drafting a media strategy and implementing it should come before drafting a report. Because that's the whole point!

Any NGOs that need to talk to the media, be creative!



Business and civil society - growing divide or getting closer?

BUSINESS AND
CIVIL SOCIETY

What is the potential of expanding partnership for needed social change and reforms? Is there an outdated binary thinking about the two sectors that we have to break? What motivates business and civil society actors to cooperate; why do or don't they work? What is the place of CSR in all this: is it just another form of *self-promotion* and is that OK, or do companies mean good? This discussion deals with the language barriers, *stereotypes* and assumptions often coming in the way for prosperous *collaboration* between the two sides, bringing in voices from both sides.

Business are interested in working with nonprofits

Moderator Eva Varga: This is a very diverse group and I am really happy to report that as a result of a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of persistence, we have some real live business people in this group as well, because I thought it would be more than appropriate to have the other side represented as well. So we do have two bankers and one venture capitalist, which are going to be giving us their perspective. Here is my first issue: businesses are interested in working with nonprofits and with civil society to achieve social change - but it's got to help them in some way, provide a bottom line and make business sense for them. This is what I hear from business people and it seems to be the general motivation, behind [social] actions of businesses.



Participant (P): It is not the only [business] motivation

Mod: What could be other motivation?

P: It can be purely philanthropic, I guess, on the side of business people. They want to help someone who is really in need. They want to change something because they find it important and meaningful, not necessarily thinking of making higher profits.

The job of businesses is to make money, period

P: I would say that is a risky proposition in some ways, maybe to take one step back, the job of businesses is to make profit. It is to make money, period. That's what a business is set up to do. The whole debate has gotten twisted in recent years that the job of businesses is also to do socially good things, to adopt a model of H&M or Marks & Spencer who have flashy CSR programs. At the end of the day, that's not their job, that's OK and we as nonprofits, I think, need to respect the fact that they are still the ones putting food on the table for most of us. That's their job. If we can accept that even though this may not be our ideological stand, we have a lot of room for working together with business and finding ways to help businesses to exercise moral interests and become more involved. But at the end of the day, it's not their job.

Business these days often declare other things they stand for

P: I disagree in a way, because if we would look at the web pages of a lot of big companies right now, they really declare a lot of things they stand for. Among this, the usual goals of making profits, but very often they declare a lot of other things as well and this is the sphere in which NGOs and business entities can cooperate. I think there are good examples, we are cooperating with law firms [for pro bono legal advice] and although we have a lot of cases, we also have a lot of interest from law firms, in fact the amount [of offered assistance] is bigger than the number of the cases. We observe that these attorneys are really involved in what they do and trying to involve younger lawyers as well. On the other hand, we have cases in which has a lovely CSR-dedicated company according to its webpage at the same time are responsible for human rights abuse, and this is a problem.

As individuals many people working in business want to do good

P: My company has 50 000 employees in CEE and I can say that people in companies are different. There are always people and individuals behind businesses, e.g. I as an individual, think I would like to do something meaningful and not only thinking in profits. This is very important. I heard two days ago on the radio that in French Telecom which has a lot of people employed, there had recently been 23 suicides. I think it's very important for people to have a sense behind what they are doing. Social corporate responsibility may give them that sense.

Pro bono work can help with recruitment

P: I am from an NGO in Czech Republic, and I just can confirm what was just said, we have not so much experience on cooperation with business, but we started cooperation on pro bono basis with bigger law firms recently and they said that they had experienced that this new scheme helped them in recruitment. Pro bono work and CSR, people really want to do that and look for some work which makes sense so finally this may help business.

Understanding each other better

Mod: This is actually one of the key discussions here - which are the motives and then understanding the motives of the other party. The key messages that came out of the survey [posted online before the session – in two different versions for businesses and NGOs] were the need to understand each other better. When being asked the question “What do you think that the other party has benefited from cooperation?” it was really interesting to see what businesses think that the NGOs are benefitting and what we think businesses benefit from the relationship, because the views don't match.

NGOs are skeptical to working together with top law firms

P: I am coming from an international organization that exists for more than 10 years, promoting human rights and pro bono work. We started with an assumption that we know the NGOs and we know the civil society because we work with them, especially similar NGOs to ourselves, and now we have to get to know lawyers and law firms to convince them to do pro bono. It turned out that it was a wrong assumption, the lawyers had 5-6 top reasons why they work pro bono and contribute their time and skills for free and in most cases the top one is to help as much as they can for free. However NGOs that could need some legal assistance they are extremely skeptical to working together with some big global corporate law firms and uneasy with the situation. In the end probably 75% of our time is taken up by motivating the NGO part of the equation and not the law firms. There is a need of organizations to increase understanding and bridge the gap because the gap is huge, corporations in skyscrapers don't meet grassroots organizations naturally.

NGOs don't commit enough to building bridges with business

Mod: An important question: “Do we as NGOs commit enough resources to building bridges toward businesses?” The general opinion seems to be “No, we don't. We try maybe once and if it doesn't work out, we never try again”. Another important point is about the matchmaking, are there enough mechanisms to make good matches between businesses and NGOs? Or is there a problem of not having a stock exchange where you can look up potential investment targets according to your wishes, risk and resources, you can pick in whom you are going to invest? You may have heard about the social stock exchange that was launched first in Brazil, in the Sao Paolo stock exchange as a civil society initiative, one guy persisted and there is now a list of NGOs and you can basically invest in them through this stock exchange mechanism. A question to one of our business representatives: Why would a company like CitiBank partner or work with the civil sector?

P: I am from CitiBank in Bratislava and work as public affairs officer. I cannot speak on behalf of the whole sector, but of the company's motivation and experience, and maybe add some personal observations. Back to the question about the motivation, first of all what we have to realize is that the key motivation and objective of existence for any business is to generate profit. We are doing it for our stakeholders and our main stakeholders are the share-



Our bank feels responsibility for the environment where we operate and our people live

holders, they are making the decisions. As a matter of consequence, we have the resources, which we can use for different purposes including corporate social responsibility. If I have to put it in one sentence at the bank we say that we feel responsibility for the environment in which we operate and our people live. Two key things [we like to invest in] the business in which we operate and the people who are our people. It is very important to realize that any business is somehow related to the environment in which it operates, and its employees have their own connections. The stakeholders who are very important in these difficult times are our employees. If we speak about CSR from the bottom line, about social, economic and environmental impact of what we do and translating this into different programs, currently I would say that most important is the social aspect of the social corporate responsibility, the way we treat our people, the way we speak and communicate difficult decisions we have to take. The motivation is very generally that we feel this responsibility, we operate in a world in which we live with our employees and we understand that our stakeholders are not only shareholders but also the external stakeholders including employees, and civil society players.

Funding is the main benefit for NGOs

Mod: Some more examples from the survey - it was not a statistically significant survey - but I think we got some good indications of what people are experiencing. It was emphasized on the business side when asked about the preferred nature of relationship, that giving advice to NGOs and the benefit that businesses would get from the relationship was not the money but being active in the environment, taking care of the people they're working with or that their business affects. The same thing, the same question asked to NGOs resulted in this: funding. Funding is the key benefit that NGOs see in the relationship with the business. I am challenging you to start thinking about how to change this thinking and approach because I think that in today's environment there are a lot more opportunities that businesses can offer, also they are short of money and we must be creative and providing them with solutions and giving them other opportunities as well.

Social corporate responsibility is not how much money you give but how you earn it

P: I am from Bulgaria, and I would say that social corporate responsibility is not how much money you give for it but the way you make your money. From this assumption it is obvious that civil organizations can partner with companies not only for the money, for funding but also in other aspects: help companies to operate more responsible because organizations are experts in the fields of community and social change. My observation is that there are much more problems of communication in terms of languages; organizations and companies speak totally different languages. Mechanisms would be useful for both groups to communicate better but obviously the motives for the relations for both sides are different, so it's time to be honest and put on the table what we want to achieve.

NGOs are also an industry

P: I am from a Capital organization, and also wanted to make this point about the resources of NGOs which they can promote, I would call it an industry. One of the points is communication which is very important, I agree that – I think the NGOs and the corporations speak different languages so one message here would will be to develop common language, to develop a matrix that each of them. Coming back to the funding perspective. Companies can provide funding but only from the profit that is generated. And this is the net profit. The allocation of this net profit is discretionary to the corporation, so there is no right for an NGO to claim part of this profit. I think that the demands of the NGOs should change - they do not participate in this net profit but could participate above this line. Participating [in generating profit] above this line in day to day business as business partners creates an opportunity for NGOs where they may provide additional values for corporations and vice versa. The corporations provide added value for NGOs if the NGO doesn't limit [the company's] growth by claiming part of this discretionary value which is the profit. I think there are number of examples where NGOs and corporations can work together also in a for-profit way, it doesn't matter what are the means of achieving a goal if the goal is the social impact, increasing life expectancy, fight poverty etc. However, by only sticking to this donor-recipient model NGOs limit their growth; by participating like business partners above the line, above the profit [necessary for growth], they can scale their businesses and achieve social impact.

More creativity needed to find new types of interactions

Mod: The business respondents in the survey were for this, saying yes, NGOs could and should work with companies, helping them to develop their core business, instead of trying to take a part of the pie which the shareholders and everyone else is also interested in. There needs to be more creativity in finding new types of interactions.

Practically how to engage business

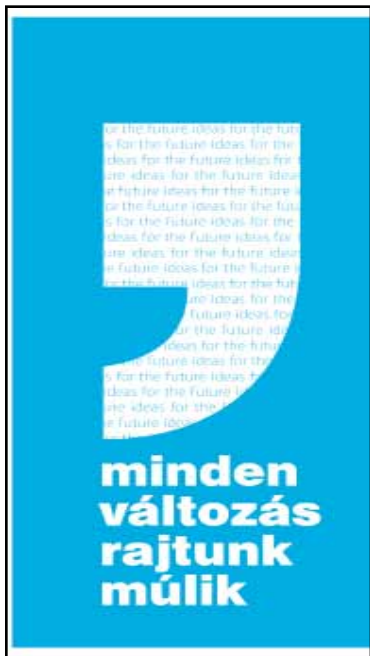
P: I am from Lithuania and my comment is about social change and corporate social responsibility and the idea is to split these concepts a bit because they are slightly different and can mean very different things. Then about the practical aspect, how to engage businesses? One thing is when a business says that they are ready to offer a piece of advice, what does that really mean that you should necessarily need to follow it? My question is whether businesses feel the same, are they ready to offer partnership because at the end of the day I completely agree that they are oriented towards creating profit in the short, medium and long terms. How many of you have been able to persuade businesses, to actually offer human resource help?

P: I am from mixed corporate and NGO background in Poland, and I would like

Small difference is a completely different thing

to draw your attention to two things that I personally find very important: first of all, we are very often victims of too high generalizations, if you go down you will find small businesses in small communities cooperating very well, because they are neighbors, all love the same vicinity and on the level of small communities the motives of small business are very close to those of NGOs. It's about cleaner water, it's about better education for the children - because basically they are also citizens of the very same community and it is easy to find obvious common goods and common goals for everybody. The problem starts with huge businesses and especially international businesses, the dilemma is that they have huge money and it is really worth looking at this money, but then the partnership and conversation is getting difficult. On the first hand the key barrier is mistrust because NGOs approaching the business are approaching it with

preset assumptions in mind of the immorality of business. The rational attitude will be to say that they have a huge budget for CSR so let us use our negotiating power, to persuade them to do something that will bring social change instead of going there saying: "You see, we are going to do something, we will not negotiate the goal with you because we are the masters of defining social goals and social values". So mistrust is one part, on the other hand there is the lack of ability to engage business, there are fantastic people in business and if they believe in you and in the presented common vision, they will go for it. We should not go to business with mediocre propositions: "give us money because there are hungry children in Poland" - this is not inspiring. We need to go to them with good diagnosis, with inspiring labels and visions, and I am sure sooner or later it will happen. So, secondly there is a barrier and lack of positive, engaging propositions. Business is impatient because of this difference of communications and languages. They would like us to come to them and say "This, and that will take 3 years to do" and we're coming saying "Listen, let us do something for the good of this or that". It is important that we have these new mechanisms designed for different situations, because as I said for small business we don't really need to worry, it works well. And again, we have to forget about these moralistic assumptions we carry, because there is nothing wrong with making money, let's stop treating all business as bloodthirsty capitalists from XIX century that suck our blood. We need in addition to encourage business to change their perception of NGO as the poor relative.



The paradigm we are living in may also be changing

Mod: The trust deficit is very true and it came out of every comment and every survey we received. So the question for us will be "How do we reduce the trust deficit?" Some of you already mentioned communication, providing information, listening, speaking the same language and also looking at how the paradigm that we are working and living within might be shifting is important too. Let's not mix objectives with methods and ways to shift those objectives. When we use the word "industry" or "efficiency" or "measure", many say let's reject that because these are business terms, but these are also terms that anyone can use in their operations. The key is the objectives and what we are trying to achieve by being efficient, by measuring, or, if you wish, even by treating us like industry. It was funny, during lunch one of the business speakers said "This is all industry – look at the number of people that are attending this forum" and somebody else that said "Industry? You can't call that industry!" This was a funny little incident to illustrate this.

Approach varies greatly between small and large businesses

P: For me it is not only the communication and language, but the legitimacy mix that the NGOs should present to business. We have worked with business and the point is if you go to big corporate companies with multinational branches etc, the expectations and communication entry at the first point is much different than if you go to your local food-chain store and tell them "We need a playground for the kids in the neighborhood". The commitment and motivation mechanisms for businesses vary, and I would agree and confirm that as an NGO representative, we NGOs sometimes lack the knowledge and information about how to present to business, first to economize their time, we know that they don't have time to listen to descriptions of all the projects we do. We really have to come to the point where we meet and we are efficient, both the NGOs and the business. I think there is space for people like our guests from the business here to say "You know, we don't have time for this", this will really be improving both ours and their efficiency and making something good. We speak about the environment, people, social issues and involving people, but then again from the NGO perspective, without being extremists, there is a need for transparency and honesty when it comes to issues such as the environment and the ultimate social motives.

Also big corporations have limited budgets

P: When you go to big corporation you have to think about the fact that also big corporations have limited budgets, often a special program for the kind of projects they sponsor or invest in. This is very important I think, NGOs cannot just go and say "We have this and we do this" but also need to ask what the business intend to do and make a discussion out of it. Many people come in and you just cannot help everybody

Who was behind the donors - business

P: Today there was this question whether we understand or remember the past and how the civil society has developed over 20 years. As I am looking back and thinking about whom donors supported and who was behind the donors – business. And they supported civil society and created a whole range of civil society in our countries through NGOs. Why did they do it? Because they knew that they had to create a proper environment, - also business environment, policy, legislation, etc. That happened over this last 20 years and also from the point of view of NGOs many people are well prepared for business, for high even government positions, because of having this experience from NGOs. They had to live with an exact amount of money, they know how to put together things, how to manage it, communicate etc. Over the years this was the best preparation for whatever position they were to reach, today they are heading all kind of important institutions, even businesses. In terms of possible ways of cooperation it is worth noticing that also our businesses has started being international, going across national borders for example supported by country aid programs. Why not going out of the country together in partnership and cooperation with local NGOs, to help support social changes in other countries as it was done here by those donors and projects in the beginning of the '90?

Mod: What kind of interactions might there be between NGOs and businesses? One is donor-recipient. What else?

NGOs monitor business entities

P: It can happen that the role or even the goal of an NGO is to monitor the activity of business entities, this can be an obstacle for cooperation so this can be also a kind of interaction: monitoring, being a watchdog. These NGOs must

be independent from business entities.

Collective initiative

P: Collective initiative, our experience is working quite a bit with private donors but also with associations, with companies from particular sectors and there is an idea to start a collective initiative, social change within the sector through research, advocacy, because at the end of the day an organization alone could not do this. You need at least 4-5-6 organization for this to start. We've been successful in the pharmaceutical sector, the construction sector and it works. The thing is that obviously now [during the financial crisis] it's not a priority for most of them, the bottom line is what really matters these days.



Micro loans

P: There is one example of cooperation between an NGO and a bank, where they did a micro credit loan program for poor people, where the fallout grade of these loans is guaranteed by an NGO, whenever poor people cannot pay back the loan it is repaid to the bank by the NGO. Basically the bank is making real business and profit given that you have no defaults on the loans.

P: We had an example in Bulgaria where banks gave loans that were secured by NGOs for starting up new social enterprises.

Barter

P: Barter, meaning the sort of barter where a business provides goods or services in exchange for publicity, visibility, connections. Monetization, meaning that NGOs provide the good, or service and then it is monetized and turned into some actual cash that the organization can use. These are different than the donor-recipient relationship, because it is a write off for the business as opposed to something that they have to report on. Another example for business partnership, a bank launching a credit card that is branded, a percentage of the expenses of that credit card goes to benefit an NGO or a coalition of NGOs. It can expand the customers' base of the bank and it is actually a business partnership as the bank could be making more.

Customer acquisition

P: NGOs can bring a customer acquisition and customer retention value for the business and the business is making profit. Part of this profit can go directly to the NGO which makes the operation of this NGO more scalable than in the donor-recipient scenario.

Cooperatives

P: In this brochure there is one beautiful quote from Ferenc Mislivetz, that the common good is one of the biggest deficits in our society. I can give you an example: businesses at local level using the experience and structures of NGOs and the civil society type of self organization, for example a local development association. Most of them are in fact NGOs uniting businesses, all type of cooperatives (cooperative is not a socialist word), local level individuals uniting for common good, all kind of credit cooperatives – there is a lot of infrastructures and organizations which are in fact interactions of business/civil society type activities. I don't mean public-private partnerships, but rather uniting individuals because the sum of individual interests is more than the interest one by one. An example: a few small producers doing something in a village, cannot buy their entry to the market themselves individually because of the cost, but united in a or with assistance from a local development organization, the cost is more reasonable in comparison with what they can achieve and this is an example of

common good. Finally I don't quite agree with this statement about the benefit from NGOs and their history in our region, I think it's rather mixed record in terms of business benefiting from people being educated through civil society activism, but interacting with businesses is beneficial for civil society organizations because businesses provide the sense of more result-based action, as they are focused on delivering things and something measurable. When analyzing this discussion, it will be very good to distinguish between types of businesses and between various types of interaction, if you are working with small businesses is one thing: if you are cooperating with big businesses it is totally different.

The interaction with business and their way of doing things is inevitable

P: Just a quick point on whether NGOs are becoming more business-like, whatever this is supposed to mean, I remember 10 years ago and even earlier, the way that donors approached NGOs and what they required from them, and compare it to nowadays, now, both in terms of goals and objectives, as well as of results and "the bottom line". I think in the development of our region and the whole society, this interaction with business and their way of doing things is almost inevitable and it might become better.

Responsibility and transparency also goes the other way

P: I am from a foundation working in the Balkans: Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo, and the scenario with civil society is not very well developed and there are not much business resources. I think [speaking] the point made about responsibility, that business has to be more responsible and transparent, it actually goes the other way. One of the first things I think good, solid business with good and solid CSR programs would ask an NGO is "OK, provide us with your annual financial statement, your annual report, and those things that make NGOs more business-like." That for sure will stop many NGOs which are not operating in a business fashion or in an ethical fashion to the extent that they should be.

Business-like what does it mean?

Mod: About business-like: does that mean more transparent, more efficient, more visible, and more professional, or does that mean you go after profit? I assume when we're saying more businesslike, we mean the first set of things becoming a little more compatible. Blurring the line more in the way we work, the lack of common language, that barrier can be dealt with.

Advisory function

P: I think that the role of a non-profit potentially is an advisor for business - let's say an Environmental Defense Fund can advise the businesses how to save the planet while they're saving their bottom line. It is a good role that we can play because we do have special abilities, knowledge and understanding. I am American and I like games so I am going to propose simple game, if you represent an NGO, can you raise your hand? I know who the businesses are, (I am a fundraiser, got my eye on you), how many of you NGOs are more interested in better interaction with business? Right, that's why we are all here. The final question that is nagging me though, is how many of you have more than 50% business representation on your Board of directors? 4 – and not everyone. For some people it's not an option, that's right, but it was just interesting. The business people in the room: how many of you sit on non-profit boards? The point is that looking at the future, if we want better interaction, we should bring business in our world as much as we want them to let us into theirs.

P: I am from Bosnia and Herzegovina, we are a foundation and this year we started two for-profit businesses. Making this clear distinction between us and them, neither help us, nor them. To categorize measuring efficiency as a busi-

Clear divides
between us and
them serves no one

ness term is in fact dangerous. If you are a non-profit and you don't measure your efficiency, you are in trouble or will be soon. Those are not business terms, those are terms of doing your job well, regardless if it brings profit or not. Speaking about bringing profit, short term, midterm or long term, and it is up to non-profit people to show that you will have more profit if you take care of your employees, the community, the environment, people in need. This is something that non-profit people somehow don't manage to say.

Corporate
governance is
forgotten

P: Let me demonstrate the difference of languages, first of all that it is important to mention that CSR has two fields for me: first the corporate governance and second the corporate citizenship. Corporate citizenship is easy, it's about donations, charitable activities, programs that businesses run, that NGOs run and businesses are supporting and so on. But the corporate governance aspect is often forgotten, if you take the 100 top economic entities in the world guess how many of them are national economies? – less than 1/3. 2/3 of the largest economies in the world are corporations. A lot of power is in the hands of corporations. That's why, in my view, you really have to get close to corporations, even if you do not have to or you do not like to. You have to understand the language of businesses because the power is now (unfortunately from your perspective perhaps) in the hands of corporations. It doesn't mean however, and I am on three boards, that we don't have an understanding and passion for CSR. It's not just like a hobby; it's about improving the situation. Corporate governance is about distributing the power, about understanding and holding power and this power is somehow translated or transformed into money. If we take the example of CEE countries now, for the last three decades we have seen a change of situation, however if we go back corporations have been here for centuries. In history when we track corporate social responsibility as a term, it has been used for about 10 years, if you go back and seek for NGOs or civil society organizations like Amnesty International or Green Peace you will find hardly any of them are older than 50 years. It really goes back to the 1960s, however it doesn't mean that the concept didn't exist before, it may have existed but it wasn't about learning from each other. So to us you are very young

industry, if I may use the term, to us you are a new world and a new partner that we are learning how to live with, but you also really have to demonstrate and prove that we have to cooperate with you. Being a bit critical with the risk of sounding like "the bad guy", some five years ago I made my very first CSR presentation to a local network and I said about the business sector: We see you quite often as marketing agencies, we put up some objectives and goals which we want you to meet. That's our fault but that's also your attitude towards us. Quite often we see you as a tool how to improve the image of the company, we see the poten-



TO ACTIVATE THE POPULAR BASE OF CIVIL SOCIETY, WE SHOULD WORK FOR AN EASTERN EUROPE OF HOSPITALITY. ALL CITIZENS AND IMMIGRANTS ARE PART OF CIVIL SOCIETY, AND SHOULD BE ACCORDINGLY INVOLVED, ENGAGED, AND COMMITTED. OUR PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY IS THE HUMAN VALUE OF HOSPITALITY TO OTHERS.

*Tomasz Witliński A New Disoriented Civil Society
Hot Art as Activism against Poland's "Moral Majority"*



Need for more dialogue, exchange and feedback

tial of you as an instrument for public relations and then we push. It's really up to you to resist or to push back, it is really up to you to prove that this is incorrect approach. I miss partnerships with equal and balanced partners on both sides, I want to see more professionalism from your side, because I don't see many professionals from NGOs. Maybe in this room there are 100% of them, but in my experience of many NGOs in Slovakia, and also the broader CEE region, I can tell you there are very few professionals. You come to us with very short goals, ad hoc projects and not with strategies or well formulated concepts, this is something that we are really missing. We want professionals to come to us and say: "This is what you do and this is what we can help you to do, maybe by changing a bit of the habits that you have". Also NGOs have to change and accept us as a partner and being professionals: "Here we are and this is what we do, work with us". Not: "Please, help us, please, work with us, try to work with us", this is about an equal partnership. This is what I said 5 years ago and I still feel that it is all about the donor-recipient relationship which I think is wrong, we should be partners because we have a lot to give to each other. It's also about learning how to live with each other. I quite often miss the process of feedback. It is often: "This is a program we would like to launch, can you help us launch it and provide us with funds" we say: "OK, let's discuss" and then if we like it, we provide you with funds. When the program is over, we see the final report and then the partnership is over. There are no follow-up initiatives, no follow-up strategy or new concepts of doing something. In the midterm we are missing this true approach from the third sector - it's about professionalism and about initiatives. The situation in Slovakia also changed, ten years ago we have lots of US based funds and big funding organizations providing a lot of funds to the local NGOs, it was quite easy to live with this money. Frankly, many NGOs used this money very easily for very different programs. There was nice output from these programs, but the situation has changed and now these funds have moved. There is a new situation that you NGOs are facing and you have to learn how to live with this experience. One of the solutions maybe is to use corporate social responsibility or create a social enterprise. There is a potential, the door is open, and so it's not about a closed door or knocking on door that can't be opened.

Took us 3 years to figure out the partnership

Mod: We set up a business advisory network, which works with us, it is set of pro bono working individuals who are not just interested in our model but as individuals they want to champion a certain cause that is important to them and they are looking for somebody to partner with and somebody who can introduce them to an environment that they are not yet familiar with. It took us three years to figure out the partnership with CitiBank, so short term versus long time really matters, we needed to follow up several times and actually to start over again and again, to explain, test and pilot the idea before it became reality. Having somebody that you can rely on in the long term gives a sense of security, "ok, what I am doing is going to make sense in the longer term so it is important for businesses to experiment and gain experience". Going back for one minute to venture philanthropy - basically this is an engaged way of being philanthropic which we introduce as well and it seems to be working for some. This as well emphasizes the point that money is not everything that businesses can provide; you can get assistance with strategy, working methods, outside advice and really create win-win situations.

P: I believe that corporate social responsibility should be used as a substitute to "sustainable development", it is about limiting using the current resources for

the benefit of the future generations so that they have the same resources

The way we are putting a price to our products may change

Mod: Looking into the future, what do you expect the tendencies to be in next 10-20 years? One of the surveys gave me really interesting respond which I want to share with you: there is a shift in the paradigm in the sense that NGOs and businesses are not longer going to be distinguished by the legal form or that one is after the profit and the other is after only the social goals. They are going to be sharing objectives and working towards social change, to achieve social impact, therefore, they are going to be actors in the same market place, compete with each other or working together as partners. Secondly, the way we are putting a price to our products, our input and our impact has to change, we can no longer be measuring in terms of money and the prices of cost of production, but we will need to take in account what is the social cost of making something. Businesses will change their pricing practices and the way they look at value and this is where NGOs can be extremely helpful, because they know or should know better, how to put a price on the social value that they create.

There is suspicion towards NGOs

P: I don't think the assumption how corporations view NGOs was completely honest, by using this macro level and compare how many corporations there are in the world. When you go to the micro level, into a country or locality, and actually deal with the NGOs there, my suspicion is that a lot of corporations don't actually know what to make of NGOs, they are suspicious of what we are. They do not see us as future competitors or that we will be able to provide social services for a lower price or have a clear orientation towards profit.

It is not only that NGOs lack vision of partnership, but I'm not sure that businesses are really willing to engage in those partnerships, in any relationship there is always one part that cares more and in this case I think that NGOs care more simply because we are the new kids on the block and we want the partnership. I'm not sure how much businesses are really interested in letting us in, they are already often participating in government structures around CEE. My question is if we are not making a mistake when assuming that this will be replicated in CEE simply because we are much more corporate minded. Our society doesn't have the same structure, nobody says that our society will have a strong middle class. I don't see it happening, we have some individuals that provide sound kind of democracy, but really we don't have the accountability mechanisms in place. It is businesses that most of the times decide which law should be passed, it is businesses that in the end put in people in the government.

Are we viewed as idealists and too enthusiastic?

P: I agree that I'm not sure how businesses look at us, NGOs, and many times I see they look at us with this "Oh, you are these idealistic people, living in your own world, doing stuff which is very nice but it is not related to the real life and real problems we are dealing with". I am wondering if there is a need from us to maybe cut down our enthusiasm when we present our activities, be more serious, more frowned, impose the harsh realities of life in order to convince companies that we are also viable partners.

P: I would say "absolutely not!" particularly because I have seen the wonder in the eyes of business people that chose to do something as illogical as work for a cause. There is something nice about that, there is something comforting that there are people like us in the world who are willing to be idiots and change the world, it's a nice thing about humanity. However, we have to back it up with their language and the sale's catch has to be tempered with reality but I

Motivating staff through volunteerism

don't think you need a frown when you say it. Additionally, when talking about that paradigm shift online, it has already started. The role of business is to make profit, and businesses are becoming more aware that by participating in certain activities they are ensuring their own profit, be that by ensuring motivated staff through volunteerism, shifted GE to more green technology, etc because they know that's where the money is - wonderful! The big question is how we can assist and still be relevant; in some sectors we may even cease to be relevant. Social services have a long history because they just are not profitable. But in environment e.g. business could play a crucial role for the betterment of society.

The passion in entrepreneurs can be amazing

P: Let's not assume that idealism and enthusiasm are something specific only to NGOs, the passion I have seen in some entrepreneurs is amazing, however that this is something they will expect from us is totally true. Further we as NGOs need to do market segmentations for our donors; we always have the good guys from the corporate sector telling us that they are really interested in partnership. Just recently one of our proposals was turned down by a bank because it was too involving, even though we were able of course to negotiate the level of engagement, they really didn't want us to go so far. I think we really need to see which companies have the capacity and the desire to be our partners, which ones are really interested in mid terms engagement in a very specific issue, and which ones are only shooting for PR because they exist as well! The key is how much do you get in return and how much do you compromise.

Business people are not cold people

P: Business people are not cold people, we are also warm-hearted. We shouldn't speak about us and them, we should speak together and build partnerships which will be really helpful for both sides, and this is a goal for the future to build these partnerships more strongly.



What about the future?

Our world is changing faster than anybody expected. 20 years ago we lived under communist regimes. There was no free media and free and fair elections were only a dream. 15 years ago we didn't really know cell phones and emails. 10 years ago there was no google. 5 years ago there were no social websites. Now we can not only vote, but - thanks to new technologies - very easily gather, **find supporters** and have direct influence on social and political life. Never in history communication and participation has been as easy as now. So how do can we use it better? What will **shape** the relationships between various actors within the public sphere, how can we **anticipate** new trends and what will this mean for our future work?

Igor Janke (moderator): All of my friends were deeply frustrated under the undemocratic regime in the 80's, we didn't know what to do with our lives, and one day just a few months later in 1989 communism collapsed. We woke up in a completely other country, we had a new government, and a few months later I had a job in a normal independent newspaper. I could write almost anything I wanted, I could influence, I could do some things for my country - in one day I became a completely different person. I woke up in another reality and this was the first revolution in my life. But the newspaper I worked for looked like a 19th century factory, we used old type machines, and to prepare the layout of the newspaper we used scissors, glue and paper. The headquarters looked very ugly, was smelly and [remained] deep in the previous time.



The revolutions of '89, internet, Google and web 2.0

And then came the second revolution, a few months later an investor came and bought [everything] completely new, the most modern equipment, he rented a new office, we moved, and a few months later we were one of the most modern newspapers in Europe! He employed an excellent designer who prepared the new layout for us, and a few months later we had one of the most modern and I think beautiful newspapers in Europe - and it was just 3 years after the reality of 88. The investor raised our salaries 3 times and I bought a computer and a car, and again I was in a different reality.

Then again a few years later came another revolution, because we got internet, email and cell phones and it changed completely our style of work. It changed my life. A few years later came another revolution with Google etc - which has also changed for many of us: our work, our way of life. Then came web 2.0 and we could all of us create our own media and my work again looked completely different. We are just 20 years later than that moment when I was a very sad student with no future in the communist state and during one-two years I jumped from the 19th to the 21st century and now I run my own website and I can do it here from my cell phone - all that happened in 20 years.

So now let's talk what will happen in the next 20 years, and I will ask Julian first, he knows the outcomes of an inquiry into the future made by Carnegie UK Trust, discussing some drivers of change in Great Britain, and we would like you to comment on that.

Revolutions happen more and more often

Julian Popov: One very interesting thing that Igor said was that there were several revolutions recently, so probably the first trend as we are starting to talk about the future we should realize that revolutions happen more and more often. So instead of thinking that the world will be looking the way we know it, we should probably be looking at the next year, and probably the next year there will be two [revolutions] if the space between them is becoming so close.



I also remember from this morning or last night a joke from exactly the time that Igor was describing, about a guy who is traveling in a bus looking at another man and asking - excuse me are you not Chinese? And the other man says no I am not. At the next stop he asks the man you are Chinese aren't you? The man says I am not. A minute later he says you must be Chinese, and the man says: no I am NOT Chinese. Later he asks again and the man says: ok I am Chinese then, [and the first man asks] but why are your eyes not like that then? I think that we have a little bit of a problem that we create Chinese all the time and we chase them about their eyes, we ask people: you are a socialist, you are a

nasty socialist and then we ask them if you are a socialist, why don't you look after the poor. We have another situation in which I think it is quite relevant - especially for me as a Bulgarian - the good intention but corrupting influences of our European Union membership [in terms of] agricultural subsidies - which I don't personally support, I am a minority in that sense. I don't think that Bulgaria needs agricultural subsidies just because some French farmers insist to have them. Agricultural subsidies have a massive corrupting influence on a country that is not completely resistance to corrupt practices, and nonetheless the European Union insists on having these agricultural subsidies, well why don't you use [the money] in the proper way?

I think the same Chinese syndrome we have when we discuss civil society and we root our ideas about civil society and what it should deal with to exactly these very exciting years of '89, none of us will live again so we have to accept that. That is the most exciting time in my life and in everybody's life and it is not going to happen again - such excitement and such belief in the future! I tried to look at something that is probably not so exciting, but will probably define the problems of civil society in the next 20 years - and I think that the main problem that will define civil society and will determine where it goes, will be our ability or inability to deal with the growing world wealth. We often - including in the Carnegie inquiry - define the problem as the growing divide between the poor and the rich. I think the problem that we are facing is exactly the opposite, or it is not a problem it is a huge challenge, and this is the narrowing gap between the poor and rich, and the fact that there is a growing population which is growing wealthier and wealthier. The world is not capable of dealing with that at the moment, if we continue to develop and live in the way we live and run an economy like the one we live in today. In this case I can give you lot of examples of economic growth of China and I think that anyone who want to know what will happen to civil society and NGOs in 10-15 years should look into what is happening in China every day, what the tendencies are there. It is the growth of population, but also the wealth of population, which is putting incredible stress on the resources that we use. If I try to be more specific I think that the main challenges and the main problem that we face in the next 20 years will be 1) climate change and energy security in one sort of package and 2) advance of medical treatment.

**The problem
of the growing
number of well-off**

Life expectancy

Children born today could very realistically expect to live 450 years. Just imagine what a mad prospect that is. Last year in England, quite seriously people were discussing the possibilities for real immortality. I would give you one other statistics, US spends 18% of GDP on health services - which is a staggering amount and Obama wants to change somehow the distribution of that. Half of these 18 % [of GDP, that is spent on health services] are spent on the last year of people's life. So that gives some indication of how ageing population and the advance of medical treatment - and the cost of medical treatment - will put additional pressure on resources and society. And the greatest injustice and unfairness e.g. in Britain appears to be exactly in that world: the distribution of advanced medical treatment. If you have cancer for example, some people can be cured with more advanced treatments and some other cannot be cured with more advanced treatments. This [injustice] is going to grow and if you live until you are 150 years, you can do the math and see that it just doesn't work out if you are to put all these resources into looking after a 150 years old person.

Resource usage and preservation

The other problem of course is climate change and energy security. We very often don't think and talk about that as a civil society, but it is a huge problem in the current economy, and the environment is not capable of coping with this rate of change in climate. We will have to expect another revolution of the type of revolution that Igor described and mentioned earlier [dealing with] the pressure that climate change is putting on the world. The climate change science - not the change of climate itself - and the political consensus over climate change will inevitably lead [be a top priority] in the next few years, not even [talking about] 20 years but fewer. Revolution in the car industry, revolution in transport [systems] and many other things. We most of us saw a few years ago, how the 100 watt light bulb disappeared, and we were not engaged in this problem, we don't know why it happened. But this is just one little single [piece] in a massive chain of events that will follow, which will force us to change our way of life and our dealing with resources and problems linked with climate change. Climate change is a very bad term by the way, it points at something that is very unclear.

One thing that linked with this, is energy security and the energy security of the world is under severe threat because of the expected peak of oil usage, ending of oil reserves, and this will be very soon - according to some predictions already in 2013. The demand for oil has become much higher than the discovery of new oil reserves, [the finding of] the last big oil reserve was around the mid 70s and since then all other oil reserves [found] has been smaller and smaller and smaller. The pressure that this will put on international relations and on international negotiations could also be quite severe. So I will stop here so that we can have some time for discussion, but I think this narrowing gap between rich and poor will have to be investigated very closely in order to analyze what will happen in the next 20 years, how society will work and how we will react to these changes.

Igor Janke: Now Ivan is to comment from our CEE perspective



Ivan Krastev: There is an American former vice president, who is not very famous for his intelligence but he is famous for saying the future is not what it used to be. And I do believe that this is very important because one of the major things when we talk about the future, 20-30-50 years ago the future was a project. E.g. if you were living in Bulgaria in the 1960's we knew how the future was going to look like. We didn't know when it is going to come, but we knew what it was going to look like. The problem is now we are starting to think about the future the way the insurance companies think about it, it is very much about risks and how you calculate risks and opportunities. And I think in this kind of way, we central Europeans have one kind of advantage and Igor made it very clear. We have seen in our personal lives how certain things that looks as kind of obvious by nature, can collapse. There is a good title of a book of an American sociologist about the last communist generation which was called "everything was forever – until it was not anymore" and I do believe that this is very important, because we should try to mobilize this type of experience that we have.



Expect the change

I am just going to put 3 drivers that I believe are really important. One is that demography is really going to be much more important than democracy as the main d-word in the next 10-15 years. Just to give you some statistics to imagine the scale, there are more people living in the world now than the number of

people that have ever lived. Imagine, for the whole history of humanity, for the first time there are more people alive than people dead. This is a huge scale, many of the things that we are talking about; we are still trying to figure out based on the experience of a totally different sized population.

Ageing

As a second part of this driver, there is ageing and ageing is a very special problem for Central and Eastern Europe which are among the countries that most quickly are ageing, Ukraine and Bulgaria and CEE in general are in the lead. Why I am saying this? All the civil society organizations have been obsessed with the idea of the young – you are talking about youth, it's about the young. In 20 years there are going to be many more old people and people getting older and older. This is going to influence the political process and the public imagination, and I agree very much with Julian: it is not so much about income inequality, but it is very much about health provision inequality – this is going to make our societies equal or unequal. Equality is not about simply consumption the way we are thinking today, but it is very much about access to health, and when you are dying and how you are dying. This is of course going also going to change the family structure and I do think this will become critically important.

10% of Bratislava are immigrants

The second driver I believe is going to be immigration. There is one major difference between Eastern and Western Europe today - and this is not that we used to be communist and they did not - the major difference is that they have a huge flow of immigrant population already and CEE doesn't. We have traditional minorities which is different. Look at Western Europe, and see to what extent it is becoming shaped by the flow of immigration and you are going to see the future. All this talk about tolerance, intolerance, xenophobia etc are going to look quite different when in the city of Bratislava, 10% of the population is black or Muslim. And this is not going to be the Muslim that you know from the 15th century, but ones that come from places to which you normally do not want to go. I do believe that this is going to be important and it is kind of irony that 20 years after Dahrendorf wrote his book "Reflections on the Revolution of Europe", a book with the same title was published this year by a quite well known American social critique Christopher Coldwell - and it was about the islamization of Europe. The book itself is not what I am recommending you, but you can see from this how much the perspective has been changed.

History doesn't matter anymore

The third thing that I very much want to put into our discussion is the internet and some of the unintended consequences of the internet. One of them is the rise of extremism. There is a great study being done by Hassan Stein and others about group polarization and they make a very simple point. In internet communities more and more you have likeminded people talking to each other. I know it was also discussed in one of the groups about the media; the fact is that people becoming much more extreme in their views. This [becomes a] type of extremization and radicalization of the opinion within societies, the fact is that we have less and less in common, because the state is losing its monopoly over socialization and education. See what happened with history and knowledge about history. In a funny way Fukuyama was right, history ended in 1989 because history does not matter anymore. If you try to check the historical knowledge of students today, you are



going to see that no matter that they can Google history here and there, they don't have a historical knowledge through which they go through experiences. They don't have a real interest in the experience of the people who were living before them because they are not on Facebook. On Facebook we don't have people who have died. I do think it is very important to think about this type of unintended consequences and how they are going to shape and form organizations and actions.

Citizen acting like on the consumer market

My last point has to do with the mode of action. This is something that has been said many times by many important and much more intelligent people than me - what we see is that the consumer experience is becoming the shaping experience for the next generation. Basically this way is where you learn how to decide, what decisions mean and what you are doing and not doing. One of the important and dominant modes of consumerism is that if you don't like something you can simply shift and buy something else. When you have for example a shampoo that you don't like, you are not trying to reform it you simply go for another brand. I am using this famous division between exit and voice which Hirschman developed, because we have more and more citizens that act the way they are acting on the consumer market. They don't have patience anymore to change things - they simply go for something new. Just to give you an idea from the political process of my own country, in Bulgaria in the last ten years, twice a new political party formed outside of the parliament have been getting majority [in elections]. Basically more than 60% of the people have been changing their vote during a single election. People don't have time anymore to change parties, to press and reform the party for which they use to vote. They just ask for the new thing. Think about how difficult it is to live and be governed in a society where there is no patience for change.

I do believe all of this has something to do with the civil society and what is going to happen in the future. And there is something more to think about the future - in 20 years there is not going to be the American funding for CEE NGOs.

Igor Janke: Vida, you talked to the leaders of the 6 roundtables discussions, please tell us what they found out.



Vida Ogorelec-Wagner: Thank you. My task was actually to prepare a summary of the roundtables from yesterday afternoon which was an interesting task really. Two footnotes, one is that my presentation is very personal and creative, it is by no means objective and scientific. In some way it builds on what Ivan was saying, in the past the future was very simple. For the future it used to be communism, and then it was democracy and then the EU and NATO integration - so from that point of view we were all aligned and travelling in kind of the same direction. Civil Society and NGOs were included in this. Today the future looks very different, there are different visions of the future, there is no common vision of where we want to be or a common vision of where we are going to be. There is also a lot of fragmentation within civil society - we are not in the same boat anymore, we don't share a vision for the future. When faced with the question what is the future going to look like in 15-20 years time, a very common response is a big question mark; this was a common thing between all of the groups.

There is no common vision of the future



Business as usual

When we go beyond that a little bit, the majority of the expectation is that the

future is a projection of the present to a large extent. Business as usual is plan A.

Techno-optimism

There was also a plan B which is a more optimistic scenario, composed of two branches. One is the techno optimism which constitutes e-democracy - technology is going to solve it all, primarily with an IT focus. The other is the social optimistic vision of society - in 15-20 years we are going to be a participatory, open society and democracy with aware, involved and empowered individuals. Both of these optimistic alternatives have something in common, and this is that the role of the NGOs is going to be that of a facilitators and catalysts for democracy in society.

EU funding, business as a social actor and NGOs bypassed by direct citizen action

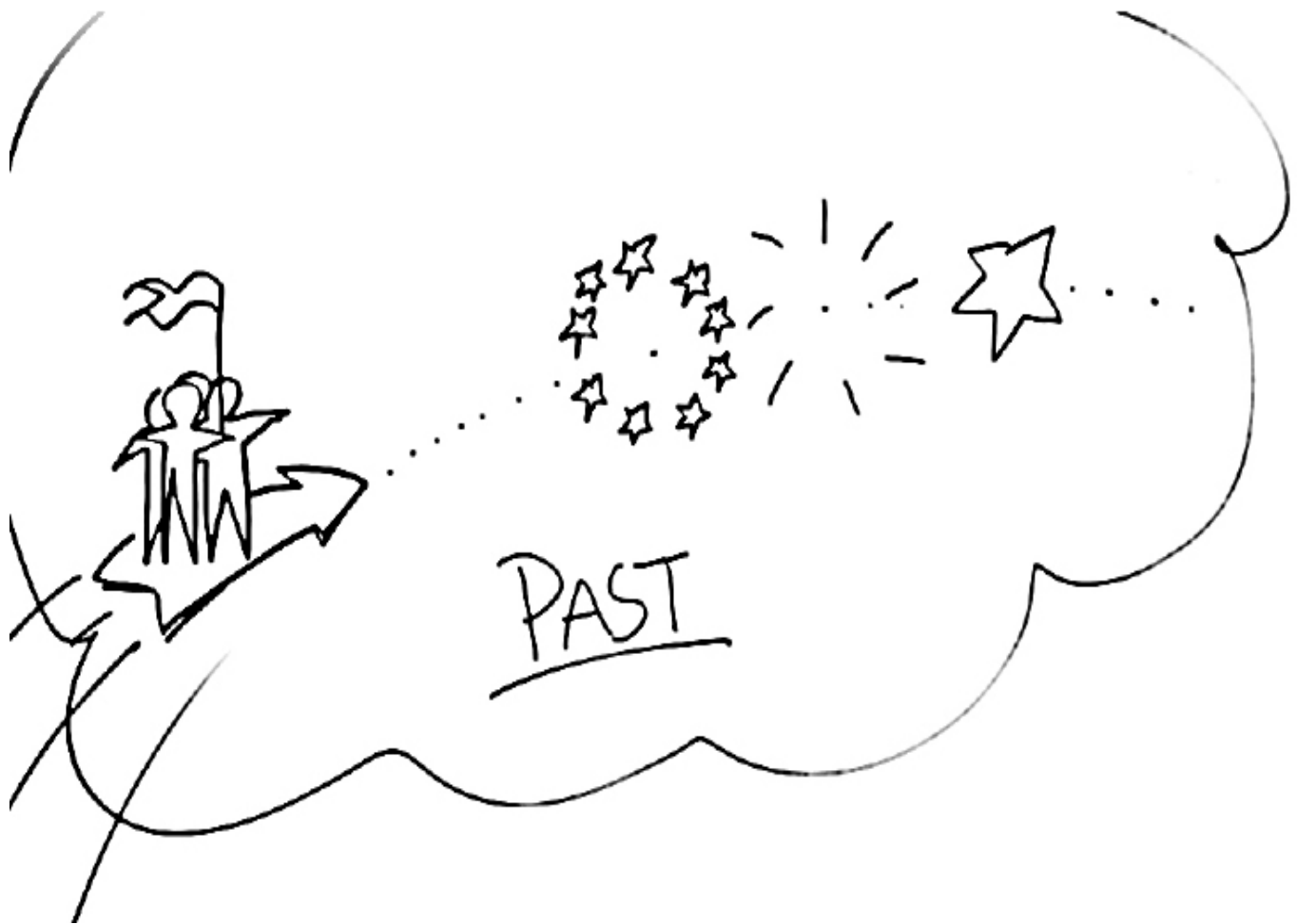
Plan C – the third scenario - is a pessimistic one. This consists of 3 branches, one is about the EU funding and how this is going to transform the independence and operations of the sector as it becomes more and more bureaucratic and politically instrumentalized. The second one is that of business entering the field of social responsibility, either competing or partnering with civil society, with their new enterprise funds. And the third one is that NGOs might actually become a thing of the past, which I think the previous session from the SIC was a good indication of. There is not going to be any more need for NGOs, they are going to be bypassed by the public acting directly because technology allows them to. So that is on the pessimistic side.

Forces of change - nationalism, demography, virtual alternative to the real world

When we talk about the future – it is about the direction in which we are moving, we can talk about visions, we can talk about scenarios. The other things we can talk about, is the forces of change that will be shaping the future, and whether these are trends that we can detect now. I have pulled out from the groups some possible trends or drivers, some of them a repetition of what we heard already. One cluster is obviously demography and population, one is communication and growing self awareness of individuals, the next cluster is nationalism and intolerance - and here again we are talking about 15-20 years into the future. One big chunk that Julian also described is the issue of resources, energy and climate change. Then there are also two growing gaps. One is a gap of parallel experiences, some people experience a very optimistic future of a more integrated, engaged and elevated society of individuals, while the other part of society - whether on global or local level - is completely marginalized and excluded. This is one of the gaps that are emerging. The other interesting gap is that between the virtual and the real world, and the relationship between the virtual interaction and reaction and real action, especially with a young generation which really live in a parallel world. So this is kind of a summary of what the groups came up with.

Is the future like the weather or can we influence it?

I would like to conclude with a question – do we as NGOs and as part of civil society understand the future like the weather – something that comes and the best we can do is to carry an umbrella with us? Or do we want to understand the future in a way that we engage with it, we co-create the future and try to influence it, and how can we be best be prepared to do so? One thing I forgot to mention for the discussion, is that talking about the ideas we have - what can we do to be better prepared? There is something in that image, the currency that we hold, which came up in quite a few roundtables, and this is trust. It is a very abstract word, but we have to make it real. There were some ideas that we have to start looking at our results in a much more serious way, we have to become more accountable and transparent about them, more like business



in a sense - but this is something that we desperately need on our way into the future.

Igor Janke: I would like to ask Anna how we may anticipate future trends?

Anna Giza-Poleszczuk: There is always value in discussion and debating – especially if the debate is quite broad. Let me start with a story. We are talking about drivers of change, but quite often - more often than not, we are immediately thinking about the big things like global warming or ageing of the population and so on. We are very high on the macro level and all these drivers look to us like some objective and independent force that are changing our lives. We are small and helpless, things are happening around that we have to deal with and this challenges us. I am sociologist, and we also love this kind of generalizations, we love to talk about secularization instead of talking about more and more people losing their faith. We are masters of developing labels that are very general and very romantic in the majority of cases. I started to read a lot of books written at the very famous Cambridge School of Historical Demography - so these are humble guys who study parochial registers for years just to decipher what was the certain birth rate in a certain county in Great Britain. One of the most famous of the Cambridge School, David Levin, starts his book about growing of the cities and factories in 19th century England with mocking sociologist saying that when he reads sociologists it looks like urbanization and industrialization are kind of god's hand suddenly stroking people and forcing them to leave their beautiful villages and to come to the cities and everyone was so unhappy because this objective destroyed their beautiful lives. Then he says: look guys, the situation is totally different because these are masses of independent individual people who over time decided to quit their community and look for better lives and look for luck in growing cities. It is not that urbanization just happened and forced citizens to leave their community, these were humble peasants looking for better lives, quitting their families and decided to go work in a factory. So the thesis I wanted to put on the table is that in a sense drivers for changes is always people and their individual decisions, and the whole thing is to try to understand and to notice what they are doing in the first place, what decisions they are making and why they are making these decisions. I think this is very crucial because it changes the way we look for drivers of change, I will come back to this in a second. Just to summarize what Levin says: what we see in statistics is just the accumulated effect of dispersed independent actions of individuals, families, groups of people and so on. The true question is why are they doing this and what are the consequences?

Trends don't just appear, what is reason?

Emotions are the drivers of change

The key thing that I would like to put on the table is that not only people are drivers of change, but inside people there are drivers of change - emotions and values which are more or less eternal. In a sense people always want to have good lives and not suffer, to have children and for their children to be happy, to be loved and belong - these are eternal dreams of humanity and they are the true drivers of change. The question or the issue is, in different environments and with different tools and means, people have to change their behavior, but again in order to obtain the same values. This is my first point and the first conclusion would be that instead of looking into matrixes of data and running correlations, logarithms, regressions and going for all kinds of econometrics, we should listen to people, we should watch people. We should use our imagination and also our hearts to really see what is going on, what people are doing and why



they are doing these things. For example, people always dreamt about immortality, like Faustus. Modern medicine gives them new tools to achieve the same goals. Of course it creates some challenges for the state budget and so on. So using this first point - listen to people, be close to people - most probably if we did a nice process maybe we could come to much better conclusions than the economists and sociologists sitting in their ivory tower?

**Experts are
no better than
others to tell**

The second point that I would like to make, is logically stemming from the last point. It is that we should not give away thinking about our future to experts. It is not true that only people with a professor's degree and very good in running all kind of statistic packages are able to tell us what will happen. We are able to tell it ourselves because this is the logical [follow-up] of the first thesis. We are making the change, people are making the change - paradoxically in business they understood this long time ago. In business but not in the social domain, they have very nice and simple indice, what do you plan to buy? And from that they can predict the demand. They do not ask economists what people will be buying in 20 years, they ask people themselves - which we should also do! What happens as well is that people who were excluded from this debate and in a sense may feel humiliated - you are stupid, you cannot tell us anything of value, we will tell you what will happen to you. I would say that this is a process that we can watch in European history for at least two centuries, first people were deprived of their competency in producing material things and they were told you need a manager, you need this and you need that. They were deprived of their competency of bringing up children, because now you can't do anything with your child without having to have three books and a few experts telling you how to love your own children. And we were also excluded, I am afraid, from social sciences, from the debate about society and what a good society means. Now we are told that we are not able to organize our society, our small communities without help of nongovernmental organizations, or without the help of local government. So my second point is that we should really not believe that. We should really try to speak our own voice, not being afraid that we are stupid, because we can be stupid - why not? We can learn from our own stupidity, we can try at least.

**Captured
language**

Which leads me to the third and last point. Let me tell you again a meaningful story, a few of our colleagues went to the very famous event for polish youth which is called Woodstock, to which many young people come to listen to music, you all know what Woodstock is. Our colleagues had workshops with these young people in a very unobtrusive way, in our new foundation shipyard we hate classic scientific research and we avoid it as much as possible. So these workshops with young people were exactly about the future, and we asked them: please imagine yourself in 20 years time and tell us what could help you and what could stop you from achieving what you want. The story I wanted to tell is about language, it's about words. These young people were talking very much about tolerance, and because the term tolerance is formed or shaped in the public debate on a very high level, when the word tolerance is used, immediately they would think about black and Jewish people and about gays and lesbians. They were talking about tolerance anyways, and then 5 min later a boy was talking about a teacher in his school who hates when boys are not appearing masculine enough, so our colleague said: so your teacher is intolerant? Then the boy was totally astonished and he said no no no, why are you saying he is not intolerant? Our colleague answered yes he is intolerant because he

Listen to people very carefully

does not respect these boys. The meaning of this story is that the language has been taken away from us. In Poland, if you are not Jewish, black, gay or lesbian, you cannot be the victim of intolerance. Tolerance is very narrowly reserved to certain phenomena, which is a real problem for human rights [activism] because these guys did not perceive intolerance in their own experience. [The same goes for] lack of democracy, because democracy is about voting and political parties, and again they do not perceive their own school as a space for democracy, they are very astonished if somebody tell them that if you don't have pupils' self government in a school it is actually a violation of your right. Human rights are about Alicia Tysiac (a very famous story in Poland) or about people in Chechnya, but it is not about my own stupid teacher screaming at me every single day. I think this is a real issue for the so-called civil society, because maybe we stop being meaningful due to the way we put problems on the table, we should start looking and listening to people very very carefully, because it is amazing what they can tell us. I think this is beautiful metaphor not only for Poland. One young anarchist in the workshop was trying to describe metaphors describing Poland, and told something that for me is 100% true: Poland is a squat but without common vision. And I think this is something that tells us more about future than the huge labor force survey made each year.

Igor Janke: Thanks





What about art and civil society

Artists are very often considered to be a narcissistic and very closed community, which hardly affects any other groups except itself. On the other hand art seems to contribute more and more to civil society nowadays. Many artists use their artistic expression to convey a message to create change, or connect with citizens around specific values or actions. Can art oppose discrimination and phobias which the civil society has to deal with nowadays? This was the main question that author, academic and activist Tomek Kitlinski asked the speakers of the first warm up discussion at the Civil Society Forum in Bratislava.

Anna Daucikova, a leading queer artist from Bratislava, claims that the role of art has genuinely changed in the last several years. Having evolved from an issue mostly confined to artists' studios and being more and more a global phenomenon, modern art is bringing about social change and making many change their minds. However, to make the links between art and culture develop further in the work for active and vibrant CEE civil societies, there need to be more recipients of the art involved and activated into the very action. In this case, art can become a source of provocative but also inspiring thoughts and a platform for social activism.

Responsibility

A modern civil society seems to need artists-activists who are sensibilized to the social issues and who take responsibility for the communities they live in.

In order not to stay at the very theoretical level, the discussion was accompanied by video clips, music and art. One of those was a concert of the Czech band Krylovici. The band was created to pay tribute to Karel Kryl by passing his message. Kryl was a Czechoslovak artist who became known during the "Prague spring" in 1968, when he reflected the situation in Czechoslovakia through his songs and lyrics and highlighted the sense of freedom, human and civil responsibility. Ivan Juras, the manager of Krylovici, thinks that we still need to be reminded of the values that Karel Kryl is singing about, as we still have to deal with very similar problems.

Long-lasting change

Is the participation of citizens, mentioned by Anna Daucikova, the only factor of a successful cooperation between art and society? Definitely not. Art seems to be very often a short-term event constructed only on a stage which can hardly make a long-lasting change. How can we change it? Krzysztof Czyzewski claims that we need to reconstruct the stage and to activate the culture which is until now mostly happening behind an invisible curtain.

Czyzewski reminded the audience of the concept of the famous Polish dramaturge Jerzy Grotowski who imposed on changing the dimension between the audience and the performers. There is a need nowadays to build a new art of creativity that involves the audience and is looking for new forms of artistic expression. It's time for art to become an agora – a meeting place for discussions that can inspire and revitalize society.

Except from reconstructing the artist-recipient relation, the character of art that wants to affect civil society has to be changed as well. In Czyzewski's opinion, art is not always a tool to deal with every social problem, as some of them demand long-lasting programmes rather than an artistic event which can only provoke, but does not come up with solutions.

Nevertheless, long-lasting art projects are possible and it gains even more relevance if we devote enough time to thinking about linking art and culture to civil society work.

Text by Marta Gawinek, Orangelog.eu





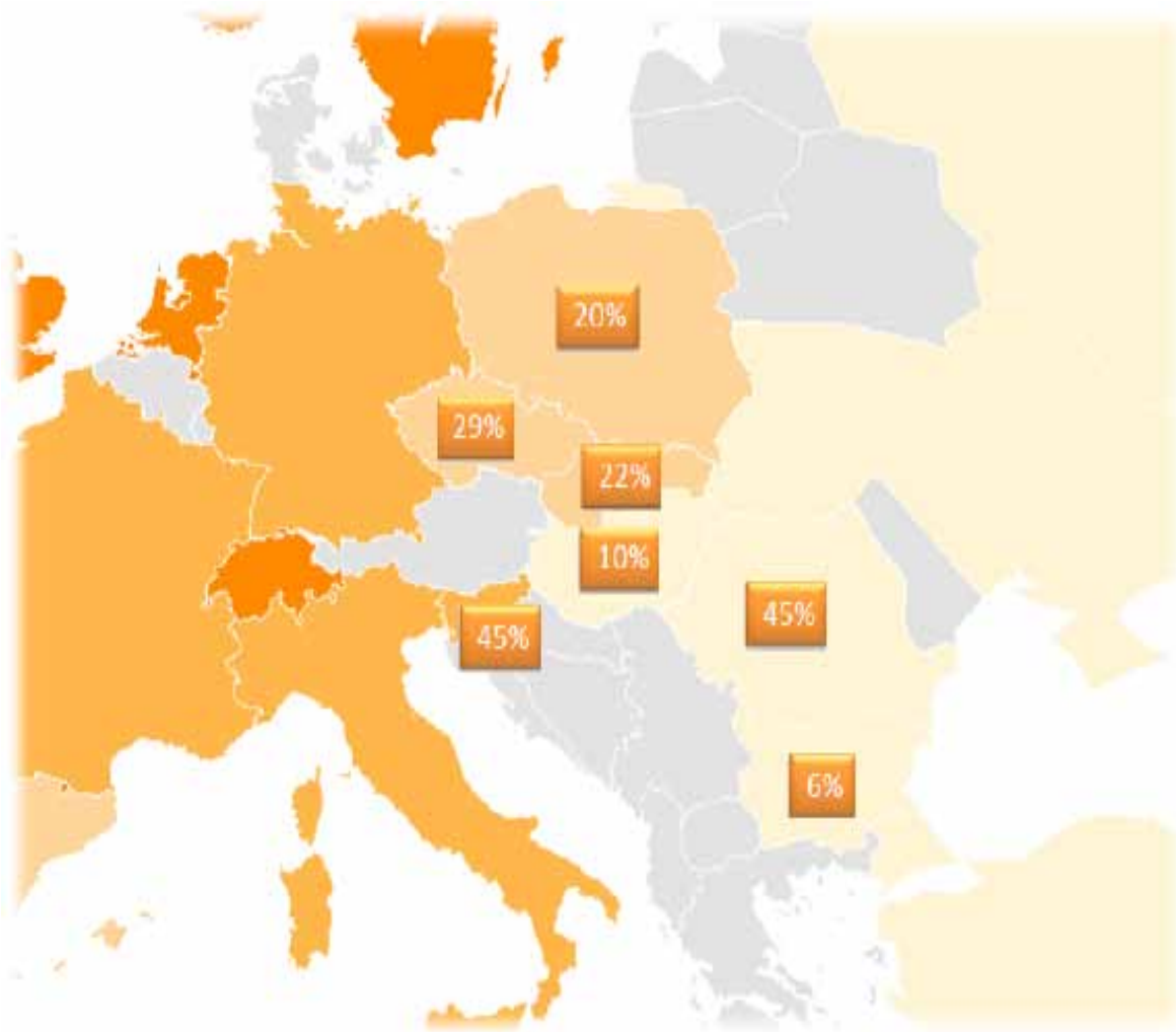
Two decades of Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe

Looking back at twenty years of democratic reform, modernization and Europeanization in the Czech and Slovak Republics, starting from 1989, civil society has played a critical role in what was then Czechoslovakia. It bolstered initial reforms in the joint state, and then took diverging paths after the split into two independent countries. Two decades of civil society development, similarities and differences between the Czech Republic and Slovakia can be seen, and the NGOs have played specific roles for the broader social and political change in both countries.

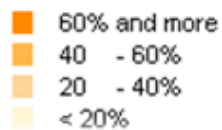
Martin Butora and **Alena Panikova** from Slovakia, discussed the role of civil society in Slovakia – for which 1998 was a high point of visibility and efficiency, as NGOs got together and encouraged Slovak people to turn out to vote and thus make a difference in their society by marking their disagreement with Meciar and his government's authoritarian tendencies. **Jiri Pehe** and **Pavlina Kalousova** from Czech Republic were discussing the role of civil society in their country, which has followed its own path throughout the accession process to the EU and the work of building a solid foundation of home-grown philanthropy and stable infrastructure for civil society in Czech Republic.

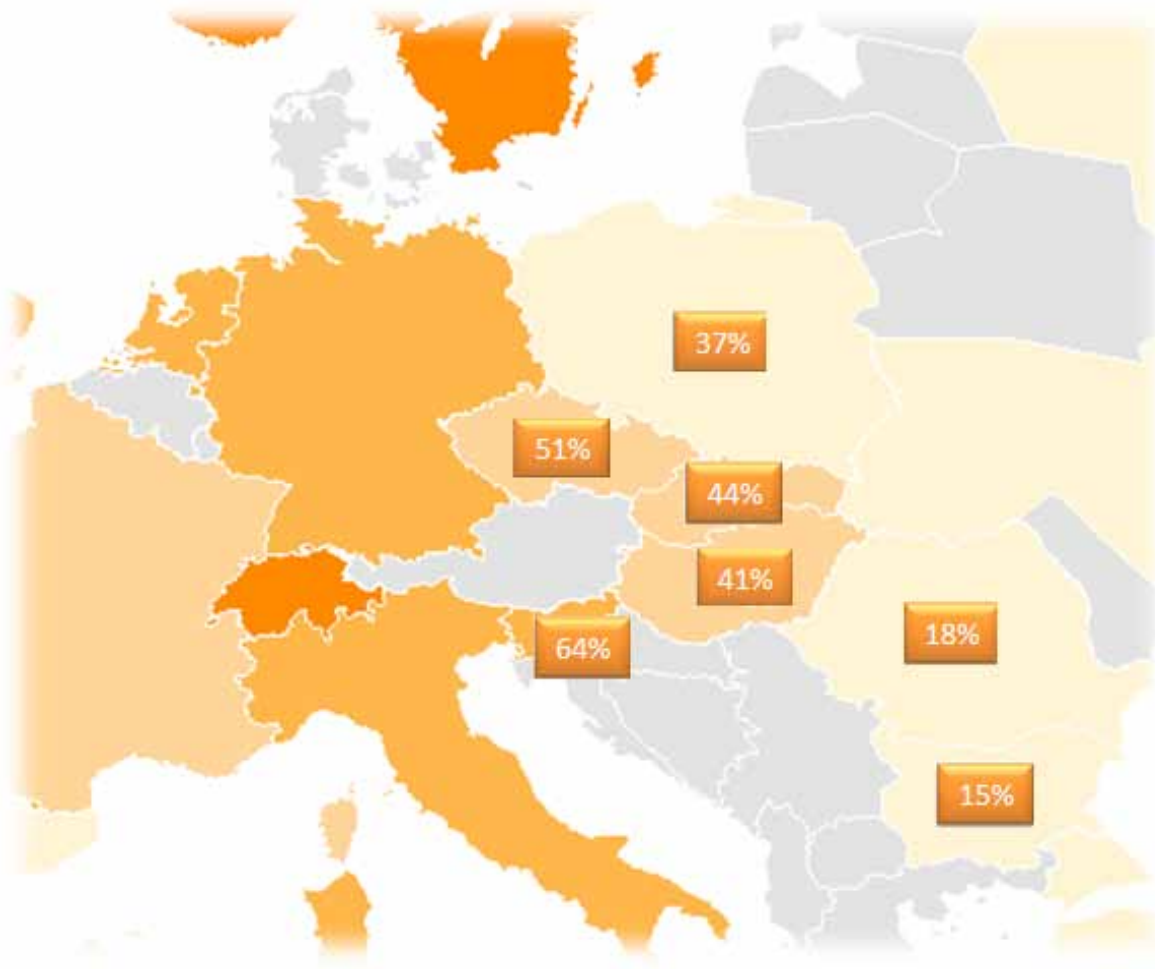
As we are entering the third decade of democratic societies across the CEE region, civil society need to continue their efforts to contribute to open and just societies, and with increased strengths, deliberation and collaboration put pressure on the state to deliver, encouraging Czechs and Slovaks to stand up for their democratic rights and be a part in the further development of the reality in their communities, concluded the discussion leader **Pavol Demes**.

Civic Engagement and Perceptions in CEE

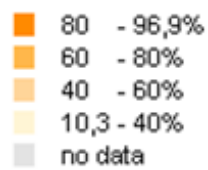


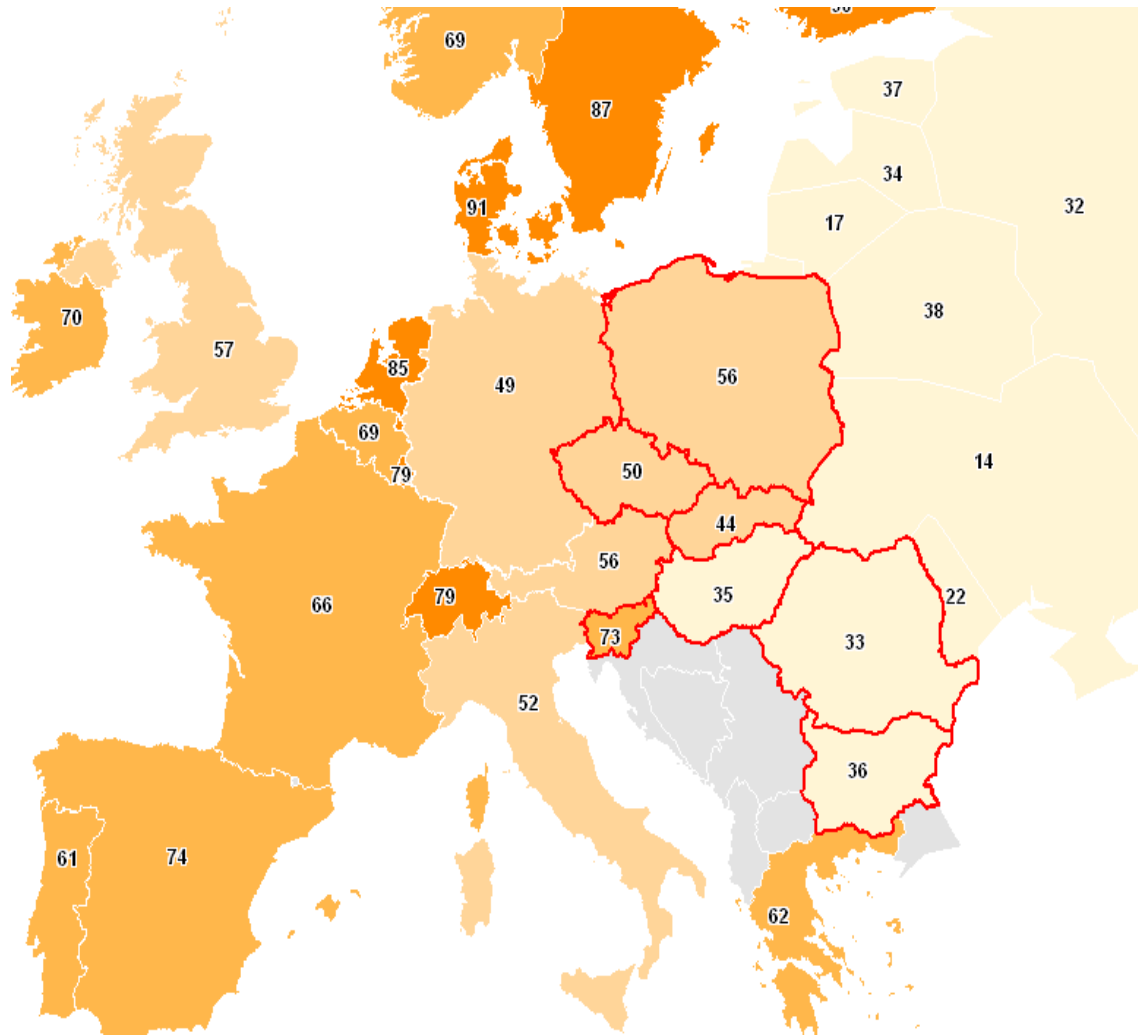
% members of NGOs (excl. Churches, Trade Unions & professional org, political org.)
WVS 2005 (ISSP for Hungary, Czech and Slovakia)





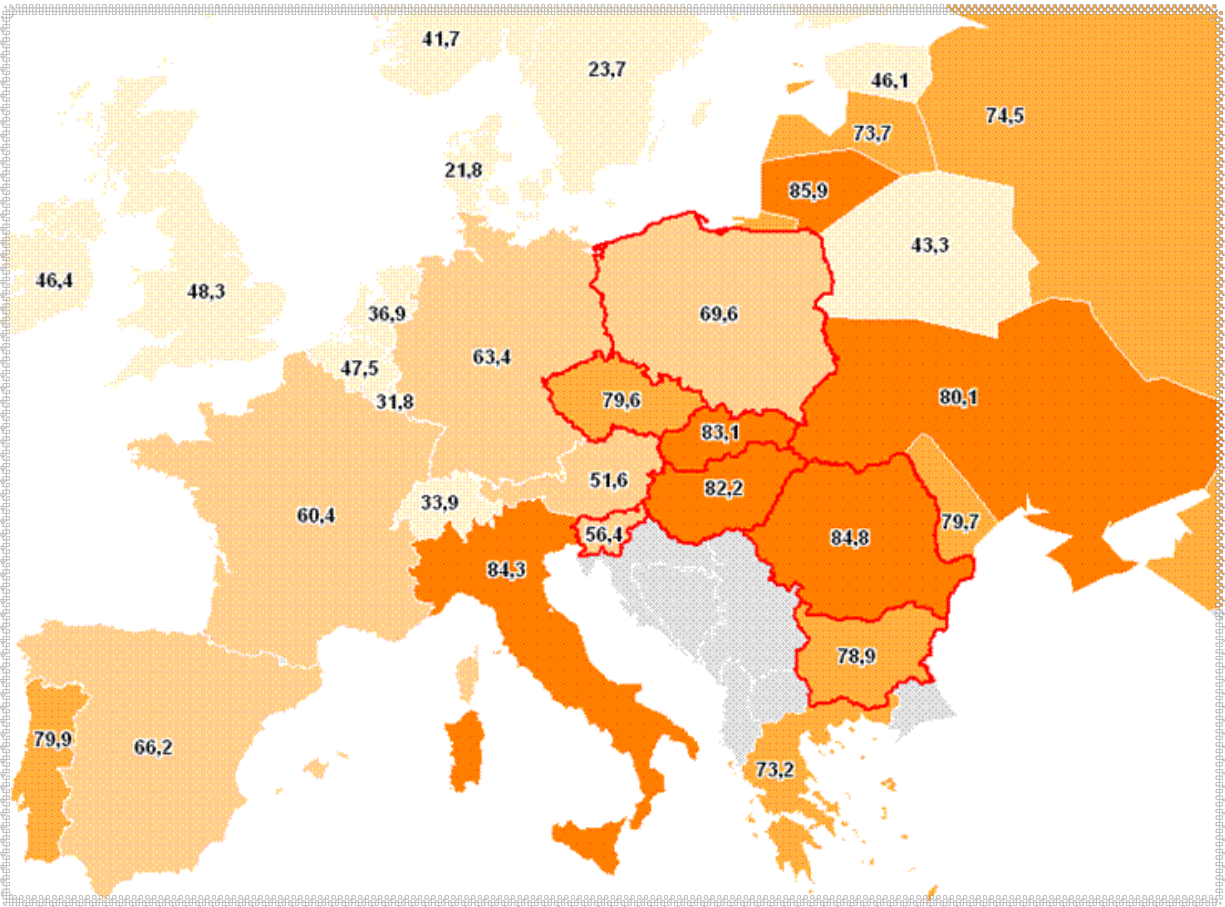
% members of ANY social organisations (Church, Trade Unions, Sports, NGOs, other)
 WVS 2005 (ISSP 2004 for Hungary, Czech and Slovakia)





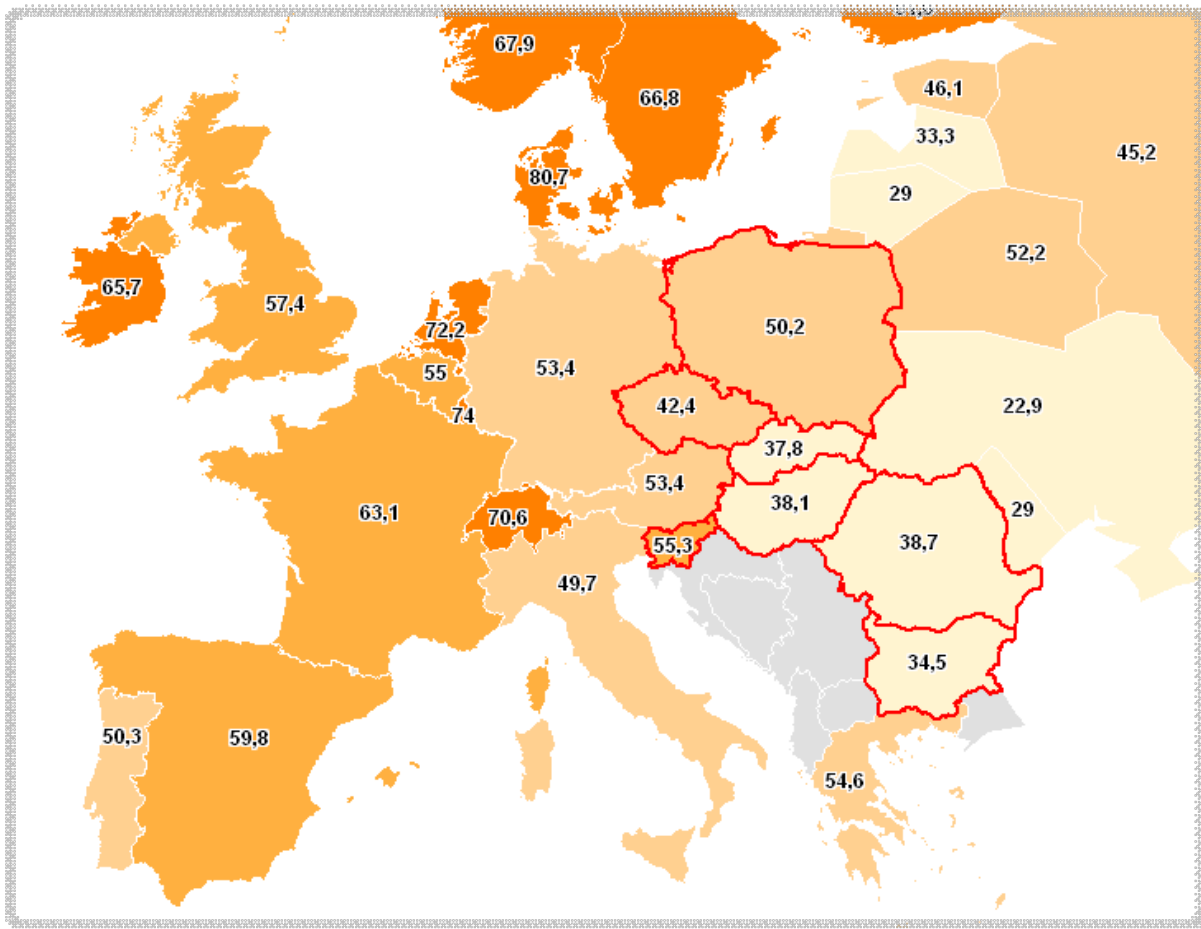
Honesty of elctions - % confident
(Gallup World Poll, 2007-2009)

- 75 - 91%
- 60 - 75%
- 40 - 60%
- 14 - 40%
- no data

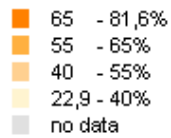



Gallup Corruption Index (perceptions on level of corruption in business & government)
(Gallup World Poll, 2007-2009)

- 80 - 85,9%
- 70 - 80%
- 50 - 70%
- < 50%
- no data



Gallup national institutions index (confidence in judicial system, government, military, honesty of elections)
(Gallup World Poll, 2007-2009)





FocusGroups

During spring of 2009 focus groups were organized in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. In each country 2 parallel discussions of approximately 3 hours were organized, with various types of active and engaged people:

Group 1 – practitioners of organized civil society, including representatives of: Think-thanks, service providers, watch-dog organizations, human rights organizations, members' organization (municipalities associations), consultants', trainers' and employer's organization.

Group 2 – individual activists and thinkers not formally organized, including Volunteers, bloggers, individual activists, intellectuals, media representatives and defenders of specific causes

The topic of discussion was **what is civil society - its role, function and future?** Discussions were recorded and took place in neutral places outside the CEE Trust offices.

Focus group facilitators:
Petia Kabakchieva, BG
Krisztina Arato, HU
Jan Jakub Wygnanski, PL
Mihaela-Beatrice Lambru, RO
Marcel David Zajac, SVK

What definition would you give to civil society and civic activism?

Internet activism
Spontaneous networking
Restructuring civil society
Enthusiasm



(summary made by facilitator)

Group 1

[While discussing what civil society is] the internet protests were not considered and, furthermore, the protests [in Sofia in early 2009] were not commented at all! Some of the attendants gave negative evaluations for the young as they were said to be living in a virtual world – “they believe things work out as they do on the Internet – you just click on and it happens – but things are much more complicated in real life”

Group 2

For these young people who were not sent forward by an organization, but were volunteers and bloggers, their civil activity is spontaneous and a matter of personal choice. They do not think of money or projects but rather defend their own causes or do it [engage] to solve a personal problem. They want to demonstrate their own stand in the blog, or they simply state “I do it because I like it”. Everyone’s leitmotif was “I do it for my own sake, not for somebody else’s”, there was no awareness either of a common cause or of articulation of a general priority problem.

This is individual, or some of them define it even as rather selfish, activism: everyone has a problem, a cause or desire; and everyone is also looking for people who have a similar problem, cause, desire, or hobby. None of them is willing to represent somebody else, everyone is (re-) presenting themselves. The “organization” principle is based on the belief in looking for one’s own kind, those having a similar problem, desire, cause.

The Internet is the perfect place for finding people of “one’s own kind”, for recognizing and acknowledging those having a similar problem, hobby, cause, etc. Thus this individual activism grows into web activism, but it also turns into creating a network of one’s own kind – networking. The Web both connects and distinguished between different groups, but it also provides a sense of something huge.

The word “we” does exist, i.e. there is a civil society indication, an awareness that civil society appears in Bulgaria through them. The belonging to the civil society is not generational – once you are in the Web, age is of no relevance. Civil society is defined as a quest for “involvement” Civil society is refers to the awareness of the fact that you are not alone but dependent on other people”; “team work”; “civil society is a matter of upbringing, of culture development”; “creating an environment that makes you feel normal, something like a sanctuary that grows bigger and bigger”. However, it is exactly because everyone starts off from their own problem, from themselves, that the groups are different and have different problems; it is difficult to formulate a common problem

Both Groups

Both groups hint at the conclusion that currently it is not self-evident what the term “civil society” refers to. Also, it becomes clear that some restructuring processes are going on, both of the socially significant public space concept and the civil participation manners. There is some transition from the civil society concept of a “third sector” to some more plastic and dynamic forms of civil activism. The latter can be defined as individual-network civil activism which is searching for new institutionalizing forms. The significance of expert civil activity increases, not only as institutionalized think-tanks but civilly engaged experts as well. Current evolving processes should be discussed and considered and it is important that both “generations” should listen to each other’s opinions and exchange wisdom for enthusiasm.

Party politics
Local level
Control function
Prohibition to distribute profit
Global consciousness



(transcripts of discussion)

Group 1

P 2: As I see, a democracy is vivid and real if party politics is part of the civil society. As Tamás Gáspár Miklós said „the most typical civil organization is a political party”. You can see how colorful the US presidential campaigning was, the coalitions include trade unions, lobby groups, religious and civil groups. In Hungary, these groups incorporated into the political parties and there is no direct feedback between the party politics and self-organized groups. Although there are different possibilities to participate in the law making or other issues, real results can be achieved if a local group – with sufficient aggression - demands it. However, as I see different parliamentary groups „simulate” this cooperation and create party related organizations as financial process machines. I think that the „bottom-up” type initiations, which exist in the western democracies, do not exist in Hungary. We cannot say that only the party politics is guilty, they are from this society. The situation is that this game was approved by those who appeared as NGO leaders in the early 90s. So, it is true that the political elite is corrupt and estranged but on the other hand those who tend to be members of self-organized groups went back to the depoliticized status that was typical for the groups in the 80s. They accepted that „we are independent from the politics thus we should avoid to be involved into the politics”. We can see the result now.

P 5: I have a different point of view. If we talk about civil society as civil organizations, we can say that the civil sector has its own elite. It became very internal, I think.

Mod: I think local relations are very important. Are the local government representatives open enough; is there real dialogue between local societies, communities and the legitimate representatives of the local governments?

P 5: It is a bad moment to talk about this because the whole political system is not credible. It is true in local level as well what P 2 said: local self-organized groups have not real possibilities to be involved into the decision-making processes.

P 3: I think it is true that civil organizations have control functions but I think their service provider function also important. In this meaning I do not feel that civil organizations are marginalized because many of them provide important services. (for gypsies, for youth, etc.) I think it is a little bit artificial to say that if somebody does not control the power it is marginalized.

P 2: Yes, this language is what I meant before. I do not care to have the „NGO sector” as part of the economy, I think it is manipulation because civil society is vivid and real only if it can control the power and state. If we talk about how weak this control function is, it can always be said that civil society plays a service provider function and there are organizations which collect donations, run schools, etc. I think these tricks can maintain the de-politization.

P 5: In most of the cases these distinctions are not valid because the organizations have different, parallel functions.

P 4: It is a very difficult story. The globalization, the information boom, the Internet made the process more difficult. It was very interesting to listen to the conversation about the US assistance [of civil society], the training method (participatory learning) for example is a typical Anglo-Saxon one; it came from the British workers’ trainings. We completely left our traditions, I am sure that we know more about US civil society than the European one. Who knows anything about the British, Norwegian or Danish civil society? While it is very important that when we talk about local issues we cannot compare them to international issues, these are tiny local problems, local communities, and it would be important to see how we could identify and solve those problems.

Mod: I think the service provider role is a very important one, and there are many of services that would not be provided without the activities of the NGOs. The problem is that service provider role is entwined with the political role because for example in the case of a social problem, an NGO cannot criticize the state or local government because its financing will be uncertain. These organizations are so defenseless that they cannot provide their professional services safely. It is because they cannot focus on the sources of the problems in many cases because if they do it they would have conflict with the governmental partners. So, I can see the political defenselessness in this area as well.

P 2: You have not understood me. I do not say that Hungarian NGOs can be put into two separate groups as service providers or public policy oriented ones. I know that very often the organizations fulfill both roles. But we have to decide what the topic of our discussion is. We can talk about the nonprofit sector and then these questions are relevant, but if we speak about societal self-organization – civil society – and ability of the Hungarian citizens to control the executive power, or even how they can influence different common decision-making processes - these are two separate discussions.

Group 2

P 3: In my understanding the category „nonprofit” is first of all an organizational-legal category, at the same time referring to a definite way of organizing finances. The term „volunteer” is first of all a category for the individual – meaning that a person is doing something regularly for his/her community (local, professional, etc.) for free, without expecting payment for these activities. The „civil” category is the most complex of all, it is a social category, referring to a certain way of thinking and acting, it can be an organization, and it can be action, a highly debated and not exactly defined category.

P 1: We have to add here that nonprofit organizations can also have for profit activities – they can publish and sell books, can have income from the market for their services, etc. The Hungarian legal system has newly established categories in this respect – social co-operative, nonprofit ltd., etc.

P 4: In this respect the most important is the prohibition to distribute profits.

P 3: The buoyancy and the energies mentioned, I think were only the characteristics of the elite of the society. Some years ago there was a Hungarian film titled „Moscow square” (A film of Ferenc TÖRÖK, the title refers to one of the main squares of Budapest. It is about the system change in the eyes of a graduating secondary school class) where the grandmother was watching the re-burial ceremony of Imre Nagy, the executed Hungarian prime minister of 1956 on the telly. The majority of this country was watching the system change on the telly and this had a very serious effect on the activity, the participation of the people, community actions later.

P 1: Global consciousness is a characteristic of a very small part of the society and a very small number of people. Most of the people, most of us live in our mini-world, mini-realities. The difference is enormous between internationally organized groups and local communities in approach, perception. We lived in the 1990s in a way that we did not know anything about the war going on in the country in the neighborhood. We do not see behind the borders of our village.

P 4: There are two basic types of civil behavior. One is the type who knows how many beans make five, takes civil activities as a kind of a business. The other type, I believe the one that makes the majority of us is the type who wants to make the world a tiny bit better day by day. The problem in Hungary is that the butterfly effect does not happen: [some engaged people and organizations] are shaking their wings but they are not enough to make a storm. We do not have a storm yet but at least we have butterflies.

P 4: The answer is simple. There is no one-dimensional person. Life is beautiful because people are interested in many issues at the same time and they like to do different things. At the same time, this sector is good because the vegetarian and the cannibal are also present.

P 4: Civil society is by nature colorful, pluralist. Politicians would prefer it to be transparent and organized. If a local authority wants to talk about an issue, they would prefer a „representative of the civil network”. But civil society organizations do not want that. They want to stay colorful.

Empty term
Society of citizens
Responsibility
Intermediaries



Group 1

P 1: I would say that for majority of people Civil Society would be rather vague and somehow empty term. People often think about it while they interact with state (for example when paying taxes) but it is often (particularly in this case) mentally associated with the certain form of oppression. It is rare that people will associate civil society with common /shared set of values, symbols, attitudes. It is not part of education as far as I can see it from contacts with kids and young people I work with.

P 2: I have the feeling that civil society is as a term mainly used by foreign donors who want to justify and give meaning for their work in this region.

P 3: Problem with the understanding of civil society in this region is very much caused by the fact that there are two very different meanings of it. First, one is more associated with “vertical” relations between individual and the state. Those relations in Poland were historically very fragile and complicated. They are often affected by the lack of trust and packed with mutual suspicions. However, it is not only the state that does not trust its own citizens but also citizens being sometimes “disappointed” by the state. Recently there are cases when people publicly express their will to resign from polish citizenship, in the way “unsubscribe” themselves from the state. However, there is also another dimension of civil society - more “horizontal” / community based more person-to-person type of relations. Maybe we should even look for different words for that (social economy?) This type of relations is based on social capital but unfortunately, they are also quite weak in Poland (of course beyond family ties). Anyway, in Poland both dimensions are weak. It creates obstacles to emergence of civil society of a more “western” type. Looking for alternative framework of description I would suggest – public sphere / space. It is more about “co-responsibility” for both political decisions and shape of community.

P 4: For me there are two different approaches to defining / clustering civil society. One is more about citizens being organized in form of intermediary institutions (sector) the second is more about citizens as individuals. For me or for us as an organization, the second dimension is somehow more important. Thus, we would rather use the term society of citizens - not civil society. We have the feeling that the concept civil society as being predominantly populated by organizations is not sufficient any more. Quite often those forms of organized civil society is not so much representative for citizens but more for self selected groups of individuals who creates them.

P 3: It is true that we lack mechanisms of advocacy (voice) – communication between citizens and the state. Those links are broken.

P 2: I did exaggerate with foreign donors but I was somehow provoked by the (all the same) question again. However, seriously what I believe is that civil society is simply a society of individuals who are subjects (not objects) - people who are responsible, who can build and sustain communities (networks of individuals, groups and institutions). It is extremely important that individuals are not excluded from those networks, and they can be part of it without intermediaries.

P 1: I like very much concept of “society of citizens”. It is important because it goes back to the fundamental question of what is the meaning for me as an individual to be a citizen? It is important to create and define a certain “layer” of identity related to being a citizen (like I’m catholic, I’m Polish etc.). Now - this layer is very thin in Poland.

P 1: Stepping back to this very fundamental issue of defining yourself as citizen. Why we lack it? First, we are leaving school without it. We can easily subscribe ourselves to certain modalities: being disabled, being part of a professional corporation, being from somewhere etc. Those “identities” are somehow not preformatted by the

common identity of being a citizen. The discovery of us being citizens comes when we are involved in dealing with more concrete but narrow actions or concerns. This creates individual paths of becoming citizens, and as a consequence we have different meaning of citizenship. This is unavoidable. But the question remains, whether it creates inclusive civil society or just a puzzle of individual and group interest groups? My belief is that they are often a source of change for the good. It sets examples and creates paths for others to face other challenges. At the same time, I do see the problem that this individual trajectory of civic "awakening" will rather restrict citizenship to only active individuals, often concerned with a specific problem.

Group 2

P 1: Civil Society consists of self-organized citizens (operating between the state and the market). But it is definitely more than institutions of the third sector - it is rather like a "space".

P 2: Civil Society for me has now two important dimensions: the first one is spontaneous communication and the possibility to create individual meaning. Secondly, the dimension of knowledge generation as a civic phenomenon and open exchange of knowledge.

P 3: It is all about responsibility. Civil Society is society populated by people who are acting as responsible actors. It means being responsible for myself, my family and friends, my community. It is about creating meaningful relations and being responsible for their sustainability.

P 4: There are two stories / legends of Civil Society. The first one is more about intermediaries (organizations) as gate keepers. The second one is more positive. The first (Rousseau) is more about civil society as generator of inequalities, about power and self-selected pressure groups. In the second perspective, (Tocqueville) intermediary groups (associations) are the very essence of democracy -> power is distributed/dispersed. The Rousseau version is very different - the role of the state is to ensure equal access to democracy. Those two traditions are still present and compete with each other. Particularly recently in Poland PiS government was directly targeting (rhetorically and factually) the "intermediaries" (for example professional corporations). Some of this criticism was justified but in its generalized form, it was dangerous.

Mod: The recently announced political program of PiS includes type of diagnosis of weakness of Civil Society in Poland. According to it - only groups well connected to foreign support were able to thrive. Indigenous activities were not supported enough.

*Non-governmental/non-profit
All of us
Linked to level of state power
Civic activism struggling*



Group 1

Group 1 defines civil society by putting the accent on nongovernmental and nonprofit characteristics. They consider the concept of "civil society" is somehow abused right now; we are talking a lot about civil society, but we are not reflecting enough on the content and meaning of civil society. The participants emphasize the fact that civil society is not represented only by NGOs, and this reductionist view on civil society is very common.

Civic activism is only a tool of civil society. For some participants civic activism is specific to militants. The civic activism is taking place when a group of people with well established objectives take action in order to fulfill those objectives.

Group 2

Group 2 defines civil society in a more general way, saying that "civil society is about all of us". Also they stressed out the frequent mistake to reduce civil society to NGOs. Another idea shared by participants was that "civil society = all community taking non-political action", the idea of civil society is connected with the premises of "taking action". This group stressed the importance of internet development for supporting civil society initiatives a lot. About the NGOs sector the comment was that this sector is now like a "monster" created in a top down approach.

So, the Internet offers the conditions for the development of a more genuine and bottom up civil society of NGO initiatives. But they also stressed the fact that the internet can not generate this specific value of civil society. Virtual contact cannot replace the face to face approach between people, the "real" exchange of ideas. But, it is a comfortable and useful surrogate.

Civic activism is very weak in Romania. The idea of civic activism is beyond civil society. For civic activism – you have an idea and the means to put this idea in practice. Civic activism is related to the idea of taking initiative. For the civic activism the motivation is very important. The civic activism can grow if "people pay attention" to general interest issues and ideas. ("They get the message, if they are connected to the right frequency"). For civic activism the important elements / triggers are: personal budget (to be affluent enough), the anthropological data (Romanians don't have strong associative behavior), the presence of a huge bureaucracy opposed to civic initiatives, the quality of messages sent by NGOs (in general civil society structures).

Both groups:

Across the board there are some common elements defining civil society mentioned by all participants though expressed differently. Examples of civil society structures: NGO's, interest groups, trade unions, Parents associations, owners associations, journalists, bloggers, commerce chambers, the church (to some extent), coalitions and civic committees.

Some general ideas about the development of the civil society in Romania: The development of civil society is linked to the level of State power. When the State is weak and fragile, the civil society is more active. Many times the NGOs played a "forced role": they took the place of the political opposition because this opposition was very weak. When the political landscape becomes more mature the relationship with the State changes.

Civic activism – the participants of the focus groups unanimously consider that the civil activism in Romania is very weak. Some participants from the NGO side consider even that the civil activism now is lower than in 2000.

Fulfillment of interest
Overlap
Expressing opinion
Public welfare
Renaissance of citizenship
Energy flows



Group 1

Civil society is a society of active citizens who actively approach fulfillment of their interests in the society.

Civil society is a part of society which complements the public and business sectors even though they overlap to a certain extent. They can overlap on the personal level, i.e. a person working in a state institution can be an activist, and a businessman can actively defend his interests too. However, the mentioned sectors can overlap also in the sphere of their role in the society, in which case we can often describe these relations as competition, for example, there are state schools, private schools as well as schools run by NGOs.

Civil society comprises more than just defining one's position between sectors. For example, in the social sphere, the discussion on what is a private and what is a public interest has been going on for 20 years. The question of what is a business entity and non-profit entity providing services is also widely discussed. Civil society goes beyond these limitations. Civil society basically means a chance to express one's opinion on public matters as well as a suitable environment for doing so. People – individuals grab their chance to express their opinion on public matters thus exercising their human and civil rights.

Civil society gives everyone a chance to address public matters. In Greek democracy only those were called citizens who thought of the wellbeing of others. To name those who only took care of themselves and their families, the ancient Greeks used the expression "idiotos".

However, it is also important to add that civil activities have their value.

In the contemporary consumption based society, civil society sometimes substitutes processes that used to be common in the past. Many relations within a community were severed as a result of historical development. For example, in the past it was normal to meet and do some craftwork together accompanied by singing and dancing. Unfortunately, today we do things like that only as part of preplanned activities of organizations promoting culture, art, and history. Taking into account the aforementioned, it is necessary to perceive civil society in the context of historical and cultural development of the society of which it is a part.

If we stop looking at civil society as something noble and we try to find its exact position, we will face a big problem. Theory says that civil society consists of people who want to fulfill their need to form associations. But where is that point when a friendly get-together becomes an association? Where lays the difference? Basically, people and their activities can be the same or very similar. People themselves define the limits when they decide to name and institutionalize their gatherings.

So what is important in this context are individuals and the way they perceive themselves in society and the form and institution within which they want to do their activity.

Group 2

Civil society is a group of voluntarily active citizens interested in participating in the administration of public matters.

To answer the question what represents civil society or how strong it is, we have to look at our short history. Active citizens are small islands of positive "deviation" which, at the time of change, have the ability to grow and absorb and activate other active citizens. The power of civil society is linked to the position of these islands in the society. If the environment is favorable, their position is strong. For example, good-quality democratic society is a favorable environment for civil society because it provides conditions for civic activities and for participation in public matters as a result of which few "small islands of positive deviation" turn into a large significant active civil society. On the contrary, if the conditions for active involvement of citizens deteriorate, it signals decreasing of the quality of democracy and justice in society.

In ideal civil society there are so many active citizens dealing with various issues that they eventually cover all of them. The size and quality of civil society in Slovakia is determined by the number of issues active citizens deal with and to a certain extent also by conditions these people have for their initiative.

Civil society is a group of people working for public welfare. The area they work in is not important in this case, crucial here is the fact that they do it for others not only for themselves. What makes these active people part of civil society are the values they represent. The fact that they define their values means that they are not influenced or driven by desire to make profit (business sector) or desire to gain power (political sector). Civil society can thus represent non-partisanship and altruism.

Civil society means people who are dissatisfied with the status quo and who become active in order to change it.

Renaissance of citizenship comes also at times (and maybe it is what we are experiencing right now in Slovakia) when people realize that if they want to change their society they cannot rely on politicians or the almighty market only.

Definition of civil society is very relative. Civil society can be reviewed from various angles. Society is an individual and his/her social part. Therefore, the basic terms used for defining the society are linked with defining the values of an individual in the society such as ethics, for example. Active citizens are those who themselves want to contribute to the wellbeing of the community and they can be driven by various reasons. It depends on their values. Naturally, it is necessary to see clearly how the others perceive these individuals, i.e. how the others identify themselves with the values these active citizens represent.

Both Groups

Summary – civil society is:

- NGOs as institutions of active citizens.
- People who work in these organizations as employees, volunteers, and supporters and who contribute to fulfillment of the goals of civil society.
- Part of public that gladly joins the activists or is active on the individual level. People who follow the situation in the society and the activities of civic organizations and who often bring up new topics and come up with solutions to their own problems or to problems already dealt with by NGOs.
- People who are not active themselves but can be motivated to act.

Finally, we have a group of, as I call them, “anti-activists”. These are often top representatives of other sectors who perceive active citizens as their competitors and treat them accordingly -politicians are convinced that only they are entitled to manage public matters because they underwent the difficult election process, similarly top managers are convinced that their position is untouchable due to all the money they had invested from their own sources.

Let's also look at civil society from the viewpoint of energy flows. Individual as a living creature cannot spend his/her life in the state of permanent vigilance as it is very demanding from the viewpoint of energy consumption. Therefore individuals spend most of their lives in the state of relaxation (in wilderness we see predators sharing the same space with their prey which pays no attention to the predator until the predator's behavior changes). Active citizen reacts similarly. Civil society starts to act when it feels endangered and under pressure. Slovak civil society can be characterized by “the worse, the better” saying. The stronger the pressure from other sectors, the faster the process of citizen activation. However, no one in Slovakia would lie under a tank as the activists in China did. Does this mean that civil society in China is stronger than civil society in Slovakia? Can we judge civil society only based on the greatness of acts done under pressure? As a matter of fact it is important to maintain the ability to stay active especially at times bringing no such pressure upon citizens. If we talk about successes of civil society in Slovakia, we talk about activities of civil groups in years 1989 and 1998. We all know our society lived under enormous pressure at that time. However, we also have to add that the pressure we talk about does not necessarily have to be negative. Even more frequently citizens become active due to positive pressure such as solidarity, pressure triggered by the need to help someone in danger. Identification with an excellent idea or good concept can also help activate people.

The strengths of civil society – what has been achieved?

Effective environmentalists



Group 2

Participants unanimously gave an example of effective civil activities – those of environmentalists. Why is that? Because, as respondents claim, environmentalists operate through several regimes – usually it is professional experts who would formulate the problem (in that case biologists, zoologists, etc); volunteers consolidate around them as they realize the significance of the problem and start collaborating in different ways. Then other professionals, lawyers this time, decide how the problem could be solved and begin using all legally admissible means – petitions with particular propositions, searching for contacts with MPs and representatives of the European Parliament; street pressure comes last.

Green movement

1 % law

Small invisible social changes



Group 1

P 4: I think the rights the civil world required became reality. For example the green groups participated in the creation of the Environmental Protection Law. It does not mean that politicians after the political change would have been proactive and care for the civil society but if the citizens wanted to achieve something, they could do it.

Group 2

P 2: The left-right political distinction does not make sense [for the green movement]. Petra Kelly, German green activist said: we are not on the left, not on the right, we are ahead. If you start the game from the other side, it can be done. We have our initiative, the ban on genetically manipulated corn. We could reach a five-party consensus. So in this direction, the case might be easier – as a civil society organization you can easily reach a political consensus than the other way round. If an initiative comes from a political party, the cleavage is already there, consensus is difficult, whatever the cause is.

P 4: The legal background is good. We have a law from 1997 that allows that taxpayers give 1% of their taxes to civil society organizations, the famous 1% law. It has become a Hungaricum, an „export good”; a lot of countries introduced it, or similar versions. We have the „public benefit” category which is also important when we talk about the economic aspects of organizations. We have the National Civil Program that coordinates the state subsidies, this is badly needed since American donors have mostly withdrawn from the region. The share of state financing, basically the money of the taxpayers in this country, has grown and is now around 40%. Normally this development is welcome, however in our country unfortunately, those who distribute these subsidies (taxpayers’ money) e.g. local authorities, government, etc. think that by giving subsidies they buy unlimited control over the organizations. Now, that is tragic. When we talk about Structural Funds money, we run into a system where civil society organization are much more thoroughly controlled (monitored, to put it elegantly) than a private business or a state agency. That is appalling.

Mod: OK, OK, but as a citizen I do not really care about the technical details of legal circumstances. Where are the big and visible successes?

P 3: There are big successes. I think the biggest ones are invisible. Those are in the local communities where there is social help, where there are employment initiatives and two more people found a job in the village as a result. And this is especially important because the success was reached contrary to bad financial and bureaucratic circumstances. On the other hand, the other most important mission of civil society organizations is the zengo-type of activities, now that is problematic, or better put - unsatisfactory. There is unfortunately very little watchdog type of activities, e.g. when a civil society organization starts legal action against the state because they deny making a state subsidy contract public.

P 1: Success is mostly small things, not very media-likable. In Budapest, the number of homeless people has not decreased, but thanks to civil society organizations, few of them froze. The situation could have been a lot worse, but this is hard to recognize.

P 2: Yes, we always want big, spectacular things. Smaller cases are not in the news but they are important.

Mod: You did mention that there is a definite quantitative development in terms of number of organizations. At the same time your marks are weak, showing that there are serious problems with the quality of organizations. Can you tell me why? And what is the direction of the developments?

P 2: I am a green activist; in our movement we do have strong co-operation among us, we are organized, we have our yearly meeting with the participation of all the member organizations. We have our representatives on every forum we could join and we give feedback to the others. So we have cooperation and effective interest representation.

P 4: Now that is an issue there – I wonder why the greens are so exceptional in this country. Because we cannot mention another area where civil society is active that is so organized and effective like the greens. Everywhere else we compete instead of cooperation, everybody wants to be the boss and tell the others what to do.

P 2: Maybe we feel the dangers. We know that the life on Earth is unsustainable. And I have to add here that it was not always so. In the old times, in the times when there were few organizations and a lot of activists, there was a lot of enthusiasm. Then this enthusiasm weakened when more organizations were established, when things became formalized. In the 2000s co-operation again improved a lot.

Intellectual understanding
Stable growth
Journey
Civic spaces
Time matter



Group 1

P 5: In my opinion over the last 20 years, I would say there is progress mainly on the meta-level. Intellectually we have more understanding of civil society: books, articles, research. Unfortunately, it is not so obvious in terms of mentality and everyday behaviors, where we are not performing so well. Massive “one-day” activities might even “shadow” or obscure the lack of more day to day activities. However, in every form of judgment, there is always the question of “reference line”, in my opinion in the region we are performing pretty well, although it may be a long way to go if we compare with more developed democracies. There are elements which can be treated as a success, and the most direct example is the huge amount of energy which was generated by disabled people and their families: thousands of places are run by self-organized citizens.

P 1: The first period [of civil society] was very chaotic, building “something out of nothing” and there was heroism but also a lot of fraud, self-dealing etc. I think this has changed, people are more aware of what is right and wrong in public life. Nowadays people are much better equipped in terms of skills to protect their rights, e.g. they know how to use media in a reasonable way. It is getting normal and we can harvest the slow but stable growth of democratic institutions.

P 6: I have two perspectives, one is that civil society is not a “state of the matters” it is rather a process or journey. The second is that in Poland people are “becoming citizens” on a kind of occasional basis, it is not given that it is an everyday experience, but it is often a moment of “being a citizen”. My observation is also that sometimes it is easier to provoke us to do something small like sending an SMS for causes which are somehow distance from us e.g. hunger in Africa, than to do something concrete like reacting in cases of aggression against the children next door.

P 4: I have a more general observation. We can complain about some aspects of third sector activities but within the sector there are at least some structures able to counterbalance the state in some instances. There is much worse if we think about individual citizens possibility for influence, there I don’t see so much difference.

P 2: I believe that “times matter”. It is true that we are weak still but I see more and more examples and attempts to incrementally build better communication.

Group 2

P 1: There are some “natural” spots for activism, for example parents’ councils in schools. Potentially these should be strong entities but in practice they are often too weak , and to be honest the source of the problems is not only hostile official school structures, but also apathy of the parents.

P 3: There are many places like this. Voluntary Fire Brigades, Schools, Parishes - they are all potentially “civic spaces”.

P 6: It is true, recently I participated in research related to civic dimension of parishes and it occurred that in fact these are places of activism although very often we do not see it on our radars. Obviously, there are other questions about the civic nature of those activities such as level of control and leadership by clergy, but parishes are still more like spaces or generic platform of activities, even possibly more open. For many people the parish is still an object easier to understand than the vague third sector organizations, it is much more incorporated into our collective mental map. For the more general issue of informal spontaneous activism, some people/researches suggest that real activism is located there and there is no need to lament about civil society.

P 4: It is a good point, in a sense Putnam himself has recently questioned his own Bowling Alone hypothesis. Civic activity is not vanishing it is rather transforming into different forms: like massive protests, internet activism etc.

EU accession
Legal cases
2 %
Non-formal associability



There are several examples of achievements and important events created by civil society: the focus group participants mentioned: Communism Trial (Procesul comunismului), enactment of FOIA legislation, Piata Universitatii events (at the beginning of 90s), abolition of the article 200 on gay and lesbians from the Penal Code, the “lessons” of the Alianta Civica and Alternativa pentru Romania (both civic movements registered latter as political parties), GO 26/2000, the law 2%, EU accession.

Concerning Romanians associative behavior, some participants (mainly NGO representatives) expressed their concern that communal behavior is strongly influenced by the available funding. One participant mentioned that we assist the growing trend of non-formal associability, especially related to internet. Through internet people started to communicate and to generate common projects we assist the development of virtual communities and more and more people donate money for NGOs through internet. They have another option to express their charity or interest outside the “classical” donations to the Church.

Another participant expressed the view that the associative spirit is growing, even if the NGO sector is somehow in crisis. We assist to the development of alternative ways to express the associative spirit. It was also mentioned that in a corrupt society the associative spirit is good, because in this way the society generate pressure for more debate. The citizens "don't buy" already made solutions so easy. There are also cultural and regional differences in Romania and the experience acquired by Romanians working in western countries is very important. They come home already educated about the importance of building associations in order to act together for a common interest or cause.

The participants from the second group (mainly media) provided additional comments related to associative behavior. One participant mentioned the fact that the Romanians are nation are inclined to associative behavior, but not in a structured way. For a structured approach we have to face some obstacles as: cultural obstacles, lack of civic education, lack of civic space, bad television, 45% of the population in rural areas. Another participant stressed the importance of the recent change of the electoral system – to uninominal vote. He considers that the civil society structures (NGOs mainly) should play a role in educating the citizens on how to interact with their political representative.

*Different perspectives
Transition of '89
Proposals for change
Diversity*



Group 1

Before we start it is necessary to say that people directly involved in the activities of CS and people from the outside environment perceive the successes of CS differently. For people directly involved in the activities of CS the greatest success is the fulfillment of their goals - satisfied clients of social service institutions, a disabled person who has found a job thanks to our intervention, an agreement, e.g. between social partners, concluded based on a managed dialogue, a book, an amended section of an act, citizens abiding by good regulations.

Looking at the past 20 years of Slovak CS from the outside, the most visible success was the opposition to the emerging authoritarian political representation of Vladimír Mečiar. Similarly, the political changes that took place in Czechoslovakia in 1989 can be considered a great success by both the Slovaks and Czechs. However, to be honest, we have to add that the movement in Slovakia never reached the strength and dimension of the movement in Bohemia.

We can say that active citizens in Slovakia know, if necessary, the right way to persuade others, perhaps less active citizens, to adopt their viewpoint. It seems that in decisive moments activists were able to motivate successfully large numbers of people. Figures are not that important, though. The intensity of activities is important, the intensity of manifestation, and changes that took place in 1989 and 1998 in Slovakia.

Another positive thing was that NGOs have produced many proposals for changing the system. These proposals ranged from really big ones such as the health care system and public administration reforms to perhaps less known and less conceptual but equally important changes of the legislation. This could have occurred as a result of the abnormal situation in the society at the time, when NGOs provided space for professionals, intellectuals, and innovators who were pushed out from public administration due to their political views. This does not happen in stable democracies. Besides providing a kind of a background for experts, NGOs today represent also a space for their discussions and confrontations with laics. Another positive feature is the ability of CS to generate feedback to administrators of public matters.

Diversity of CS has its positive effects too. Diversity means that CS is able to react to and bring up a variety of topics and initiatives.

Group 2

Civil sector in Slovakia achieved its greatest successes at the times of great pressure on citizens. Before 1989 activists knew their deeds would put them in danger (even though it was not necessary to lay under a tank, the activists were ready to do so). On the other hand the role of activists (e.g. environment protection activists) in the political turmoil of November 1989 is undisputable and generally acknowledged, just like the role of civil activists in the changes that took place in 1989. The events of 1989 and 1998 brought about significant changes in our society and it is an important fact that Slovak civil society was an active part of these changes.

Activism in small communities can be viewed from a similar perspective. Again, it is mainly the pressure of the environment that stirs action (I consider the intention to replace a park by a new multi-functional building right in front of my window a direct pressure upon myself). It is very positive that in the past two years we have recorded visible demonstrations of civil activism also on the lowest level. For example, in the past 5 years, Ružinov district in Bratislava has witnessed the foundation of more than 16 new civil initiatives which have started to communicate and support each other and which have the potential to achieve the right systematic solutions in their district in the future.

Highly positive is also the fact that civil activists have accomplished a great deal in certain cases. It does not necessarily mean that their initiatives were successes. From the viewpoint of civil activists "a great deal" means that they succeeded in persuading a substantial number of other inhabitants to support them, they took the steps that our legislation enable them to take, they defended the value and public interest with dignity and regardless of the positive or negative outcome they were able to describe the process and offer its positive aspects to activists dealing with other issues.

Further positive aspects concern the civil sector itself, e.g. introduction of the 2 % assignation mechanism which have had a positive financial impact on NGOs (but which is paradoxically often criticized by NGOs themselves). At the same time, this mechanism enables individuals and corporations to play an active role in deciding how to spend at least a small amount of their tax and present their positive proposals for development of the society.

In recent years, another highly positive aspect is the emergence of eCommunities and their inclusion into the "information mainstream" by printed media. Printed dailies give bloggers space for presenting minority, authentically civil opinions.

Diversity of opinions is a great strength of Slovak civil sector. Naturally, this aspect can be both positive and negative since diversity means also great disunity. How far should we go in attempts to unite ourselves? This question has been publicly discussed for a long time. In Slovak context the answer to the question comes again from the pressure of other sectors of society to which, fortunately, CS has always responded so far (e.g. CS succeeded in stopping the Association Act which would institutionally throw civic society back to the period before 1989). Facing the threat, representatives of CS managed to overcome their differences and presented their arguments together.

The weaknesses – which important problems have not been addressed or resolved by civil society?

Privatization
European fund dependency
New activism
Poor consultative mechanisms



Group 1

Most of the participants, engaged in analyzing societal processes as a whole, used the perspectives civil society within the thorough social context. Their pessimism was based on the following impressions: “currently total privatization of the social interest can be observed. Social interest refers to the opportunity given to people to participate in decision making processes and privatization, on the other hand, it is a fact that a group of people has appropriated the right to make significant social decisions taking into consideration only their own interest. Some participants even believe that those people [in power] are businessmen rather than politicians.”

Alongside this process, the privatization of civil structures is also developing through European structural funds financing. The financing issue is of key significance since currently these social structures are thoroughly dependent on EU funds. As EU funds pass through the state authority, both state and local authorities establish “their own” NGOs serving their own interests, and those new NGOs are financed at the expense of old and authentic NGOs which have lost their influence.

Most participants have some experience with the authority and have confronted it a number of times, and they have lost the illusion that civil society could count as a factor. Even participants starting their statements “the good news is that...” would eventually come to the conclusion that at present it is even harder to work than before.

Group 2

It is exactly because “new activism” includes groups of people with different problems, that it is rather particular and communicative, that means it would barely lead to large-scale activities or protests. Indeed it is of key significance to institutionalize some internet channels for propositions for and control of government decisions – the Web is not only the new public space where different groups are constituted, but it is also perceived as a main mechanism for civic participation.

“I fight for, not against”, “I fight against heroism, but for normal participation”; the other important issue is the formation of civil culture and education, the debate should be educational and people should be aware of their rights.

As far as prioritizing of socially significant problems is concerned, it was hard to define such common problems. However, there was definitely some bitterness due to the lack of civil participation mechanisms in the decision making processes or control over those decisions: “nobody requires our opinion”. It is exactly due to the voluntary choice of standing up for oneself, either through a common problem or activity, which shifts the focus from projects or financing and makes it spontaneous and voluntary activity. However this may lead to problem with formulating a joint thesis – the Web is many-voiced, it is about communicating and sharing, it is not just some space for rational formulation of theses and strategies. As a main problem, all the focus group participants perceive the “problem clarification”, the formulation of clear-cut theses and demands to create a critical mass behind an action.

Administrative burdens
Dependence on state funding
Lack of civil courage
Idiot



Group 1:

P 2: If someone establishes an association, they have to work with decrees, specimen of signatures, banks, Tax Office for 6 months. I would not like to establish an organization... So, where have we arrived at after 20 years? At a bureaucratic space where we cannot put our ideas and intentions into practice, if we have them at all...

P 3: I think the politicians played important role because they created the regulations for self-organization. It is problematic for NGOs to participate in the decision – making processes

P 5: Very often beneficiaries [of state funding] and supported organizations are dependent on their supporters.

Mod: They are expected to be loyal. It is a weakness of our democracy.

P 5: If we approach the question in the way that I provide a service, theoretically it mustn't happen. But in reality it is difficult to expect it because there is a „double speaking” always. It is a real danger that we will be moved from the cultural house where we work and cannot provide our services if we continue our advocacy function. But on other hand, these functions are mixed in our organization and I cannot expect from the local government not to mix it and let us provide services and also initiate local referendums for example

P 4: This shows how young our civil sector is. In other parts of the world where the civil sector is much stronger, the solution is easy: the organization splits. But in Hungary, the old friendships, human relations keep it together. An organization which provides services to the community has to feel that its income, livelihood, functionality do not depend on the community but the local government, then what are we talking about? Somehow civil organizations take their hands in different stories but it is not a strategic approach at all.

Mod: I think the dark side of it is that a political body creates a blackmailing situation without any consequence.

P 2: It would be a blackmailing situation if it were expressed. In this way, it is only an uncomfortable situation. The direct communication would be to say that OK if you finish the Tubes issue, we sign a contract with you. But this kind of direct communication in the reality does not happen.

P 3: I think in healthy societies it cannot happen. The local government or the state should say that you provide services; I give you the necessary sources for it. Anyway, I do not like that you raised your voice but there is not any relation between them. It is obvious that the situation is different in Hungary.

Group 2

P 3: I believe political debates are natural and may be beneficial for the entire society. We do have to accept other opinions and have to learn to accept others' opinions. On the other hand, I accept that the current atmosphere and state of party politics in Hungary can be rather bad for civil society organizations, the media concentrate on cases where party politicians use civil society organizations for illegal party financing tricks. This might be rather bad for the entire civil sector since small successes are never mentioned, only scandals.

P 1: I do miss civil courage. Neither organizations, nor individuals want to reflect on each other.

P 2: IDIOT – in ancient Greece this is how people were called who did not want to participate in politics or the common issues within the community. Civil society organizations per definition participate in politics since they deal with community issues, however today party politics is not about this. We have to get back politics, so that it is again about community issues.

P 3: I have some data. They are from a book edited by Mária Kopp, about the state of Hungarian individuals and society. About 10 % of Hungarian society is a member of any organization, this is very low and shows a passive society with low participation. The other figure which I was actually surprised by is that there is a correlation between participation (membership in organizations) and life expectancy. If we live an active life, participate in our communities (local, professional, or any kind) we live longer. People probably don't know this enough, but life is more enjoyable if our relationships are wide and we care for our communities.

P 1: Volunteerism during the system change was preposterous and exceptional. Today it is an accepted, everyday activity, although figures show that it is still very low in our country. Today we have a problem that the number of places where volunteers are welcome isn't enough. On the other hand, volunteerism in local communities is still very weak, in most places. We do not co-operate enough, either on the individual level, or on organizational level.

Normative dimension
Civic energy
Organizational capacity
Professionalization
Time deficit



Group 1

P 2: Having in mind first the institutional/sectoral perspective we are performing quite well, NGOs are operating rather well in an administrative way. The biggest problem I guess is with normative dimension. We are far from being the “good” civil society - inclusive, open, accepting others, committed to common good etc. We have certain capacity to be collectively “good” civil society, but it is often for short periods. It is not just us, we can take the example of Ukrainians e.g. in 2004, they were also very much “good” civil society at this particular moment.

P 1: Speaking of Ukraine I would say there is also a problem of mutual learning within this region, we are not cooperating enough. Poland often perceives itself as a kind of “stronghold” in the region, but in reality, this is far from obvious.

P 5: There are arenas, particularly formal politics, which are not driven by civic energy and this deficit hits us back. This last period [of civil society development] is just obsession about how to access and consume EU funds, and at the same time kind of reflection about what is going to happen “after”, how to build real stability and sustainability after EU funds.

P 4: Bureaucratic culture is not changing so much, there are plenty of “words” but not so much action.

P 3: [Defining citizenship identity based on individual action and problems] has also some bad consequences. Various interest groups very often do not communicate with each other, sometimes they are even hostile and competitive. This phenomenon is somehow related to bigger debate about post modernity, there are more and more group identities built on ad hoc incidental shared experience: like being a mother with small children, having a child which is supposed to participate in preschool education or even being a fan of a specific type of music, etc. The problematic thing is lack of communication among those “identities” and lack of overall bigger framework of shared identity. There is also problem with lack of communication with the administration, example of this is the fake mechanisms of so-called public consultations.

P 3 + 2: There is an issue of lack of continuum between private and public people do not define their problem and abuses (like aggression within family) as public issues. The concept that I have the right to live without aggression at home is rare. Comparing with other places in the region I would say that the level of public awareness is much higher, however far from being satisfactory.

P 3 + 1: What is missing for me is community (gmina) in a deeper sense of the word, missing in Poland is territory based networks of properly connected, institutions, a complete landscape of church, school, shops, coffee shops, park etc. Such a territory is the most natural “micro cosmos” of civil society. A separate issue is that we often ignore business as an important ingredient of civil society, this is a big mistake. They have the capacity to change things and do something concrete. They produce things, pay taxes, give employment, transform local landscape etc and still we treat them with a kind of moral supremacy and this is a mistake. In Poland, business people were never perceived as the elite (of course they might think of themselves differently), the term elite was reserved for intelligentsia, it is an anachronism.

Group 2

P 5: I believe civil society in Poland is representing itself by individual and often small episodes or actions. Unfortunately, there is not enough of them to verify the existence of “good” Civil Society, just moments created by abnegates and rather exceptions than norms. Much more common is the lack of “community spirit” and lack of respect for common or collective good. This is the bottom line and very visible indicator of the overall condition of Civil Society.

P 1: What I see as problematic for many organizations is a problem of organizational capacity. It is much too often driven by a single individual not being able to - or not willing to - build an “institution” but instead is constructing his / her “extended ego”. Often there are problems of succession of leadership, and organizations are not able to live on “beyond” its founders. Another problem is that sometimes even well organized initiatives are not so “civil”. Soft version of this might be church organizations, often they do a good job but they are not so democratic and self-driven. Of course there are some extreme and even dangerous examples of authoritarian anti-democratic organizations and movements, and this is the “dark side” of civil society. But there are also positive examples of spontaneous activities organized by individuals.

P 3: There is a problem of too professionalized civic organizations. Unfortunately, it is not always paired with quality, but often just about heaving a job. The third sector is populated by people who are well trained in different fund raising techniques, they are able to write proposals and they know how to survive. On the other hand there are not enough people who are altruistic in a deeper sense, who will act just because they like it and not because it is expected and awarded by donors.

P 4: Another hypothesis is related to Hirschman’s “shifting involvements” of the public and private arena, I think it might be simpler in Poland. The ethos of the intelligentsia has evaporated, and there is still not enough time to build a new ethos of public involvement. There are some forms of public activism, but they are in a sense marginal and appealing to passionate individuals. There is still no “middle class” civil society, the middle class constitutes itself slowly and in the first instance is more preoccupied with its material status and attributes. This group is still not getting itself organized to demand and defend its rights. Another characteristic is the lack of civic life in the new wealthy suburbia, people who live there are busy contemplating their eventual move to “something of their own”. Maybe the next generation which will grow up in those places will take it for granted and be able to act differently. Warsaw has a huge number of gated wealthy condominiums – the largest in Europe, and there are good reasons to believe that those places are not “islands” of collective life. They have separated themselves in a golden cage protected from the outside world, but they are also separated as individual families. Who knows, maybe it is all due to being “too close” in the previous era, living in communal densely populated houses with no privacy, maybe there is a need for people’s own territory?

P 6: All data shows that recently people don’t need formal organization to get together. There are many tools for on-line communication and on-line organizing, for example MySociety and its set of tools, particularly services like Groups Near You.

P 2 + 7: There are limits however, to this “shift” into internet, not everything can be transferred there. There are also some specific features of Polish “translation” of internet based ideas, for example the Polish version of Pledge Bank is not so much about collective efforts for public good, it is more about protesting or just doing stupid things. In fact, being on the internet is often another form of escape which is quite

contrary to participation.

Mod + P 4: It is true that all indicators of everyday civic activities are going down but there are also some “moments” of collective activity which represent a certain “need of belonging”. This need is often pushed aside in everyday life and reveals itself only in special moments and we have a problem with expressing these kinds of needs, it is not only a Polish problem but it exists also in other CEE countries. Maybe we are not “self confident” enough not courageous enough, we still believe that we constantly have to justify who we are? We need very strong moments to go beyond the threshold of showing our emotions publicly, and to do so we need to see others being able to do the same and show their soft sides. Even in these moments however, people very often are not together but rather next to each other.

P 1: We are not educationally equipped with basic social skills of doing things together and communicating with each other. Therefore we are not competent in civic virtues, we need specific settings to start conversation in a real (not virtual) sense.

P 4: In the reality of social life, there is a need for conversational situations and need for reciprocity. Nowadays we are somehow lacking this. An example is talking about kids and helping each other with starting a car, it is disappearing.

P 2 + 5: Being a sport fan can also potentially play this role, but in the Polish situation it is often ambiguous. Looking for collective activities one should also not forget groups like Radio Maryja, like it or not - but it is definitely a massive phenomenon. Another one is Wikipedia (Poland has 4th biggest number of contributors in the world).

P 8: Maybe we are just in this initial phase of accumulation of capital. What is important is much about what we have and not who we are, this phase might be unavoidable.

P 7: But it is also true that in Poland one has to work much harder to get necessary (or even not necessary) goods. People here work more and thus it might also be simply a problem of time deficit [to engage].

*Trust level in NGOs
Leadership problems
Post EU strategy
Media driven*



Group 1

The participants consider that one of the big problems for civil society is the fact that NGOs are alienated from the citizens “the civil society don’t feel that NGOs are a part of it”. Problematic aspects are: low citizens trust level in NGOs (under 30%); low number of volunteers; not so many good examples of successful collective action.

They also mentioned that in the political discourse we make appeal to “Romanians”, not “citizens”. The citizen is not motivated to participate in politics. They don’t go to vote anymore, they feel that general problems like corruption are impossible to solve. There are high rates of absenteeism, negative vote and low participation in decision-making.

Participants listed the following important problems for civil society: Weak partnership with public authorities as the value of partnership is not internalized or completely understood; the relationship with the business sector, there are a lot of expectations for financial support from the business sector but in reality the relationship is still fragile. Another problem is the low level of federalization and coalitions created among NGOs, we have very few examples of good successful coalitions. A general accepted idea is that the Internet is a very good support for collective actions, or at least for mobilization, however it is not enough, there needs to be more commitment to acting together. Participants considered the risk of replacing real communication with the internet, and highlighted that face-to-face communication is very important: “we lack the human element.” One participant made a comment about the Romanian NGO Forum claiming that the event has become a managers’ forum: “we become not NGOs, but

small companies. Where is the enthusiasm?"

"A leader should be close with the needs"...; "They are many organizations representing a good example, but it is hard to find something exceptional. In general participants agreed that it was difficult for them to indicate special examples of leadership and innovation in the civil society area. Participants also expressed concerns related to lack of post EU accession strategy.

Group 2

Problematic aspects mentioned: the lack of confidence in the law, from school where the children are being taught that the law is done only for stupid people. Human resources quality is not so good anymore, the young generation is not interested to work for NGOs anymore. A problematic aspect in Romania is that there is not any serious publication about civil society development, history, etc. Some participants mentioned that "sometimes there is a bizarre connection between state and civil society", a sort of "clientelism". Another participant mentioned the problematic aspect of accessing structural funds.

Not being able to count on successful collective action was also mentioned: "in order to create successful collective action we need good subjects and means to put them into practice. We have to respond to citizens' expectations". Many participants expressed concern regarding citizens' disappointment with politics and with the bad performance of the administration: "the public administration is made to prevent you from doing anything".

Participants discussed a lot about the influence of media in generating "leaders", they underlined that in Romania there are "media driven" leaders these days. The conclusion is however, that today in Romania we don't have strong civic personalities but more media generated public persona

Loss of credit and ethos
Unstable environment
Regional differences
Moral authority



Group 1

What is on one hand considered good or successful can on the other hand be labeled a failure. People involved in civil society have lost their credit and ethos characteristic of civil society, in the eyes of their partners in other sectors. This is due to their uncompromising interference with big politics. Politicians say these actions of civil organizations have political not altruistic or civic background. Entrepreneurs similarly described civil sector as a sector yearning for power. Moreover, the public they address and mobilize shifted their frustration resulting from unfulfilled promises regarding political changes, on to NGOs.

Yet another problem is that despite their effort, NGOs were not able to achieve systematic changes in society that are crucial for the creation of a stable environment for their functioning. Financial mechanisms such as support from the government and local self-governments which should serve as a basic source of support for civil society without the need to intervene from abroad are very limited. Support from corporations based on unstable assignment mechanism is not sufficiently developed either. Individual philanthropy is absent completely. What is even worse, not only philanthropy but also volunteering stopped developing, if it exists then it is only to mitigate the consequences of problems.

Slovak NGOs miss professionalism, there are only a few people who devote themselves to development of NGOs. For example in social organizations all employees focus on provision of the service itself, nobody pays attention to the development of the institution. Undeveloped institutions have far less opportunity to communicate with local or foreign NGOs, this may from the outside seem as lack of mutual solidarity. As a result NGOs become easily and frequently victims of proposals deteriorating the conditions for their functioning (e.g. new draft Social Service Act).

Unfortunately, neither civil activists nor civil society participate in solving the problem of huge regional differences [that exist in Slovakia]. While in towns and especially in Bratislava we observe some demonstrations of activism, in rural areas and economically less developed environment the situation is worse.

Group 2

Obviously, from the inside one identifies more strengths and weaknesses than from the outside where only significant ones bringing overall change, are visible.

Slovak society misses moral authorities, which is a big problem. There is a lack of people from the areas of culture, science, and politics who would be willing to take over the responsibility and express their opinions on problems of society with the ambition to be accepted by public. The Church in Slovakia lacks moral authority too. As a result it is not perceived as a moral entity by society. Representatives of the Church in Slovakia do not deal with the problem of values, they do not set an example for the society and they do not attempt to impart their moral ethos to the society.

This is not exclusively a problem of the civil sector, representatives of political parties and businessmen face it too. The most acknowledged businessmen in Slovakia are the spoiled sons of former Communist party leaders. Similarly, leaders of political parties are mainly politicians who are always ready to compromise inside their parties.

What are the most important public issues/problems to address by citizens and civil society?

Government control
High culture
eDemocracy
Open Source



Group 1

Participants believe that there are enough institutional channels for participation in and controlling of the government, the point is that it has to become effective and decisive from the “privatization implementers”. Therefore they identify the following priorities:

- To assist the development and establishment of alternative civil activity subjects, investing in developing local communities, stimulating the development and maintenance of networks that could manage, channel and concentrate civil resources
- To stimulate campaigns that would work for removing the administrating of structural funds from state institutions in order to minimize the political and corruption pressure;
- To look for self-funding mechanisms of civil initiatives;
- To stimulate and finance watch dogs activities;
- To finance government policies monitoring and organize a permanent judicial system control structure.

Group 2

In order to turn “my” problem into a significant one for more people, besides looking for adherents, professional experts need to be found as they would formulate both the problem and the respective requirements precisely and clearly; then active action should follow. In other words, Web activism needs expert knowledge, it sort of realizes it cannot be spontaneous – experts should play key roles in formulating both a problem and the strategies for its solution. The idea of expertise goes alongside the idea of improving education as a whole, and boosting civil expertise in particular.

Web activism does not exclude institutions, on the contrary, its representatives strive for institutionalizing their participation in the government process – i.e. provide mechanisms that would guarantee that the position of a particular group will be taken into consideration when making a particular decision. Here the institutionalizing of the eDemocracy mechanisms and the different forms of deliberative democracy is of key importance. When it is evident that “no one is listening”, street demonstrations and pressure may follow.

When asked “If you had the money, which problem would you solve?” the answers were: “the Prime Minister should...” or “this and that minister is supposed to...” Often revolving around education and the financing of “high culture.”

Everyone appeared to be a free culture fan; however there was no evidence of considering things through one's own project interest.

- There is absolute necessity for the institutionalization of civic mechanisms for participation and control of the decision making processes – “I want to have the opportunity to fight for something”.
- The new public space for defending one's interests and for alternative policies is definitely the internet, therefore the internet space should be perceived as a valid public forum, provided that people identify themselves as they state their claims
- The time is ripe for introducing certain eDemocracy mechanisms: developing mechanisms for gathering civil and expert opinions through the internet, organizing subscription lists through the net and developing legislative initiatives that would oblige state and political institutions to take such initiatives into consideration
- “Open Source” and Linux should be introduced in the state administration as “civil servants should be trained” to use freely the new informational technologies
- Encouraging work with and through international civil networks as they are not merely a conductor of civil cul-

ture and know-how, but also provide civil initiatives with different legitimacy.

- Work for improving the social image of the civil sector, including monitoring of procedures, project financing and results. .

Both Groups

Despite the differences, both focus groups are identifying the problem of democratic shortage, of excluding citizens from decision making processes or exerting control over them. Defined slightly differently by the different types of participants: the independent activist group state “nobody listens to us, nobody cares about us” and “there are no established channels for public participation.” The representatives from established organizations on the other hand, claim that all social resources for authority access have been privatized.

Common recommendations of both FGs for activity priority financing:

- Development and financing of alternative policies: it is crucially necessary that experts debate and develop some alternatives to the policies currently applied in socially significant areas, as well as that civil priority strategies were formulated. Although both groups come up with a similar message, the method of achieving this is a bit different, the expert knowledge organization perceives it differently: independent activists putting their faith in think-tanks, while the established group focused rather on creation of working expert groups to formulate problems and propose strategies for solving them with some socially active groups consolidated around them – a form of expert-civil activity.
- Emphasis on the bringing-up and cultivation of civic culture, encouraging initiatives that develop skills for public defense of social interests, paying attention to social education, develop and propose new procedures, know-how and normative base.

Volunteerism
Restarting change process
Social basis
Community development



Group 1

P 4: The sector should show much more voluntarism. There are too many paid activists here.

P 2: But P 4, the society itself should show more voluntarism not the sector. There is not a sector, there is only society. It is obvious that the legal environment should be changed. It does not make sense to have rules and regulations of the coordination if there are no consequences if somebody violates them. We could experience in the last years how public consultations disappeared from the Hungarian legal system because of the interests of different investors, if an important investor wants to build something, the interests of the local people are put into parentheses.

P 5: If we go back to the times of political changes, we can state that one of the achievements was that there are a lot of rules and regulations on public participation. The problem is that its juridical practice has not been formed, we can see a lot of issues when the law is violated. But it is also true that these rules are not utilized as the people do not take the opportunity to use them. There is no any real intention to cooperate with each other.

P 3: I agree that we should change the legal environment. Partly it would make sense to revise the rules but on other hand it is a joke that the State itself does not keep the rules. We also know that Hungarian courts are not friendly with NGOs. Also, it would be needed to change the financing system, with regards to the National Civil Fund serious conflict of interest can be brought up. The biggest challenge is to change attitudes and change the culture. If I were ironic I would say we should start the whole change again.

Group 2

Mod: I would like to ask you to tell me what should be important, what we should concentrate in the

future, what would be your dreams? Money doesn't matter: in your dreams it would all be available...

P 1: We need social basis. There are a lot of civil society organizations that are run by one or two people and fight for survival, not the survival of the organization but the survival of the issue. People should acknowledge that they have to fight for their own community, for the sustainability of their own community. We need real participatory democracy. The other issue is that we should restrain bureaucracy, we are suffocating in administration, statistics and reports. We are not surprised anymore that the state does not fulfill its contracted obligations but we need watchdog organizations that dare to challenge these issues. The third issue is that the civil and business sector should be linked, the two worlds have to be bridged, today they do not understand each other and there is mistrust between them. Communities would be better served if the two could talk to each other.

P 3: I would like to make people behave like adults. I have two examples: the first is about the reaction of people when they get into a straightforwardly unfair situation, for example they get a phone bill that cannot be valid. They can have three strategies: not to fight and pay, try the legal option through some state agency for consumer protection, usually useless or try to find others who have had the same experience. I prefer the third and I wish there were plenty of these organizations to help each other and fight for our rights. The other example is about the current crisis situation. We talk a lot about the necessity to cut back state subsidies, especially about the allowance the state gives to families with children, which goes to families irrespective of their financial situation. The new option, currently loudly debated is to give the money only to families in need, but then you need bureaucracy to collect papers and make the appropriate decisions. I have not heard an option that would say: trust people! Make them decide whether they need that money from the community or not. Ask them to refuse it if they think they are not in need.

P 2: I would like to reach those people who do not accept that those in power do whatever they want. It would be good if people knew what we achieve, that they had information of the success stories, and not only the big cases but others as well. I would like to reach that sense of caring for the community - participation in general is fashionable.

P 4: I think all of us think in the same direction. I think the key for all of the issues raised is community development. Although there are plenty of organizations dealing with this issue, we should have more. Building local communities is the key to build civil society. In a society the least "conscious" strata is the poor, among those below low-middle class, there is no civil courage, if there is money available, I would spend on them.

*Who is responsible?
Activity of parishes
Passive schools
Narcissistic youth values
Role of media*



Group 1

P 4: There is a big question of who should be responsible for a "better" civil society and what the role of the state is. An example, yesterday I was visiting the oldest Senior Club in Warsaw which used to be supported by the City Hall. Suddenly they were informed that the support will be cut by half, no explanation just this information. Who knows, maybe there are some good reasons for this but it is arrogant to leave people without explanation, these are active people who should not be ignored and treated instrumentally. I'm not sure whether the administration might support civil society but at least it should not make active people frustrated. In consequence, those who are "heard" by administration are mainly, "vocal" individuals who are, mainly for the sake of their own interest, pushing the administration, sometimes you can even hear people from the administration praising them as examples of active citizenship. Is there a way to go beyond this?

P 5: I cannot answer question about "division of labor" for civil society but I can point those elements or institutions, which are crucial for development of civil society. In my opinion, an important issue in Poland is the activity of parishes, they are potentially crucial for nurturing cooperative and community practice,

but this is currently a very much unrealized potential. The second element would be the educational system, civic education is almost none-existing in primary and secondary schools and in my opinion, it should be introduced even in preschools, not mentioning at the university or in programs of life-long learning.

P 1: I want to support this view, I work with kids and I can see that schools are very passive in terms of work with civic education, they will not step beyond what is formally required. A separate issue is the university whose educational pattern is so old fashioned. During the studies, there is no message about myself in society, particularly with regards to my obligations. There is almost no training in terms of “doing” things, it is just studying. We study as individuals “in parallel”, we have no chances to interact with real institutions.

P 3: I also think educational systems are crucial. With the overall pattern of more and more individualism, institutions have to create the “immune system”. In practice, they work exactly the opposite, the whole system is extremely individualistic and based on competition. Unfortunately, the same goes with the Church, it should be a stronghold for community but it is not. The parish becomes kind of “spiritual service points” for individuals and they are not any more expressions of community. The same with lifelong education. This pattern is preserved and practiced by the elites, needs in terms of recognition does not get to regular ordinary people.

P 3 + 1 + mod: The question of the Church and civil society this part of Europe (particularly in Poland) should be examined much deeper. Is it just another competitor for our time and energy, or is it more a generic space and source of motivation for various activities? One should remember which role it had during communist time, it was much more than place of worship! It created a protected space, an umbrella for social and political activities, is there a way to bring at least some of this back?

Group 2

P 4: A very important aspect of any activity is “enlightened” self-interest. Eventually, groups like consumers, professional associations etc will grow and it is important to ensure that the state will not treat them as rebels but more, as a natural “counterbalance” to its own power. It is misleading to use rhetoric of “common good”, it is rather a natural expression of differences of interest within society. It lies in its nature and I believe those activities have its own internal dynamic engine and there is no urgent need to stimulate them. More complicated and needed are forms of “public altruism”. My students are very much expressing these needs for collective experience, however in my opinion there is no need for motivating especially young people but rather creating a space. The educational system is very much about competition rather than cooperation, however, they have to find their own way.

P 9: It goes even deeper, there is a certain pattern of bringing kids up. It is true that parents are often working very hard, trying to organize extra-curricular activities (swimming pool, language lessons etc.) but there is not so much effort to create opportunities for collective experiences for kids (like it used to be in scouting etc.). There is simply not enough time for it And kids lack after school experiences of this type. Actually there is not enough situations of collective responsibility for “anything” - colleagues, territory, tree, pets - whatever. Without this it is hard to gain those skills afterwards.

P 8: Those activities are important even in preschool age. Those are “golden hours” of encouraging (or discouraging) certain patterns of collective behaviors.

P 3: At the same time, young people are in fact looking for that kind of collective experience, there is an authentic need for it. For example, WOSP (the large polish Great Orchestra of Christmas charity) is attracting people very much beyond “the usual suspects”, but being involved in a one day activity like fund raising for WOSP is simple. It is apparently much more complicated to “get into” many NGOs, you have to “climb the ladder” often with not very satisfying or useful tasks (making the coffee - type of jobs). NGOs are often not volunteer friendly, it is a shame.

P 2: Part of the problem is that many young people want to be part of already established cool, prestigious NGOs, why would they not rather do something in the own neighborhood, is it not cool enough?

P 3: What I see quite often is kind of narcissistic attitude among young people, they believe that they can and have to be famous, cool, recognized, awarded. Humble, patient, small and not so vocal activities are not so popular among young people.

P 2: What is also inhibiting people from undertaking civic activities is bureaucracy. Bottom-up indigenous initiatives are immediately quenched by regulations, you have to fight your way “up the hill” for even the simplest of initiatives, like planting a tree for example. There is an obvious need for deregulation. –Another idea regards the creative use of networks, in the US, they are contemplating the idea of something inspired by the old-fashioned “public work” that was organized during the pre-war big crisis. Having access to a network, one can become a teacher or mentor, networks are organic but they still can be cultivated.

P 1: It is true, networks represent huge potential and sometimes you need very little resources to trigger lots of energy. But this is a very delicate issue, in a sense it is a living organism.

P 5: The role of media is extremely important, the message about civil society is inconsistent. There is no “brand” for it like Solidarnosc used to be. People are not familiar with the whole concept of the third sector. However, the role of media is also ambivalent, they are very strong and they create their own institutions and brands, portraying themselves as the core of civil society but often overshadowing activities of organizations. Particularly in Poland this 4th power is in fact very strong with all good and bad consequences’.

P 4 + mod: Maybe we need to build new relations with media as we all agree that there is a need for civic education. It might take a form of dedicated cycle of programs in form of “How to do it?”. It regards those elementary social and civic skills, eventually it will happen.

P 3: Media people often perceive it as competition, they have their “own” campaigns etc. There is a need for huge educational effort among media leaders.

P 2: We can complain about mainstream media, but we should also be able to harvest possibilities created by other tools, on the internet you can have your own YouTube TV channel within days. I’m also a bit skeptical about the influence of media, at least in a certain “marketing” role, I see so many posters, appeals, campaigns that I am lost and “over prompted”. Then there is one more issue, the role of business in supporting civil society. The concept of CSR is still shallow in Poland and reserved for philanthropy, altogether business is often perceived as something “dirty” and by definition focused only on its own interest. Nobody believes in any form of altruistic behaviors of businesses.

P 6: I remember being in UK with a group of Polish MPs. they were listening to people from the Home Office trying to describe the phenomenon of social enterprises. For our MP the most unbelievable thing was that they operate in UK without any special tax incentives.

P 7: Sometimes it might be useful to use even “artificial” incentives, they may sometimes turn into something real. This was the case in Italy with alternative military services for so-called “objectors”.

*European issues
Social contracting
Crisis will nourish activism
Community centres*



Group 1

During the next 10 year, we will assist the growing of the social services sector, NGOs working in this field will grow. In general, all the aspects related to local communities’ development will be important. The participation rate related to social issues will also grow.

Some participants believed that the number of NGOs active in democracy field will decrease because of lack of

funding. Other participants considered that the democracy NGOs may continue to grow, however moving on to more "European" issues.

Other opinions: social contracting will grow and the system will modernize. Also the membership structure for NGOs will grow and NGOs will be better at representing citizens' interests and we will assist the acceleration of development of grassroots organizations.

All participants appreciated that the present crisis context will have also a positive side, as NGO expertise will become more valued. The present crisis could also be seen as an opportunity for NGOs in terms of human resources, as they hope not as many people will migrate from the NGO sector to the business sector.

The existence of people with strong leadership skills, clear ideas and ability to motivate others is very important, and there is a need for more people able to promote and fight for a cause.

If they were to invest for the future - participants identified several strategic areas for civil society development. Some participants considered that the most interesting investment should be in improving the image and increase the trust of citizens in NGOs. This can be done through campaigns to promote successes and unsuccessful projects, or through building up a special television station covering citizens/NGOs issues. Other participants considered that a smart investment could be in grassroots initiatives, e.g. through a special fund created to support those initiatives. Other opinions stressed the importance of investing in education: civic education in schools, but also education for business leaders and politicians to learn more about the NGO sector. Training of leadership for NGOs was also considered strategic and one participant stressed paying a lot of attention to the community level and that investment in community development programs is strategically important.

Group 2

Participants believed that they will assist the development of a "user generated state", where citizens have better access to governance. Also participants from this group made comments related to the present crisis situation, saying that the crisis will force the participation and activism to grow.

Other opinions: the structural funds management will influence the relationship between civil society and the state. In Romania there will be a group of big organizations, more or less looking like corporations, for the rest there will be assistance for development of small and local organizations. Volunteer activities will grow, and charity behavior of Romanians will change, marketing will become very important.

As strategic investment, participants mentioned civic education for children and youth, investment in development of the civic space such as more community centers. A general education program for citizens could also be interesting, other participants mentioned investment in educational programs for journalists as well as human resources assistance for small organizations.

Judicial power
Information flows
Economic independence
Local philanthropy



Group 1

Inevitably, judicial power has to be reformed and depoliticized in the near future. It will also be necessary to monitor compliance with the Antidiscrimination Act. Further necessities will be to extend the legislative opportunities for citizens and NGOs to participate in decision-making processes regarding public matters, and shift democracy in Slovakia towards deliberation.

As for civil society it will be very important to maintain its ability to generate ideas and different viewpoints, influence public discussions and create public policies. It will be crucial to create an environment suitable for the functioning of organizations, and for individuals providing feedback on the running of the country. In the future, this ability should get all the way to the regional and community levels.

With respect to the social services sphere, the biggest challenge will be to find and create fair environment for provision of social services by all partners, excluding manifestations of injustice, favoritism or political corruption. In addition, it will be necessary to create space for financial support from EU sources, resources from the state, entrepreneurs or individuals for projects, ideas, and methodologies representing innovations in the area of social services provisioning.

The civil sector will face more challenges including re-establishment of mutual communication and information flows, bringing together active people from various environments and cultures, as well as have to make an effort to achieve positive perception of civil society by the public and submit common solutions from various regions up to the EU level.

Yet another challenge for our society is the creation of a space for economically independent citizens and their work or business activities, decreasing the amount of administrative work in dealing with public sector. Also interference by the state and public institutions with the lives of individuals in general will have to be decreased.

Group 2

It is necessary that activists - individuals as well as institutions, are able to bring issues to a successful end on all levels. This means that active citizens have to get legal advice and other help from specialists, architects, city planners, doctors, etc. It will be necessary to support active citizens and help them get their cases to the media in order to enable them address new activists more efficiently and help them inform the public about their successes.

Supporting the infrastructure for civil activists from local independent sources is another big challenge. Volunteering and philanthropy will definitely remain among topics for discussion. Both of them demonstrate civil activism and represent an important independent basis of financial resources for civil society.

In the future, civil sector will also have to tackle the problem of lack of young leaders. Activists are getting old, they are exhausted and this results in a crisis of alternative thinking, absence of elites in science, culture, politics, as well as absence of ability to address issues and get people involved.

In the future, civil society will have to make a decision probably preceded by a very difficult discussion, regarding the existence of infrastructure for active citizens and its institutional backbone. Advantages of the existence of infrastructure stand in contrast to the evil the infrastructure, or rather its bad performance, may bring to civil society. The problem of financing such institutions or structures considerably limits their occurrence.

Democratization of the communal sphere in Slovakia, thorough decentralization of public administration and removal of some well functioning civil mechanisms from the central administration to administrations on the local level, represent a great challenge for civil society. At present the budgets and powers of towns, villages and regional self-governments can be compared with those of the central government. Another important issue is legislation enabling people to participate in administration of public matters, have secured access to information and access to decision-making via participation in administrative proceedings.

Civil society will have to solve the question of effective spreading of information; the existing eSpace provides completely new forms of communication. On one hand it makes communication faster and more efficient, on the other such communication is impersonal and value oriented, and civil society will have to come to terms with this fact.

Making the inter-sectoral collaboration more efficient in the future may shift civil society from dealing with the consequences of problems to preventing them. This will place higher demands especially on the other two sectors and their prejudices against civil society. Last but not least, civil society will have to come to terms with globalization of Slovak society which will be another big challenge.

What are the changes and trends that affect the future of civil society?

Fraud and corruption
Environment of freethinkers



Group 1

Dominating the discussion was the subject of social resource privatization, including local authorities alleged of purchasing votes at elections and establishing and funding own-purpose-serving NGOs, corruption of the juridical authority etc. Almost everyone established a return to some pre-modern lifestyles, a “freaky-pre-modern bandit culture” and a new feudalization was mentioned.

Group 2

On the one hand, the participants perceived civil society as newly-emerging through them as individual activists, and on the other hand, their own realization was significant for them and they do not complain about it. They appear optimistic about the future as they believe that, after all, society is bound to normalize; furthermore they believe they have the opportunity to form an environment of freethinkers.

Civic culture
Reducing the gap to politics



Group 1

Mod: Who could do something, what are the necessary steps – a “civic culture” is the key word but we should be more specific. Today participating in open forums, signing petitions, participating demonstrations, etc are very rare. Schools should be one of the main areas of practicing these skills and a place where students learn advocacy and interest protection.

P 4: I agree that education system has a key role to educate the students for the active citizenship.

Mod: What can we do to make the interest representation and advocacy real? What can we do if the schools socialize children for assimilation and avoiding conflicts? How can we reduce the gap between the politics and the civil society?

P 4: Do you know what an ordinary child hears at home? S/he hears that there was the KISZ (Young Communists) but it was a disaster. What do they hear at school? The director belongs to FIDESZ, the head master belongs to the MSZP - so it is a disaster as well. How could a self respecting children’s movement evolve in this environment?

Mod: Are there movements that could be models?

P 3: I am sure that they exist. I know the youth area and issues very well and this tertiary socialization area (after the family and schools), is a good area for it. In the first and second areas, a stick power controls the children. In the tertiary area there are patterns of recreation and no predestine power, the youths can choose plazas, internet, motor gangs, and contemporary groups. Obviously we have a lot of tasks in this area; us who are civic organizations, state and businesses. I think it is a good area to teach them what advocacy and interest protection is, because it is very difficult to teach them in the framework of schools because of the predestine power which does not allow this processes. In this way, a „normal” society could be created.

P 2: There were a lot of local protest movements from 2000, which can see beyond their local interests and find allies among similar communities or national movements. It is a positive process but comparing to a stable democracy it is not enough, it is an aborted situation. I do not agree that de-politization is the solution, as I see it - this is the problem instead, there is a culture of „politics is disgusting” in Hungary. If we play a republic, we should be citizens, have self-respect and have an opinion on public issues. It is not needed to be party members, but it is needed to have minimal civic knowledge and to use those tools necessary to be involved in decision-making processes. A culture of cooperation is necessary also, I am sad to see that very often the elite who normally speak for civil society, talks about itself. These organizations are different than organizations in Western Europe: they have insufficient number of members, they do not have internal democratic rules, and these organizations operate as companies: there is management, there are donors who behave like quasi owners, and they usually just like to prove their existence. This is a big burden on our democracy.

Mod: Do you know of any potential ways and steps to change it? Maybe this financial crisis can cause that individuals and local communities will be more important, or is this an illusion?

P 4: The crisis will not assist this process. It came from outside, it is a mass of global interactions; so turning inside is a wrong answer. We must have these interactions but our answers should be local ones, based on local needs and local demands.

Life is risky and unpredictable
Social economy
Investigating our values
The changing role of the state
Cyber communities



Group 1

Main issues raised by participants: life is becoming more risky. The current crisis might unfold itself into unpredictable directions: in some scenarios we will become even more egoistic, self-protecting and preoccupied with survival strategies. On the other hand, it might also trigger positive processes of solidarity and mobilization.

The Crisis will force us to sort out our fundamental values again, we would probably be more concerned about stability and the values of “belonging” and responsibility. Paradoxically things and issues which are often raised by civil society organizations might become more important than ever, for example: mutuality, reciprocity, trust as an economic factor, social economy, different concepts of wellbeing etc.

We are lacking habits and practices for a non-instrumental debate about our own values. Third sector people often think that they are somehow immune from difficult questions about their own axiology, it is high time for debates around the question know why? rather than know how? There is also the important and growing issue of so-called institutional isomorphism of third sector organizations, since they are more and more contracted by the administration they are under constant pressure to standardize and are somehow forced to be more and more opportunistic and bureaucratic. Third sector should protect its unique features.

Group 2

P 4: First of all there is a need for understanding the changing role of state, as it is still perceived to be responsible for delivering all solutions. Obviously, it is anachronism, not only in Poland is this deeply imprinted in us. Probably what will change first (in fact it has already started to change) are behaviors, more and more we have to rely on ourselves for education, health etc. However, we are still trapped by our language and it will take a while to change it, not only the language in society but also the official technocratic rhetoric of state bureaucracy which is portraying itself as the source of solutions for all problems. Asking citizens to get self-organized is perceived as presenting itself as “weak”, the only exceptions are catastrophe like situations. Who knows maybe current crisis will be so deep that it will force a renaissance of the old and forgotten concept of mutuality or reciprocity (for example on credit markets) rather than belief in state protection. This would be a chance for self-help. Obviously, for these concepts to work they need to be rooted in a culture of mutuality with access to social capital, which is not very so available.

P 2: There is definitely a need for the third sector to think beyond structural funds planning periods. It is true that funds are available now, but what will happen afterwards? NGOs are very dependent and patronized by the public administration which distributes those funds and the system often awards opportunistic behaviors. This is dangerous in the long run.

P 2: Technology is obviously one of the main drivers of change and my belief is that in Poland the traditional third sector is not “catching up” with development. This does not say that individuals are not using it, but with this “gap”, individual cyber activism is weakening NGOs who are not adapting fast enough. It creates alternative channels while in many cases it would rather be possible to fuel new energy into existing one.

P 1: Obviously, huge development of cyber communities is going on, of course in most cases they are of a very specific nature: they exist mainly for fun, entertainment and self-interest, but in the end they play a very important social role again both negative and positive. Cyber communities often create very complex social forms, they generate specific form of social capital and of course also so-called “dirty” capital. Too often, however, they are treated just as dangerous alternative to the real world, while sometimes they are influencing the very real world and they can help organize real activities of people. By the way there are more and more NGOs (however not in Poland so far) which use the virtual world to interact with people, recruit and educate. Technology provides powerful tools for free and lowers the cost of operation as well as democratizes access to information.

P 2 + 4: There is also one extremely important issue, the participation of Poland in taking global responsibility. We still have one of the lowest portion of our budget dedicated to developmental goals, and public debate on issues such as EU agricultural subsidies in relation to problem of famine in developing countries is non existing. We perceive ourselves as a “poor” country and subject of much desired and demanded help from others. We are not paying our debts of solidarity to others.

P 2: Another interesting question is about the process of emergence of post materialistic values. How much time do we need in Poland to witness the growing of subtle concepts like quality of life which are measured not only in economic terms, but rather in e.g. quality of food, identity, public space, esthetics, time.

P 4: The big question in my opinion is whether collectively we would be better described as a post-communist society or a pre-consumerist and purely materialistic society, being the first generation who can freely consume the outcomes of their efforts.

P 6: Sooner or later we will collectively face the question of meaning of life, happiness etc. We need to answer it in a deeper sense and feel that we need others - community.

*Democracy deficit
Social communication
Role of internet
Public consultation*



Conclusions Group 1 & 2

Civic transformation happened abruptly in Romania at the beginning of 90s. Social, political and technological factors converged to facilitate the development and transformation of Romanian civil society. At the present (after 20 years) there is a solid landscape of civil society, populated with all kind of associative forms and collective actions in Romania – NGOs, coalitions and federations, trade unions, informal association, big, national organizations and small community organizations, media associations, bloggers etc.

Still, despite the progresses, there is a democracy deficit in Romania and both civil society structure and government should tackle this issue seriously. The level of citizens' trust in NGOs is very low (under 30%), the level of citizens' participation in political activities through voting is also very low, in general the citizen is alienated from participatory activities, political or apolitical. Strengthening participatory associations may be the key to political as well civil revitalization.

The level of civic activism level is also considered very low. Participants of the focus group sessions had real difficulties to indicate examples of outstanding "civic entrepreneurs" - individuals or organizations. It was considered that in Romania there often is a sort of "civic reaction" something below civic activism. For civic activism it is necessary to have solid civic values and civic education, civic activism should be a systematic activity, based on values and conducting our attitudes and behavior in society.

Social communication is critical to a healthy civil society, the practice of leading and managing newspapers, TV stations, opinion magazines etc have a substantial impact on civic education, associative behavior and civic mobilization. Without necessarily intending to do so, Romanian media adopted the wrong strategies for portraying and gathering information about civil society activities, encouraging unrepresentative leadership and ridiculing organized group activities. Mass media should become more self-conscious about their own civic impact and responsibilities.

A special emphasis was placed on discussing the role of internet in supporting and encouraging civil society development and civic attitudes and behavior. Internet is a wonderful opportunity for social communication and a sort of support for a civic space, where we can express our ideas, but is only a tool, internet cannot replace the face-to-face communication.

Civil society development and civic transformation are linked with governance reform and electoral politics (electoral system reform). In Romania there was a lot of progress in the last 20 years in terms of governance reform. The civil society structure is involved in decision-making processes, at least formally. Public consultation has become a legal requirement for all governmental structures, however still there are a lot of things to do in order to modify the working of government and politics. Institutions, movements and associations could have a more prominent role in public consultation with the government and Parliament.

STREET POLL

During the summer of 2009 a street poll was conducted in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Four questions about **civic engagement**, **civil society** and **democracy** were translated and asked to random citizens mainly in the capitals of these countries. The films were translated, subtitled and showed during the Civil Society Forum available on: www.csf.ceetrust.org/article/csf-street-poll/

Street Poll reporters:
Plamena Foteva and Tzvetelina Stoyanova, BG
Jana Milojevicova, CZ
Peter Hoffmann & Zsofia Zsemlye, HU
Joanna Kozera, PL
Inre Studio, RO
Norber Maur, SVK
Studio 12, SI

What comes to mind when you hear civil society?



That it is missing in Bulgaria.



Security, morals and responsibilities.

Maybe how people get together and do something for public benefit?

The feeling of responsibility among the people, I think that should be civil society



ideals, which have not until now been really reachable in the Czech Republic.

Civil society? What comes to my mind is a community of people living in a specific town or country.



Hard to say what exactly comes to my mind... For me society means all the people living in a community, society is the nation, all of us. And civil? For me society and civil society is the same thing.



Well, organizations that are neither governmental, nor businesses but those organizations created by the citizens for a purpose or a public affair.

I think that the so called civil society operates well in West and North Europe, but in Hungary we just have the opportunity to create a well-operating civil society.



In my opinion the main task of the civil society would be to keep under control the state and governmental institutions. It is an extraordinary important role. A good civil society could provide activities which the government cannot or do not want to provide. So the state could be controlled by the civil society and the governmental activities could be more effective and less corrupt. Even so there are serious problems with the civil society in Hungary, sometimes it is a parody of itself. Look at the Advisory Board of the Hungarian State Television and Radio, for example. In this case, the civil control is a joke. Various interests can be noticed in this process, which are led by party politics. It is more destructive than useful.

I think that in the media, we can hear more and more often the expressions civil society, NGO, but I'm not sure that they work properly in this country, especially due to the mentality of the Hungarians.





What a question! I don't know what it is for me to be honest. Civil society..? You are asking about the times of People's Republic of Poland, aren't you? (Reporter) No, I'm asking about what it is for you in present times. (Respondent) I really don't know.

I think "civil society" is a society where members, citizens believe in their influence on the reality that surrounds them. In a short perspective and further in the future. They believe that the world (close and a bit further away) can be changed for the better. And they try to do it. They are engaged in different activities, they are able to work as a team. I think it's also important because people can feel that they are not only individuals, but members of a bigger group and together they can achieve something.



To me "civil society" is something that I can have impact on. It means to be active, it means people who create this society are aware of their influence and they want to have an impact on it. They know that they can do something and they do it.

What a question! Woman: Let me think, I really don't know Man: It's hard to say. Civil society is community mainly.



It's a society which is able to organize itself, do something together. It doesn't need any orders from authorities, it does not need a scheme. It's creative, it cooperates, people help each other. These are main features connected with "civil society".

I associate it with the fact that each person, each citizen of the particular country can feel that his country belongs to him.

What is it for me..? I associate it with free people.



It's our society, it's what it should be: everything that surrounds us. (Reporter) It is more about organizations or it's "me, you and the others"? (Respondent) Both, in a society there are individuals, but also organizations, fighting for rights and freedoms.



I think it's a conglomerate. I think you are a group, you, the civil society. It represents the interest of the people when we have elections or when there are troubles during elections or abuses on the part of political organizations. It depends. The civil society is like the environment. We are all part of the civil society, aren't we? I am a member of civil society, and you are too, and the taxi drivers over there, we all are from the civil society.

Civil society? What could it be? A world full of controversies? It's something that lately became less active than, say, 15 years ago, as it was in 1996 till 2000. It was more dynamic then.





Civil society represents for me the whole nation. (Reporter) What you mean by nation?
(Respondent) Nation as Slovakia, Slovaks, Czechs, etc.

Civil society? People have power to make decisions about everything, about important things.

Normal society that is based on certain ideas, connected to the community. Tolerance at all levels: elderly people, young people, and those in middle age. Covering of basic needs. Civil society means that we are taking notice of everybody. Something, like more equality. There are differences among people who did not work honestly to earn their money. They were clever.

All community and good relations between people. There should be no rivalry between one another, people should have compassion for other people.



Civil society is everything around us. Everything which we live with, what we deal with. Whether it is public offices in connection with citizens, or things like that... Somewhere where all citizens have equal rights. You are asking me difficult questions, I do not think about them every day. Civil society... I would define it like that. Civil society is a society with some kind of civil rights. (Reporter) What are these civil rights? (Respondent) Those which are approved by government of this society for all citizens.



Dispersion, a variety of interests, associations - that would be it.

Civil society means all of us - civilians, all of us.

All who are not actively involved in public affairs but still bear responsibility towards fellow men. Maybe even the responsibility that something has to be done, that a better quality of life is to be promoted in society.

Organizations, associations... not linked to and financed by the national government.



Is democracy working in our countries after 20 years?



In a way, but I think there is a lot more to be done in that field. (Reporter) What needs to be done to improve it? (Respondent) Higher transparency on how our taxes are spent, on the work of the administration and government of the country. If things are more transparent, people will have better vision and will be more satisfied.

No. (Reporter) What needs to be done to improve it? (Respondent) The morals and the security must be increased and everybody must take their own responsibility.



Well, there is democracy, it is working, but the people who live in Bulgaria hardly see the result. (Reporter) What needs to be done to improve it? (Respondent) Oh, there are many things to be done; it's not just one thing. First we must change ourselves and then work for the democracy.

It appears that the democracy works mainly on the negative side, because there is very liberate understanding about some things, even about human rights, do you have to take them into consideration or not... (Reporter) What needs to be done to improve it? (Respondent) I think that parents must pay more attention to their children at home, because this is where all problems come from, in the street, at work, everywhere. There isn't good upbringing at home, and that causes many problems, is the child going to throw trash on the street, to shout, to be polite with people, etc



I would say it works, it exists but it does not work well enough yet. Simply it is not yet very well rooted in the soil of this country.



Some democracy is working but there is corruption, disrespect to the law and something more... intolerance.

With regards to everybody's expectations, it has developed badly enough as everybody thought that after 10 years process everything would be fine, everything would be wonderful, we would have the same standard as in Germany. I would say it became true, we are doing well, but democracy? That is the question. As a nation we are what we are, as people we are what we are and this is how we elected [politicians]. The politicians are only the tip of the iceberg of the whole nation.





The democracy itself works but a little bit uneasily because when someone really would like to exercise one's right, he or she can meet such difficulties that it makes him/her rather get around the problems. For example, me, I would never take legal action against someone who trespasses upon my rights only because I think of that I would have to attend the court for ages and it is so unreal.

Basically, yes. We have democratic institutions which were created in 1989/90. But this construction is not so stable yet. (Reporter) Why? (Respondent) There are serious economic and financial problems at the basic democratic elements. As long as the corruption is so widespread and mushroomed in this country, we cannot expect stable democratic institutions. The most serious problem is the finance of the political parties, until we can see corruption in this field in connection with the various tender procedures, highway and road-building tenders it is easy to say, that it has a negative impact on people. So the whole 'building' of the Hungarian democracy is under this negative influence. If we have solid economic and financial background the corruption will decrease and we can make a 'step forward'. This step will have an effect on society and on the people's attitude and mentality too. But it is a long way, I know.



I believe that the democracy itself works well, the rules are given and they are surely established but maybe the institutions don't function so well because they're over politicized.



If we speak about the last 20 years, I think yes, but compared to other countries not really. I think it's connected with economy development. We are still far behind other countries and that's the reason that all institutions are in a weak condition in Poland. New reforms are not good enough and often they try to change something without results.

Firstly, it started working eventually. We tried to make it work, that's the most important. Secondly, I think democracy depends on a will to participate in it and practice it. And I think in this field we still have got lots to do. I don't want to say it's because of old socialistic mechanisms that made people not to believe that we can do something, I think it's because of capitalism that has been functioning for the last 20 years and it's still something new – it makes us often think only about our private interests and we are not interested in what is going on around us. We don't really want to be engaged because it's inconvenient and requires some effort. I think this is the biggest threat for our democracy. But at the same time I think sometimes there are manipulative mechanisms and I'm thinking about media issues. I remember when I protested against war in Iraq when it was very unpopular opinion and media reported from my very pathetic speech only the part where I said that it costs a lot of money. So this is my experience and also a threat for democracy.

I think as for the beginning it's working very well but there are lots of things to do especially with stimulating people's activity. With encouraging people to do things on their own, I think this should be the most important.



Woman: For me personally democracy looks completely different when I compare it to other countries. Unfortunately we don't have democracy. Man: We have something similar but still it's not what it should be. Woman: We lack integrity of society, different attitude towards life and people, young people and elderly people. I could say more but it would be inappropriate.

Woman: It's not how we imagined. There is no democracy. Man: Our power is not the real power. Woman: Anyway, I would like young people to have different, more peaceful life because I observe my granddaughters how hard they work. One is working in Polish Airlines and she is nervous about being sacked, the second has got her own company, she is a landscape architect, they work all the time. I used to work in a telecommunication company, I worked from 8 am until 3 pm and I didn't have to worry. They work much more and I see young people have got tough lives.

Is democracy functioning well? We have elections. Everyone can vote according to his opinion, for representatives for government or self-governing authorities. Everybody can work for his community through those representatives. Of course in reality it's different sometimes but I think democracy is working and Poland is gaining an experience how to live in democratic atmosphere. It's getting better all the time.



It's a controversial question. I think, compared to other countries not bad. But I think there are a lot of things to improve. I'm thinking about culture of politics but if we talk about law I think the situation is good.

It works as it can. What could be changed? Nothing in particular. We have to wait another 20 years in order for people who were born in democracy to grow up and start deciding about things and maybe then it will be better. As other democracies that have been functioning longer show, they are also not so good. (Reporter) So you think about young people. (Respondent) Yes, but they will get older and become old men and forget how they were young.



(Reporter) We are 20 years after the revolution, we have democracy here. What needs to be done to improve democracy in Slovakia? (Respondent) Everything. Unfortunately, in my age, I am saying that everything has to improve, since based on my opinion nothing is working well here. I am telling you how it is. (Reporter) What you mean by nothing is working well here? (Respondent) Caring for people, whether they are young or elderly, hospitals, everything. The fact is that everything should be improved. Improved to make things better, for people, not only for a few people, but for all of us, throughout Slovakia.



Possibilities have changed. People have more possibilities than they did 20 years ago. We have freedom of speech, which didn't exist before; people can publically express their opinions. We have the possibility to travel, to get to know new cultures, more or less we have freedom. (Reporter) If you compare an idealistic model of democracy and actual democracy in Slovakia, what could be changed in Slovakia? (Respondents) Mainly the way of thinking of politics should be changed. And to make Slovakia more open to other countries. Everything which developed until now or this openness of Slovakia towards other countries is stagnating or is shutting down.

To improve democracy? People should be more equal. There is a big difference between wealthy and poor people. This is a problem. And we also can't influence or say what we really think or how we want things to be done. This government is doing what it thinks is appropriate.



Definitely the protection of individuals against tabloid papers and people on social benefits. People who want to live at the expense of others. I mean to increase safety on the streets, in shopping malls where people are pick-pocketed.

Mainly our generation has to die out. We are still warped by things from the previous socialist regime. The fact that we can't bear life in a democratic way. We still think that we have to use bribes. Look at our government, whether red or green, or black, all are equal, it doesn't matter.





(Reporter) what do you think should be improved here? (Respondent) I am really worried about my husband, who has been unemployed for a year and a half. He is 57, an engineer who he does not have a job. He is now applying for to be an office receptionist. So I think working conditions should be changed. I think everybody has the right to work. Before everybody had a guaranteed job. It was probably better in the past, this is the thing I am worried about.

Better salaries. Yes, certainly. (Reporter) What else should be improved to reach an ideal democracy? (Respondent) Everything. What is here? Nothing. Unemployment, there are no jobs, and even when you have a job, you have no money. Nepotism. And what else, I do not know. Everything is wrong here. When you apply for a job and you do not know anybody, they hire their own people, and ordinary people cannot get a job. You see an advertisement for a job, but it was filled ages ago. It does not work. There is no democracy. People in power have their own understanding of democracy with is suitable for them. They deceive people, I do not trust even one of those people, even one, they



are liars.

There are general things we see every day. Corruption, that's the outrageous behavior of politicians who do not have any scruples and act mainly in economic affairs, often arrogant. There should be more tolerance between people in interpersonal relationships, there is arrogance between people and that is the thing I also do not like. It is shown for example between young people, it is shown on the streets, and I am often on the streets as a driver. Irresponsibility, over-taking, I find these serious problems as well. And then motor bikers on housing developments, revving his gas just because he likes it, he is playing but he wakes up children. It is just a small thing, but it disrupts people's lives.

Goodness, what a question. What should be improved? Transparency of all public decisions and affairs should be improved for sure. And that is all. On the basis of transparency, people would have a bigger overview and maybe more discussion. And I think that as for the rest, we just pretend that it is present. But when there is no transparency... Transparency of government, parties and their actions. Because every government is grabbing and thus the government does not work transparently, it hides everything and I think that when we come into contact with lies and hypocrisy, we do not know who we can believe.



Yes, I think so.



No, absolutely not.

I would say so-so. Influences can be felt.

The country is run by the few. There is no democracy.

No, it works in a very poor and unjust manner.



Well, I hardly think this is the case. Compared to the previous regime, we can now speak up but to no avail.

I don't think that democracy has ever really properly worked as a concept. So it hasn't worked in Slovenia either.

Not really. One does have a say at the elections, but that is it.

There are more options and political candidates than before. This is different. We have an option there, but none apart from that. There is lobbying and patronage, this isn't right.



If you have a problem in your community to whom do you turn?



Well, there's nobody to address, we solve our problems by ourselves.



Presumably to nobody, except the police maybe

To the municipality, you must torture the municipality constantly ring on their phones. Unfortunately, it's old-fashioned, but it's the only way that works.



We actually have a problem in our neighborhood with some youngsters, there is as far as I know, a curfew to which they don't comply. They shout, make noise and we can't rest and sleep normally at night. And now we intend to make a petition, because the police don't respond to our requests to check why these youngsters are outside their homes during these late hours. We clean all kind of garbage left by these young people, where are the parents and why are their children in the street by that time of the night?



Hm? To my daddy? :-)

Perhaps I would turn to the municipal office.

Hundred-percent to the municipal council of Prague 14 where I live, and if it would not work then on Prague city hall, its mother organization.

To local or state Police



Up till now I haven't had any personal experience in this field but in my opinion, we can turn to the ombudsman and the municipality.





I think the local Administration, (Reporter) And if it was a problem connected with your district or your city? (Respondent) Then District Council or City Council. I think there is no problem with communication in these institutions.



I think it depends on what kind of problem I had. I would try to find the institution which would have a chance to help me to solve the problem. I would go to appropriate authorities: regional self-government or some other kind of power, it depends what problem it was exactly.

In my district there is a very active group of residents. For instance, recently we blocked the project of a building that was supposed to be built opposite us. We also have a few councilors who live in the neighborhood and I would ask them.



Woman: We would ask, but who can listen to us? Social Help wouldn't help much. I would ask a person who, I support the PIS party so I would ask Mrs. Kaczynska! She could help in some situations. Man: I support PIS party too.

Local self-government. I would find out what they are planning to build, what is the purpose of it. Is it consistent with the needs of the local community because if someone wants to build a factory which is harmful to me, then inhabitants of the particular district or building should organize themselves to take care of their security and health in order to prevent building it so close to the estate. (Reporter) So, you would turn mainly to self-government? (Respondent) Yes, because they administrate the area.



It would depend on the conflict but if it was a conflict connected with the administration then I would ask self-governing authorities, but if it was an ethical or social conflict I would go to a well-known actor. (Reporter) Someone who is a leader? (Respondent) Yes, I know one NGO in my district so I think they could be a mediator, but I think many people would go to a priest, something like this.



It also depends on the kind of problem. There are lots of different organizations which are responsible for very different things. So it's hard to say.

Not here but when I lived in Komorów city, I agreed to be a councilor of my district in order to be able to deal with problems. But then I moved out and lost contact with the community but it was the experience from the early '90s, in the beginning of freedom in Poland.



Most of the times? Or a problem in my home? I don't know, I guess there are institutions for this. From what I saw: some for children's rights, women's rights, all kind of such institutions. (Reporter) Would you go to these institutions or to the private, non-governmental ones? (Respondent) Both, both, it depends on the context, as sometimes the private organizations do not have too much influence. Well, sometimes neither of the institutions has and they don't work properly, so it depends from case to case.



First thing I do is to call 112 (the emergency number). (Reporter) And what if you want to arrange a park for children, to whom do you turn? (Respondent) Normally one should go to the major, right? Because he's the one in command.

We don't have enough power to turn to someone, as we don't have the right. We are people of color, so we don't have too much success anywhere. I came here for an interview, for a job. And I tell you, I am 40, I am no 15-year old kid. I worked for a boss for five months, and he kept telling me that he'd offer me a work contract, but he didn't. And then he gave me a 15-day notice. What kind of notice if I had no work contract? (Reporter) Do you think it's because of the crisis or because you are – in your words – “of color”? (Respondent) Both, crisis and color. (Reporter) But you have minority rights organizations, haven't you? (Respondent) I did not get to them because they don't have real power. Power is money, you have money - you have power. No money – no power. And everybody looks down on you. (Reporter) But you could just look for those organizations, knock at their door. Just look for them in the newspapers, on the Internet... (Respondent) Right. I didn't go to minorities organizations to complain that I don't have a job. It pains me a lot, so I didn't. Anyway, nobody cares. You cannot live in Romania. I worked in Germany, as a house keeper, a cleaning lady I was treated with respect, I'd say, the boss there placed me at his table, but here they treat you differently. Big difference. Earth to sky. (Reporter) So, I can assume that you don't trust the organizations. (Respondent) No power, no power at all. Everyone for their own pocket. If I get a big shot tomorrow, I don't look right, I don't look left, I just look for my interests, this is how Romanians are.



Where I live, in the 4th district of Bucharest, it's possible, there is a kind of center, it appeared recently, one year ago. So you have somewhere to turn and seek help for solving community problems. Problem is that they are not solved quick enough or, well, good enough, as the citizens want them to be. They are not too receptive. Moreover, it is also a problem with the legislation, not only technical problems, let's say you have somewhere to go for help, there's somebody you can talk to, but there are no [proper instruments] to implement the solutions. Anyway, there's hope,



I would deal with the person with whom I had a problem myself. I wouldn't go to anyone. I have had a couple of jobs during my life, but I have never been angry with anybody, but maybe they have been annoyed with me. Whom would I visit? The Ombudsman or what is he called? I would fix everything myself! (Reporter) Would you know whom to go to in case of any problems? (Respondent) Maybe I would go to the local authorities. Truly, I don't know how I would solve something like that. Maybe I would use my own hands ?

I would probably turn to the police. Maybe I would turn to some media agency. For example, TV Markiza has a special program on TV where they help people with legal problems. And of course I would turn to my friends, who would know to advise me.

I would turn to the civic court. Until now I haven't had any significant problem I have needed to fix, but if there was I would turn to the ombudsman or somebody similar.



Luckily I haven't had any problems. But I think that when you want to find help, you will find it. I would use the internet since I know that such websites exist. And I also have a lot of friends who are working in this area.

I do not have any problems. I have not thought about it.

For neighborhood problems, I would turn to the administrator of our building, or the estate, or whatever and I would resolve it. If not, I would go to the housing association, or another organization, there are maybe more of them, there are not just housing associations and there are various owners. Or if there is no solution, I would call “Lampăren” and publicize the whole problem on television, I think it really works as a tool for some activities.





il have once turned to the ombudsman, my experience was positive, the counseling was efficient. I have absolutely no trust in the police.



Our community, family and friends try to help one another.

I generally solve my problems by inquiring in my social network: friends, acquaintances. I ask those who would know the solution or know someone who could help. I turn to formal sources second.



To the Social Work Centre, the Employment Service, the health centers. It depends on the problem. Also the police ultimately.



The municipality, the mayor.

Have you ever volunteered for a civic action?



It was a long time ago doing some cleaning, actually improving something in the neighborhood which belongs to the whole community. To create an environment more pleasant for all of us.



No. Because nobody is interested in involving me and because nobody works to involve particularly the young people in such initiatives.

No, because I don't think that their initiatives are good enough to attract me as a volunteer.

Yes. (Reporter) Why? (Respondent) Maybe because of my feeling of responsibility, for clean space even, to make something, to plant a tree, I think that kind of things must be done by everyone.



I think yes, I was helping with some cultural projects, for example with the charity projects when sculptors from abroad were coming here to work for 10 days on a sculpture for free and then the statue was donated to a hospital. In this cultural field yes.



We were cleaning a forest voluntarily, but it was not organized, we were cleaning it for our pleasure from having a clean forest, that is the only thing that comes to my mind, otherwise I have not volunteered.

I am volunteering in my neighborhood because there is no workforce that would be doing it. I mow the lawn, I embellish the surroundings, I clean sewers [for prevention from floods]



It seems like no, when I was a child yes but I would say it was also a bit obligatory at that time as it was under socialism. (Reporter) Would you volunteer now? (Respondent) If there would be a place where a forest should be planted then yes I would be glad to go, voluntarily.

I haven't volunteered but maybe I will one day in order to help somebody.



In my opinion, in Hungary there are only a few well operating NGOs, but I usually participate in the Critical Mass. Otherwise I ride a bicycle to my workplace and I believe that the Critical Mass fits me well.


Yes. Some years ago I assisted to Habeas Corpus working group. Its activities covered minority protection, women protection and family abuse. This group have had theoretical and practical activities too. Nowadays I also follow some NGO's work, for example the ÓVÁS Group. It tries to protect the historical quarters of the downtown which can be demolished in the future because of the 'business action' of some estate agents.



No, until now I haven't. On one hand, because I haven't had enough time for that yet, and on the other hand, those organizations are not apparent enough for the men in the street, so they don't know about the opportunities and they are not motivated to do it either.





No. (Reporter) Have you ever done anything for you community for free? (Respondent) Yes, I have. It was a project "Bring your own story", a social-artistic project. You put your own memorials on the Internet portal and these memorials you can link with Google Maps. Then some of them are put on special plates on the buildings which your memorials are connected with. (Reporter) Was it your only adventure with doing something as a volunteer for the society? (Respondent) No, as far as we talk about art projects I always work as a volunteer. The idea is to work with artists and support them because it's still not enough done in this field. It would be advisable if this kind of projects were financed by the government as a whole.

 I'm still a volunteer, on a smaller scale maybe than I used to be but I'm still a Scouting Instructor. (Reporter) How many years have you done it? (Respondent) 38 years. (Reporter) Is it the only form of voluntary work you do? (Respondent) No. Because I'm not an instructor of junior scouts any more what had been my favorite activity for many years so I decided to find something similar and started searching for the possibility to work with children. I went to Social Help Organization and they proposed me work to help with studying and it appeared that the person I was suppose to help was a man over 40-years old So my intention to keep contact with children wasn't exactly met in reality, but I hope I will do what I want. I also work for other organizations like PTTK (Polish Tourist-Sightseeing Society) and I'm a member of Amnesty International, a passive member though, because I don't have time for everything and PTTK and voluntary tourism is my passion.

Yes, many times. I used to be a scout. It's a form of voluntary activity. Also I worked in Children Hospice. The most interesting project I was participating in was organizing "A Day of Recognition of Depression". We tried to make people aware of symptoms of depression so they can recognize it among their relatives or themselves. People often don't know how to recognize it and those affected can end up committing suicide for example. We made the research among students and we taught them how to do it.



  Man: We don't do anything like this. Woman: We lived in different times. We had children to bring up. We had Communism. Man: I thought you're asking about present times? (Reporter) Yes, about present times too. (Respondents) Man: Yes, I was a scout. We had lots to do. Woman: Now, we help poor families. For example we try to give away clothes that our grandchildren don't use any more to other people because they are still good. My granddaughter gives me things that are unnecessary any more, trousers, jumpers, and we send them. My granddaughters are young and they can buy new things. (Reporter) Have you got contact with the Community of War Veterans? (Respondents) Woman: Not any more. Many of them died already. Man: I had contact for many years. Woman: There is an emptiness around us. Man: And those who are still alive do not keep contact any more. The contact is broken. Woman: It's not that it's broken because we even have got relatives in Australia. During Martial law in Poland our son unfortunately left Poland as many young people did, for example from my work.

No, I haven't. I've never been a volunteer because when voluntary organizations started to function in Poland I was already an adult and I focused on commercial activities, on things that gave me professional satisfaction rather than to work without profit. But it doesn't mean that it's closed way for me, in the future I'll be able to use my knowledge and experience for this kind of activity. (Reporter) Have you ever done anything for free? (Respondent) Of course, I have. I worked for an NGO called "Etnographic workshops"



Yes, I have. In an NGO called "Fundacja Rodzic po Ludzku" (Foundation Human Way of Giving Birth). I try to improve the situation of women who give birth in our country. I was a scout earlier, so I can say scouting too. (Reporter) Why did you become a volunteer? (Respondent) Because I had some free time and I wanted to use it well and the organization was close to the subject I'm interested in. I think it's an important problem so I wanted to do something not only for myself but also for other people.

Lots of things, for example I made election posters, banners, leaflets. I worked in "Wolnosc i Pokój" ("Freedom and Peace") organization. It was a movement created in '86. Mainly it was about opposing joining the Army in the People's Republic of Poland times. People were giving away their Army Identity Cards or burnt them so it was a pacific movement but at the same time connected with the fight for democracy in Poland. Last few years? Formally I'm a member of Association of Artists of Utilitarian Photography, but more on the paper than in reality, it's a different story.



I did and I am still doing it. Last time I worked as a volunteer with the Botanical Garden, my university organized this. We had to clean the garden in spring and fall and it seemed like an interesting idea. We have just one such a garden in Bucharest, we should take a bit of care of it. (Reporter) And why did you get involved in volunteering? (Respondent) Because if not us, who else? At the end of the day, these are problems we can solve by ourselves. (Reporter) Do you feel the need to have an organization to back you up? Or can it be done individually? (Respondent) It is more difficult if you are alone. You don't have the logistics, I think you need some legal agreements, you cannot simply gather some friends and say "Let's clean the Botanical Garden". I think they will chase you out. Yes, I believe that in most cases you need an organization.




I would volunteer, because I miss the activity and I would get involved to occupy my time, I am willing to do whatever.

No, no. I have my problems, I have a big family, children, my family is my preoccupation. I don't see myself getting beyond this, spending all my time in politics or whatever. So no.



Yes, to the extent that my time allows it, I would be willing to do it and I think one should find time for this. Now, it depends on what would be asked from me. I think it is possible, frankly, I could find time to get involved in an NGO that would reflect my ideas. It has to be something inspirational, it depends on the work of the NGOs. (Reporter) Haven't you found an attractive cause until now? (Respondent) It is not that, I believe there are causes. I didn't give too much thought until now, when you asked, but there are causes: children, elderly, social minorities, things I assume I understand and in which more of us should invest time and money. It's not about much money. What has been discussed, that percentage of taxes, it's not much money for each of us but the result is, in my opinion, very concrete.



Volunteering? I can remember when we had weekend jobs. We collected potatoes, beetroots and hops. I was a high school student at that time. But apart from that, I didn't volunteer as such anywhere else. (Reporter) Why did you do it? (Respondent) In order to skip school. Why not? All students are the same. But we also helped the farm a little, at that time they didn't have so many people working as they do today. (Reporter) Have you done any voluntary work since you've become older? (Respondent) No, I haven't. I had 3 children, a family, a job and I've been pretty busy. I haven't done anything like this. Voluntary organizations as we know them today didn't exist at that time. And I don't have enough energy to volunteer. What could I do? 

No, not yet. I haven't had the opportunity.

Yes, I did some short-term voluntary work. I worked in a centre for autistic people; we helped them to do up the garden. I have also volunteered in a place close to my home, we cleaned and maintained the interior and the exterior of one building.



No, I am employed, so I have to work. (Reporter) Why haven't you volunteered for any organization or individual? (Respondent) It is probably because I didn't find the time. I have been in full-time employment since I was 18, I have a family, so I didn't have time.

Yes I do. I am volunteering for humanitarian projects that are situated in e.g. Kenya. I find people who would like to sponsor children who live abroad, this is a widespread system of support that works in many countries around the world. We find people, who are willing to pay for a child's education and in some cases also the accommodation for children living in poverty in developing countries.




No, I have my own job, I am busy. When I come back from work, I cook, clean and look after my children. What should I do?

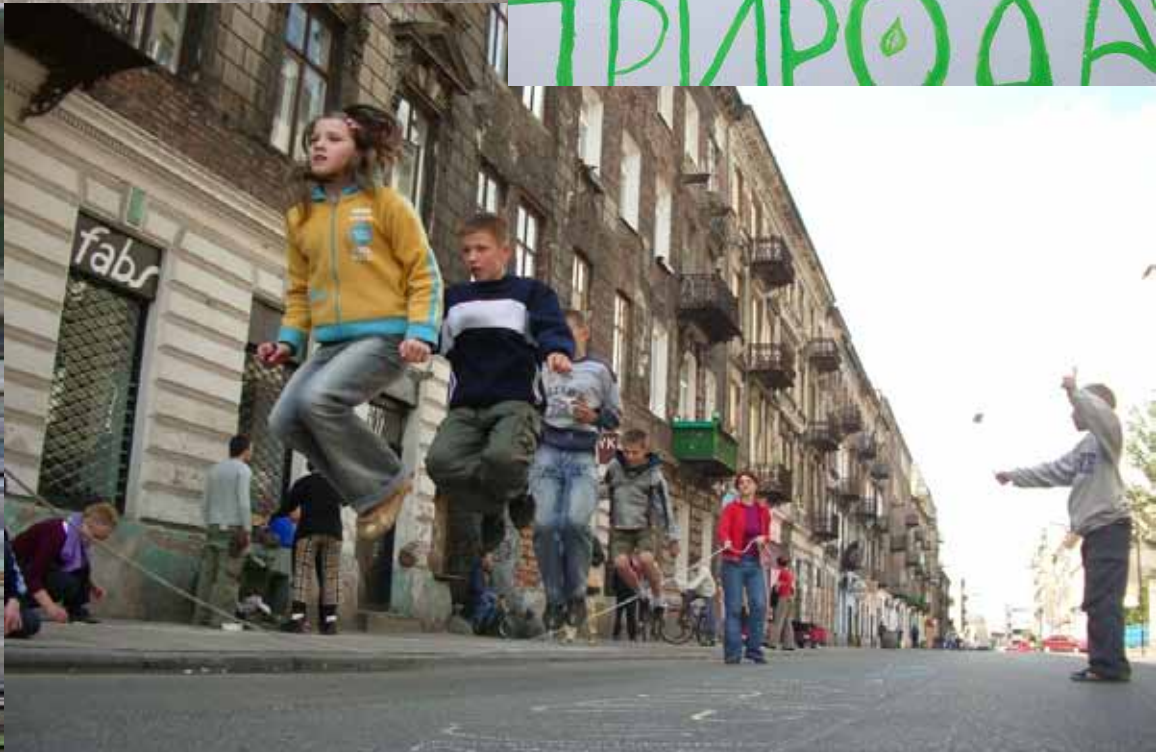
No, no, I have a full-time job, so I have no time left. Not even when I was young. I volunteered for the army, but I had to.



For a non-profit organization? Yes I have. I volunteered for a non-profit organization called Skala, this organization in Tatranska Lomnica addresses the development of cultural life in the High Tatra Mountains by organising festivals. I was happy I could contribute. The head of Skala is one of my best friends and the rest of the people who work there are also my friends from childhood.



I have attended some union protests, cleaning drives, what else? Also student rallies. Not all, of course, but some yes. There was an anti-fascist rally the other day that I did attend. I have cleaned Ljubljana and removed graffiti. At the beginnings of our state, our whole family went to many rallies. Back then, it was still done out of positive hope. We now go less and less. I think that Slovenia is quite small and that it is shaped by politics, every individual as such cannot change things. Mass is power, but if actions are organized by small groups without massive support, then they are bound to fail. 



In times when producing texts and images has become so seductively easy, finding sincere, smart and heartfelt examples on a theme so specific and important – how to be an active citizen – is really difficult. Yet, our foundation saw this trend as an opportunity to gather voices and images that rarely reach the institutional platforms.

In connection with the Civil Society Forum, the CEE Trust announced a competition for **young activists, students and journalists**. We asked participants from Central and Eastern Europe to submit their views of civic engagement and activism in **essay, photo story and video format**. The challenge was to show how **civic activism** can trigger positive change.

On the previous page, a couple of submissions received in the photo category, below the winning essay and some extracts in written format from other young voices. All winners and further information available on: www.csf.ceetrust.org



Bydgoskie

A group of students moves into Bydgoskie Przedmiescie, once a Mecca for Polish artists, now degraded and dangerous district of Torun. Inspired by stories of their old neighbor, they establish a Society for Bydgoskie Przedmiescie. Soon they are flooded by letters from citizens and get involved in social campaigns saving the only public library in the area and organizing workshops for children from the orphanage. The district starts to change, attracting students, university teachers, artists and... developers, who bring new problems.

I met them in Czarny Tulipan, a stylish dive with Klimt pictures on the walls at Sienkiewicz Street. At that time they were already quite well-known in Torun - Pawel Kolacz, Marta Kolacz, Lukasz Broniszewski. For the last couple of months I had been writing about their actions, but we knew each other only by phone. I remember that at first glance they looked surprisingly young. We sat near the window. Sipping beers, they looked like an ordinary bunch of students right after their classes.

We all lived in Bydgoskie Przedmiescie, talked about Bydgoskie Przedmiescie, met in Bydgoskie Przedmiescie. Not a very safe place for a night out, but certainly an appealing one.

A forgotten wonder, a pearl hidden under the cloth of time, back in the 1920s, Bydgoskie Przedmiescie was a district of artists. Prussian walls from the 19th century, Art Nouveau mansions, large villas with gardens on Slowacki street became home to painters, sculptors and writers, many of whom came here from southern cities: Cracow, Lvov, Zakopane – capitals of Polish modernism. Kazimiera Zulawska, the good spirit of Zakopane's artistic cafés, widowed by famous writer Jerzy, bought an old Prussian mansion here at Bydgoska 26, opening a pension for actors of a local theatre, and actresses, of course. What a loot for Zulawska's old friends from the south! Soon Torun attracted top Polish artists of the period: Witkacy,

Stanislaw Przybyszewski, Juliusz Osterwa. They all lived in a pension in Bydgoskie Przedmiescie, an area bursting with cultural life, full of cafés, restaurants and cinemas, with its own concert space and an enormous 19th-century park.

Zulawska lived in Torun until 1926. Later the war broke out, and after that – the communists arrived. Locating factories on the outskirts of the city, they turned Bydgoskie Przedmiescie into a workers' area. This is when the process of the district's degradation began. Bydgoskie Przedmiescie turned into what Nowa Huta meant for Cracow. Except that it wasn't built on the core. The communist engineering affected the very heart of a historical place, bringing crime, alcoholism, poverty, vandalism. Only several old citizens remained. Among them was Edward Moszynski.

An old painter, erudite, and collector of ancient stories, who could debate for hours and hours about the history of Polish gentry, the art of the Enlightenment, Kant's philosophy, Russian literature as well as hundreds of other topics, and the neighbor of Marta and Pawel Kolacz.

The young pair moved in, when they arrived in Torun for studies. He - a tall, lively chap in glasses, with a clear facial expression and three-day-beard, she - a lovely blonde, working part-time for the Centre of Contemporary Art. I don't know how exactly they met Moszynski – maybe on their way to the local shop or cleaning the staircase. I know that soon they started having discussions. Surrounded by a circle of students, in a loose atmosphere, Moszynski gave informal lectures about Bydgoskie Przedmiescie – about the history of a mansion just around the corner, about 19th-century architecture and about old families that had already moved out.

It was 2007, when Kolacz – an archeology postgraduate – and his friends decided to establish a Society for Bydgoskie Przedmiescie (SBP). Inspired by Moszynski, they created a website about the district – and were flooded by dozens of letters from citizens, especially those who moved in later, in the 1990s. Since then, Bydgoskie Przedmiescie has been regaining some of its charm, attracting students, university teachers and restaurant-keepers due to its location near the Old Town.

People asked them to install CCTV, because the area was still dangerous, sent old photos, wanted to find out more about their houses. A real test for the new organization came in April 2008, when local authorities decided to shut down the only public library in the area. Readers began protesting and received strong support from SBP: the young wrote letters to the City Council and alerted the local media. Soon officials withdrew the idea of closure.

It was a similar story a couple of months later: my newspaper revealed, that the authorities were considering demolishing a 100-year-old sports centre instead of renovating it. Our source claimed that there was at least one developer, who was prepared to buy the land and build a gated apartment complex. After the article was published, Pawel Kolacz convinced the heritage conservator to put the building on the official list of protected monuments, saving a popular sports centre for the local community. At the same time, the organization presented its ideas for the future of Bydgoskie Przedmiescie during a public debate. The young see it as an "artistic district", as it used to be, and already agreed with the Centre of Contemporary Art, which is operating in the Old Town, to launch a residential program in the area. Foreign artists will come to live in the district and create installations, sculptures or live acts. In autumn, people from SBP and other NGOs from the city organized a street art festival and photography workshops for children from an orphanage on Sienkiewicza St. Every participant had their photo exhibited in the windows of local shops. Children are now waiting for a new football pitch – the authorities are going to build it in the western part of the district. As part of the national program called "Orlik", new sports complexes are going to be built all over the country. Initially, it seemed that Bydgoskie Przedmiescie didn't have a chance of qualifying for a pitch, due to the lack of space, but SBP carried out a successful campaign to plan it on a deserted square near the tramway.

Quite a success! Yet, there is a lot to improve. Almost 3,000 out of total of 40,000 citizens living in Byd-

goskie Przedmiescie are on social security. No jobs, no money. No plans for the future. The area is still one of the most dangerous in Torun – fights, burglaries, vandalism. A lot of old mansions, owned by private landlords, have regained their glamour. However, there are still many that are squalid, neglected, unkempt.

Then in Czarny Tulipan, sitting with people from SBP, for the first time I thought to myself, that Bydgoskie Przedmiescie may turn into what Praga became for Warsaw and Kazimierz for Cracow. Once old, dowdy districts, they are now full of modern cafés, pubs and hotels, bursting with life and new energy. The same happened to Salford Quays in Manchester and the coastal parts of Barcelona.

Of course, the revitalization itself also produces new dangers. A property developer called Marbud is planning to build about 750 new apartments in a northern part of district, all gated with private shops and restaurants. It's a good sign for the area, but rather than push existing citizens out to poorer parts of city, we should try to offer them something new – say the young from SBP. That's why they are now starting a gallery and a cultural space in a deserted Prussian building near the river, they are planning to organize other workshops for children from the orphanage, they have launched a campaign to change the administrative borders of the district (which will make more citizens eligible for revitalization funds from the EU). It's important, that many activities are undertaken not only by the city, local companies or regional authorities, but also by young citizens, who have become an outlet for the voice of many others.

Bydgoskie Przedmiescie is changing. Last year Andrzej Lipinski, a well known local restaurateur, opened a stylish Italian café just two blocks from my house. More and more mansions are being renovated and there are more students, artists and professors interested in living in the area. A private company is planning to open a hostel here, another businessman came up with the idea of constructing a 4-star-hotel near Marbud's housing estate. A series of our articles about the district, inspired by SBP's activity attracted another people – new NGOs are springing up like mushrooms. They establish new websites, organize discussions, call for new bicycle paths or organize workshops. Some of them are opportunist, trying to promote candidates for euro elections. Others are not. It all proves that Bydgoskie Przedmiescie is becoming trendy. After all, Machiavelli wouldn't bet on a lame horse.

Maciej Czarnecki *graduated from law and cultural anthropology at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland. He is an experienced journalist and traveler, and he is currently writing a book about Bydgoskie Przedmiescie district in Torun. Maciej plans to use the awarded scholarship to realize a series of interviews with people engaged in revitalization of once degraded districts in a few European cities, such as London, Manchester, Paris and Madrid. This would allow him to write about their experience, successes and errors, providing examples and ideas for Polish revitalization projects.*

Mikuláš Pštroš - Keychains and Potlucks

Here we are now. Rights acquired just by being born into the Homo sapiens sapiens family. Representatives we can choose and/or criticize. A variety of organizations devoted to improving the quality of life. You name it: the environment, social justice, remembering our neighbor (...). The beliefs we won't be persecuted for. Is this all that belongs to the so-called "democratic transition"? Isn't there something missing? If so, what is it?

Just as one and one is two, liberty can never exist without responsibility. « Wait a minute - I did not sign up for that... whatever it means. » (...) And yet, rules do not completely fulfill the definition of responsibility. We have no choice, but to look at it from a different angle."

Community. A single word so empowered with meaning, especially when its full definition can sometimes become so tangible. Or can it? It all depends on one's point of view. "Yeah, but why should I be active? I don't get any money for it?" Or as the grandma of a young volunteer from Ústí nad Labem put it: "Even a chicken doesn't dig for free..." So why bother? For the fun? For the friends? For the potluck cakes? And maybe even for the greater good? The soldiers of the past, marching in the streets probably did not look as happy. But something tells me that a group of people can actually dedicate their free time and money to something that exceeds their immediate needs. And have a good feeling about it. A sense of an acquired meaning. In fact, how else can the demos of democracy "rule" other than in the small everyday tasks. Details sometimes display the most beauty, if you know what I mean, and especially if they are done with the intentions to help others.

It is very important to create and sustain active communities. Citizenship means caring with others for others. Gone are the grey nimbostratus clouds that prevent the light from shining through. Democracy or maybe a "federation of communities". The term community can only enlighten our understanding of democracy if we experience what a community means in real life. All the money spent on cheesy billboards would thus be wasted - a quick glance from a fast going car never lead to a question. But there are activities in everyday life that surely can.

Andreas Sepp - Observations on the Differences between Civic Engagement in Estonia & the U.S.

I define civic engagement as something that unites people with similar interests. The result is usually a movement, group, organization, or something similar. The sustainability of such "unit" is dependent on two criteria- a) do the people involved in a certain kind of activity really love what they are doing per se; b) whether it is able to give its member's sense of accomplishment. If the answer to both is "yes", then most probably something in the society will essentially improve thanks to the activities carried out by such a group. Even if government policies contradict this particular area of civic activism or the state does not provide any significant assistance to accomplish this group's goals".

In Spring 2008 a previously unknown Estonian NGO mobilized 50.000 people (about 4 per cent of the country's population) to come together for a day in order to collect trash from forests, highways, and other such places where it's being illegally dumped. A year later, the same organization initiated the so called national brainstorming, where every individual could propose ideas how to improve life in Estonia. Only about 11.000 people showed up, even though the campaign was being widely supported by public and private media sources.

My fellow countrymen possess a slightly more obedient mindset compared to my American friends, which, I believe, is a result of living more than 50 years in a political system that was based on fulfilling the orders coming from above. (...) No wonder then, that collecting garbage, a very result-oriented and easily measurable activity, turned out to be more popular than collecting thoughts, a field where there are no right or wrong answers.

Tanya Grishkovskaya - We can be a part of solution

Many people think that the antithesis of love is hate. I think in another way.... I consider that it is indifference! This is ignoring a need which knocks on your door and looks in your window. You can change something in this world not only when you have a lot of money, a significant position in society, extensive work experience. You can change something when you really are not indifferent to people, you understand what compassion means. When you begin with something small, then your friends join you, then whole crowd starts to follow you, and together this is already a big force, which can make a difference! Yes, we are not the sun giving warmth to the whole of humanity. But we can at least do something to become initiators of changes in our society.

Maria Comandasu – Letter to the young

In the place where I grew up, people don't think very much about the world outside their community. They spend their life taking care of their children, praising God for a better day tomorrow and cherishing their friends. The nature surrounding them is always seen as a gift from heaven and they don't need special policies to understand that. They are helping each other before knowing the Good Samaritan story and they never, but never expect something in return for their good will.

I am strongly convinced that awareness is a powerful weapon and that if beautiful initiatives will keep developing there will be a powerful Romanian civil society in the near future. It might not be enough for a sudden change of an entire country, but it will be just the start to the right path. It is said that if you wait long enough, someone will agree with your point of view. It is why I will never close my eyes and I will always keep seeking for those who will want to find solutions.

Emile Zola once said « If you ask me what I came to do in this world... I will answer you: 'I am here to live out loud. » And this is what all young Romanian people and East-European young people should do. For their countries, for their souls, for all the children from the small villages who believe that sharing, loving and giving are the natural ways of acting in life. The past is irrelevant. The present is improvable. But the future must have the sound of change.

Silvena Garelova – Civil society: Do we mean the same?

Today it is clear to anybody, that building a real, functioning democracy inevitably goes through building a strong civil society. In order to do so we invite to my country "missionaries" from all over developed Europe to help us strengthen our civil society, believing that it cannot be done in a different way – we are the pupils and they are the teachers.

But what actually happens, is just a transfer of a western European model, which simply does not fit everywhere, which we are not ready for. Maybe our own path is simply in a different direction. I think we in the East should be more self-confident and realize that we have something valuable, and the West – something else. We do not have to completely forget what we used to be and what we are in order to adopt a completely new lifestyle that nobody can prove is the better one. The healthy connection between the West and the East does not consist in a one-way knowledge transfer, which is cultural imperialism, but in a balanced exchange from both sides – both should give and take.

Roxana Georgiana Radu – Youth activism: Between the culture of revolution and the culture of reaction

It is commonly said that youth governs itself by its own rules. And it is frequently acknowledged that democratic choices imply a degree of consciousness and responsibility without which equal opportunities and equal rights would not wield the same value. Being actively engaged in political processes, however, does not come to contradict any of these features. On the contrary, making "new rules", specific to one generation, could be influential in adapting policymaking to expectations in a timely manner. Besides, it strengthens the ability of young people to create the environment they wish for. With

the enhancement of technologically-mediated channels of communication, ideas do not need to be restricted to traditional frontiers; they become enriched by the flux of information on their different application in diverse contexts.

Three solutions would enhance participation in democratic processes and awareness: one of them involves the introduction of civil service reform, the second concerns the mentorship framework for projects and the third is connected to spreading information through social advertising.

Firstly, the completion of a program of civic service that would be compulsory for all people aged between 15 and 18 would ensure an equal level of understanding and commitment to democratic values by active involvement. This would complement the civic education received during secondary school and would put an emphasis on the practical aspect of learning.

Secondly, the mentorship program would become a framework for developing informed groups ready to offer a model of democratic citizenship. Mentors chosen on a voluntary and merit basis from active youth leaders could become role models for people willing to contribute to societal development in a manner that allows for personal characteristics to be brought to the forefront.

Thirdly, forms of social communication, media campaigns and advertising aimed at social ends have been implemented extensively, especially by the younger generation, in several European countries. Romania, however, has only witnessed the creation of several advocacy campaigns, coordinated by private actors or by governmental agencies. But social advertising as a result of youth work could successfully perform the function of public opinion education in pursuing general welfare."

Liis Hinsberg – Civil society today and tomorrow

Civic engagement is a two-way street. The government or some other organization has to provide citizens with the opportunities to participate and the citizens have to take part and give feedback in return. It cannot be done without having some dialogue between them both. Taking example from these events, later the citizens with experience can be the initiators for the next events."



This is a job for...

Social Innovation Camp Central and Eastern Europe

I need a hero [aims of project / success criteria]

The recipe:

- Take 60 young people from 18 countries stretching from Estonia to Georgia.
- Ask for ideas about social projects they would like to develop
- Team them up by combine their programming, marketing and business skills with enthusiasm and social entrepreneurship.
- Give them 48 hours, a lot of coffee, sandwiches and allow them to stay late at night



- you have got the Social Innovation Camp!!

After a couple of days of hard work, plenty of discussion, trying different solutions, growing friendships and exploration of social networks - plus a lot of tweeting back and forth it is time for the teams presentation skills to be tried. The various project team head to the stage as they go in for judging by a jury as well as a popular vote on the best webtool.

social innovation camp
central & eastern europe



create.
share.
be there.



Changing society with technology or changing society with pen and paper – it is all about the people!

Reflections on the Social Innovation Camp CEE and the link to the Civil Society Forum - the voice of a participant.

With the task at hand being to reflect and discuss technology and civil society in 2010 - four start-off assumptions to chew on:

- The Information Technology Revolution influenced all our lives and is present in most sectors and spheres of people's day to day experience. The ever-present personal computer and its sidekick the mobile phone dominate our lives from dawn till dusk...
- Technology like any tool can be very useful to work for open societies, social change, world peace, equality, animal rights, personal gain, climate change, awareness etc. etc.
- At the end of the day outputs still depend on creative people, energizing meetings, an effective exchange of ideas, crisp information flow and the harmonious joint-collaborative effort.
- Technology and its access to the internet have introduced the potential for anyone anywhere to start an effective project or movement, given that they wield the aforementioned human capacity.

It's time to stop treating modern technology as anything but a tool that regulates and shapes the professional output of society. In short - it's not which version of software you have or if you are blogging about activism on your fluorescent purple iPhone or writing on a napkin in a Bucharest café: **it's still what you write and who you write it to**. Simple answers amiss – and in spinning off of the Social Innovation Camp, - let's develop the thought that “how” is rather about the people than about the software.

Finding the link between upstairs and downstairs

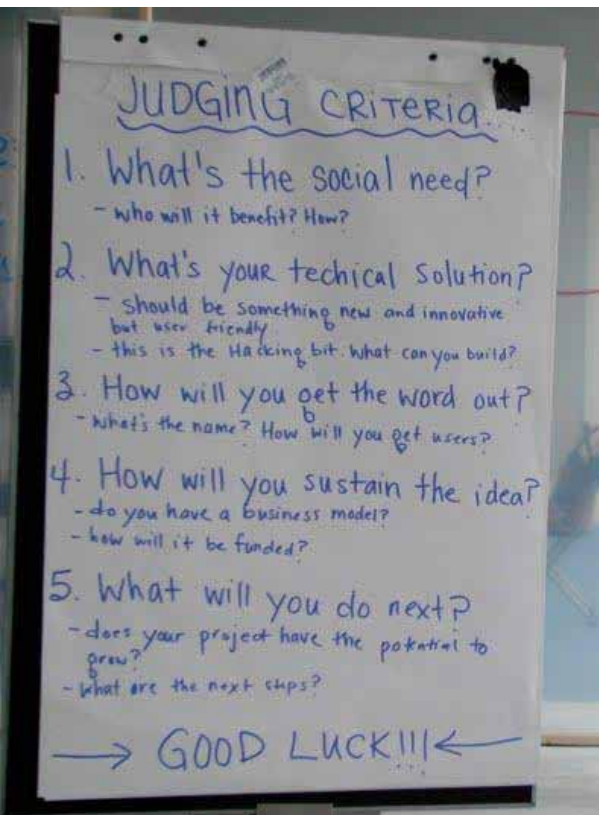
What separated the youth of the Social Innovation Camp that were housed upstairs at the Civil Society Forum venue, from the rest of the conference on the first floor? What can we learn about connection and network maintenance in a non technological sense?

Well, a couple of observations can be made in addition to the fact that the median age was slightly lower upstairs First of all, that **many young energetic people who are-not-really-engaged-in-organized-civil-society seem to care about their societies** and have an enormous through the night energy and motivation for the work,



willing to invest at least a day and a half and the headache of administering a travel for a good cause. Playing a part in its popularity may be the doing rather than talking.

Second, the force that propelled these skilled geeks from their well-wired basements to thrust their skills into the buzz of organic society was fundamentally civil, social, and down to earth. And also - relevant to these people's own day-to-day experience: help finding a doctor, searching for psychological care, help with childcare in stressful times and voluntary help for older people, watchdog action against drivers risking other people's lives or neo-Nazis writing hateful and criminal offences on walls of our cities.



As a matter of fact, participating in both discussions revealed the intentions and social consciousness of the two groups to be strikingly similar. The young activists upstairs, echoed the same type of concerns their experienced colleagues downstairs experience when framing new projects:

- "I am not an expert but...."
 - "How would a professional NGO approach this?"
- and
- "We can't get stuck in the long deliberation of this question this [social] problem won't go away."

Third, the SIC CEE teams all mentioned during the final presentations that the way forward for their ideas past that initial brainstorming and late-night-programming stage was to work with an NGO to get the backing and air under the wings to carry their idea forward. Despite successes in their own worlds, much could be gained by both groups through joint efforts. **Free activism often needs civil society organizations; organizations need masses of supporters, ideas, energy, time, skills (IT, marketing, outreach and others) etc.**

Many of the NGOs in the audience also seemed inspired by what they heard. The big question is: was it just a good-will show of little consequence? How many participants found it worthwhile to network with the other lot or contacted each other afterwards, curious to see if there was any mutual benefit – this I know not.

If You Can connect on Twitter You Can Connect without It

In the good old days behind the iron curtain there was very little information flow in the public space. Relics of the past, more than a handful of local and regional government officials in Central Europe will always begin a meeting "speaking as an expert."

The era when this was the only argument needed is passing. The young ones of this region, and of the world, are no longer recognizing the singular authority of "expertise." And we all know that for whatever we are told we can always find another opinion on their problems; its up to us to search for solutions, and gradually acquire the needed expertise.

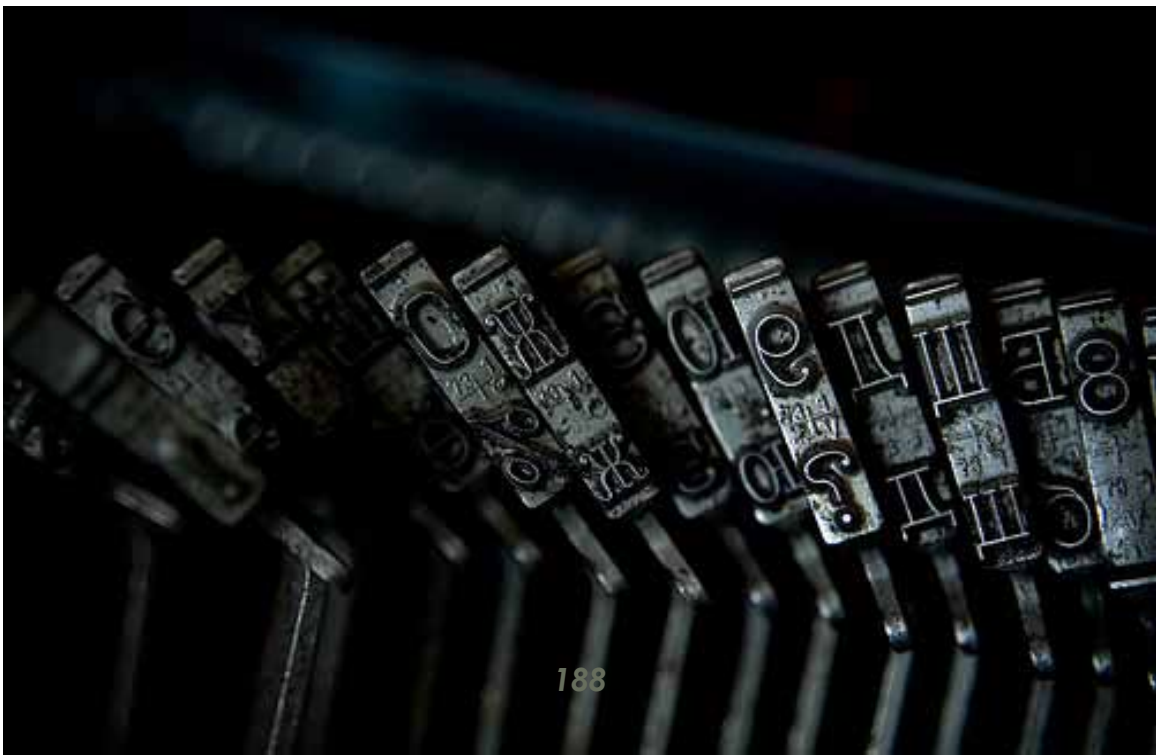
I, for one have met dozens of top class IT developers who would jump at an opportunity donate their time to activists and NGOs. Open Source movements who practically exist in every country in this region with thousands of active members working for free to develop technology and more than often express their great desire to contribute it to social causes.

So it is about connection and linking up with people - benefit from their drive, skills and energy. Dealing with people is our business, albeit a messy business that cannot be organized into logical boxes and frameworks. Addressing quickly and with a broad arsenal of knowledge the evolution of multiple issues rather than reinforcing sticking to the beliefs - and statements - that we already have all the answers is key.

Reaching out to the individuals, activists and enthusiasts in the online communities, is about inviting, recognizing the value of what they can offer but also about being interested in their experiences. A PC with internet access can be decisive in the right hands – and how about adding that human dimension by any of the following ideas:

1. Make sure to invite your IT staff to your next team meeting if you are not already doing so – and listen to their ideas and solutions.
2. Don't have IT staff? Invite the most tech-knowledgeable member of your team and make her/him talk.
3. Don't have staff? Go online and try the hard way to find fora to discuss it inviting the community to help you. Or go and loiter at the barcamp/social innovation camp type event in your region.
4. And let's not forget the will on the other side - I would encourage the e-activists to come forward and test some of their local NGOs, seeing what they are up to without judging them beforehand - offering their ideas, perspectives and practical help may actually lead to the opening of doors.

In the end it is all about people - asking them to inform our work and thus actually serving our constituencies. If they like it and get involved, they will probably discuss it on Facebook!



What ails civil society?



Agnieszka Graff claims that through stubbornly labeling themselves as anti-political, neutral and working for the “public good”, civil society organizations have marginalized their own voice and impact in creating real alternatives to the ruling politics.

Introductory remarks

"We wanted a vibrant civil society, and all we got were NGOs." I have heard this quote several times, sometimes attributed to an anonymous social activist in Hungary, and other times to someone in the Czech Republic. Yet whoever said it first, it captures an important feeling haunting the region, which I would describe as disillusionment mixed with nostalgia and bitterness. For some thirteen years (since returning from my studies abroad), I have been part of a circle of people in Poland who could be defined as 'social activists', 'engaged intelligentsia' or 'the new left' – feminists, human rights activists and academics with an interest in social justice and political change, many of us linked to the former democratic opposition. We often reflect on the topic set here by the Civil Society Forum, and most would agree that something has gone wrong.

There seems to be a great distance between the time of wild hope and engagement in 1989 and the years that followed, and the present atmosphere of distrust, cynical me-ism, the low level of social activism, and the plague of 'burn-out' among activists. In my view, the sense of defeat and discouragement is connected with the way in which civil society was conceived and idealized in the late 1980s and early 1990s (i.e. as separate from the realm of politics), the way it congealed into institutions and was professionalized by the late 1990s (a process sometimes referred to as NGO-ization), and the way these institutions are now positioned in relationship to each other, the society, and the state.

Other forces and processes are also at play. For example, as I am sure many others in this debate will conclude, there is something very wrong with our educational system. By continuing to provide students with facts to memorize rather than ideas to debate, or instilling the desire to debate them, it has failed to prepare people for 'citizenship' in the modern sense – citizenship as participation. Another important factor in the specific context of Poland is the central role of the Catholic Church as the primary site of social and cultural cohesion, the bearer of political power, the nation's values. Devoid of true values, or as a source of values other than its own, the church is dealing with a monopoly directly at odds with democratic pluralism. Ironically enough, as human rights advocate Professor Wiktor Osiatynski once noted, the most vibrant center of 'civil society' in today's Poland, capable of engaging the commitment of millions, is the nationalist Catholic broadcaster Radio Maryja. Such topics as education or the role of the Church are worth discussing, but I believe that the key problem is the relation of civil society to market forces, and the dominance of the neoliberal framework in the region's transition to democracy. It is to this that I devote the bulk of my response.

The key problem is the relation of civil society to market forces, and the dominance of the neoliberal framework in the region's transition to democracy.

Church as the primary cultural cohesiveness, a monopoly on pending on the world be seen as a guardian censor blocking access own. In either case, we monopoly directly at odds

I have also consciously omitted the most obvious argumentation, namely that it is all a matter of the legacy of communism and the way it deprived people of agency and trust in public institutions; the way it made us turn away from any involvement in public affairs. Of course, all this is true. But twenty years have passed, a new generation born after 1989 is coming of age, and we must move on.

False assumptions: the trouble with 'anti-politics'

I will not be the first to suggest that much of the 'sickness' afflicting civil society in Eastern and Central Europe is due to its conception from the very beginning as a sort of non-political engagement, a mission that is not about power struggle, ideological difference, or group interests, but about serving the common good. The sources of this ethos, as we know, have their roots in the culture of political dissidence that arose in the 1970s and 1980s (Karta 77, KOR, Solidarnosc, etc.).

There is no such thing as a commonly agreed definition of the 'common good'. In effect, 'anti-politics' has a politics of its own, in that it legitimizes the status quo.

The concept of 'anti-politics' then survived 1989 largely unexamined and was idealized – both by activists and by institutions such as the UN and the EU – as the proper site of the transition to democracy. I would argue, though, that in a democracy there is no such thing as political neutrality. There is no such thing as a commonly agreed definition of the 'common good'. In effect, 'anti-politics' has a politics of its own, in

that it legitimizes the status quo. As an ideological construct, the glorification of 'anti-politics' has served to constrain rather than encourage effective and autonomous organization, blocked debate about alternative paths of development, and, finally, contributed to the rise of right-wing populism.

In her recent book *Citizenship in an Enlarging Europe*, Barbara Einhorn describes what she calls the civil society 'trap': instead of building a movement for social change, groups are engaged in "stopping the 'gap' left by state retrenchment and the ensuing loss of public welfare provisions" (p.175). In this scenario, social actors such as women's rights activists are reduced to the role of mere service providers (and often inefficient ones, at that), a fig leaf in the process of mass privatization. The question is: was this what we wanted? Is this what we meant by 'empowerment' and 'democratization'?

I consider the civil society trap to be part of a broader historical and social process, which is clear to me only in retrospect (things seemed natural and inevitable at the time). Early on in the transition period, the limited definition of 'the political' led to a peculiar division of roles in the public sphere. State institutions and party politics, as well as the sphere of public debate, were soon conceived of as 'dirty' and left to self-proclaimed experts, most of whom were uncritically committed to a neoliberal agenda and who viewed the process of marketization as non-negotiable. Meanwhile, the 'idealists' committed themselves to the purportedly neutral ideal of civil society.

State institutions and party politics, as well as the sphere of public debate, were soon conceived of as 'dirty' and left to self-proclaimed experts, most of whom were uncritically committed to a neoliberal agenda and who viewed the process of marketization as non-negotiable. Meanwhile, the 'idealists' committed themselves to the purportedly neutral ideal of civil society.

Today, I think that these idealists, on the run from ideological commitment, were the very people who, in another scenario, might have offered a political alternative to the neoliberal paradigm. One that would have involved a social safety net that could and should have been provided by the state. Without the constricting ideal of 'anti-politics,' they might have transformed the pub-

lic sphere, engaging people in a truly democratic debate about the possible paths of transition itself; they might have built a continuity of values with the political idealists of the pre-war period (stemming from the homegrown socialist and not the post-communist tradition). In short, had it not been for the 'politics of anti-politics', a new left wing might have emerged, marginalizing the corrupt post-communist forces and possibly preventing the rise of right-wing populism. Instead, with only a few exceptions (notably Jacek Kuron), efforts were chiefly poured into 'serving society.' Meanwhile, as Kinga Dunin, Slawomir Sierakowski and others have argued, power in the public sphere was neatly divided between the Market and the Church, the experts and the priests. Proclaiming themselves to be outsiders to both power and ideology, civil society actors were in no position to challenge this right-wing hegemony (neoliberal in economics and conservative in values). The key issues were never debated, because the answers had already been provided. No wonder the terms 'democracy' and 'civil society' came to ring hollow to so many people.

How did we end up in the blind alley of anti-politics? Chiefly because we left the politics to (mostly male) 'experts'. The idea that the free market should be allowed to rule with as little state regulation and intervention as possible was all but a dogma in the transition era. All those who challenged the neoliberal paradigm (or even called it a paradigm, suggesting that it could be up for debate), were labeled as ignoramuses, populists or nut-cases. Jacek Kuron was seen as a saint – idealistic, but somewhat unrealistic and naïve. The power of this ideology and the fear of stigma was (and perhaps still is) tremendous. Hence, instead of creating another political scenario, people who believed in social justice retreated into 'anti-politics'; instead of challenging neoliberal dogma, we engaged in damage limitation.

Instead of creating another political scenario, people who believed in social justice retreated into 'anti-politics'; instead of challenging neoliberal dogma, we engaged in damage limitation.

While it is true that NGOs helped a great deal at local level, it could also be argued that they were supplying the neoliberal state with an alibi. For example, gender injustice leads to the formation of women's groups and NGOs, which provide services for women usually along single-issue lines (hotlines, legal advice, medical information, shelter for victims of violence, and sex education in schools). Occasionally, we also demonstrate, protest or lobby, but 'service' takes up most of our energy and resources. When protests do take place, state authorities are visibly uninterested: why should the government be worried about gender discrimination when that is what women's NGOs are for? Feminism is thus reduced from a world-changing vision and grassroots political movement to a series of professionally run institutions engaging in 'projects', which are forced to adapt to outside agendas and pressures because of their dependence on funding.

If civil society is by definition marginal to state institutions, those state institutions are happy to take advantage of the fact, relegating activists to the status of service providers, or worse – charities. Twenty years down the road, many of the 'idealists' I know are tired of this, and the politics of anti-politics is increasingly viewed as a dead end. It was as a consequence of this realization that initiatives such as the Greens 2004, Krytyka Polityczna (Political Critique), and the

Women's Party was created in Poland. All three are overtly political, and define the public sphere as the site of the struggle for power. On the other hand, they are also idealistic in their commitment to social justice. I see this as a long overdue departure from the 'civil society' model, and an effort to re-connect politics and idealism.

Specific difficulties

As the above diagnosis suggests, I see the disease ailing civil society as essentially systemic. It is therefore difficult to pinpoint specific problems that could be solved within the existing framework. Most of the difficulties I can see take me back to the original problem with 'anti-politics', i.e. the civil society 'trap'. Here are three examples.

First comes the massive public distrust of civil society institutions. This problem is one of alienation: for instance, many women complain about sexism, gender inequality etc, but nonetheless do not view the women's movement as representing them, nor is there a grassroots organization they might join. On the contrary, the movement is perceived as a body of distant institutions, funded by a group of suspicious outsiders. "There's nowhere for us to go," I hear young feminists complain again and again. And indeed, the vast majority of NGOs are not membership organizations. Rather than a movement to join, there are 'foundations' which can be applied to for financial support, or to protest against a sexist advertising campaign (perhaps DO exist, and young woman could Yet the NGO model part of the landscape perceived as service providers). Some informal activists complain about disengagement and surely find one to join. has become so much a part of the landscape that they, too, are perceived as service providers. Many activists complain about disengagement and the cynical culture of greed that surrounds us, and the fact that students consider it chic to be socially and politically apathetic. They are infuriated by the fact that people relate to us activists as clients, complaining and demanding, rather than contributing and becoming active themselves. Sadly, this is a result of the very framework we ourselves established – one of service, rather than representation. De-politicization and NGO-ization have had a profoundly alienating effect.

At its root is the very status and structure of NGOs, and above all the project-based funding system, which breeds ruthless competition for limited resources between people who theoretically have a common goal.

Secondly, there are bitter conflicts both within and between NGOs. I am not an expert on this painful subject, but I believe that it, too, is structural, and not to be solved by means of 'conflict resolution' workshops, or the like. At its root is the very status and structure of NGOs, and above all the project-based funding system, which breeds ruthless competition for limited resources between people who theoretically have a common goal. The NGOs I know are also not managed democratically: in fact, the founder of any particular group often remains at the helm for decades. Even if the person in question is charismatic and deeply committed to the organization, its rigid power structure leads to conflicts and sometimes even its destruction.

Thirdly, I would mention the lack of success in transforming civil society initiatives into legislation. Many activists I know complain of the arrogance of politicians in

communicating with NGOs. Despite the respectful talk of “dialogue with social partners,” women’s NGOs are often ignored when it comes to policy making. Without exonerating the politicians, who are indeed often arrogant, and need to be held accountable, I would argue that the problem is not just in political resistance to our demands (gender equality legislation, etc.). Rather, it is systemic: once civil society had vacated the sphere of politics, social actors found themselves in a very weak negotiating position. Isolated NGOs (or even coalitions of NGOs) without large membership and grassroots support have very little means of exerting political pressure.

Concluding remarks

The problems listed above are interconnected, and all related to the disadvantageous position of social activism with regard to the state and the market economy. I am convinced that by situating itself outside politics, civil society has contributed to its own marginalization. As I have argued above, the pattern

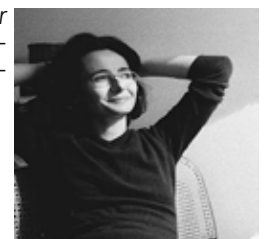
Isolated NGOs (or even coalitions of NGOs) without large membership and grassroots support have very little means of exerting political pressure.

is circular: the neoliberal state fails to deliver basic social provisions, and NGOs – funded mostly by Western institutions – respond to these needs by building professionalized, specialized structures designed to satisfy specific needs. The donors prefer non-political projects (because of the assumptions of the civil society framework), and so de-politicization is strengthened further. As (some) needs are met, the state considers itself justified in its retrenchment strategy. Within civil

society itself, there is less and less discussion of how to make the system more just and equitable, because organizations are busy writing grant applications for yet another project, which will help fill new gaps created by the unjust system.

I do not wish to negate the good that has come from the work of NGOs. There are many wonderful initiatives around, aimed to alleviate injustice, eradicate inequality and fight prejudice. I continue to contribute to many, and have even helped to found some, including a feminist group and a stipend fund for young people who otherwise could not afford to study in Warsaw. I wish many others well. However, I believe that, in the final analysis, thinking of ourselves as remaining ‘outside politics’ has been a costly mistake. Instead of getting to the roots of inequality and social exclusion, we ended up serving as a cushion to the very system we were protesting against. It is not more NGOs to deal with more problems that are needed, but a shift in the framework itself: new voices in the public sphere, and grassroots political movements that will encourage participation. We must begin to re-examine and move beyond the politics of anti-politics.

Agnieszka Graff graduated from Amherst College (USA, 1993) and Oxford University (1995) and holds a Ph.D. in Literature from the University of Warsaw (1999). She is currently an assistant professor at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw, where she teaches U.S. culture, literature, African American studies and women’s history. She also offers regular seminars on various aspects of feminist thought at the Warsaw University Gender Studies Center and at Collegium Civitas. Her current research interest is in gender and national identity (focusing on Poland) and in the rhetorical strategies of modern American feminism. A scholar and activist in Poland, she has published extensively on gender in Polish public life.



Launching a campaign to support vulnerable groups is more difficult than conducting a survey on their needs - but the risks of merging civil society too much with social science are poor scientific quality and a society without action, Anna Krasteva claims



The Narratives

Harry Potter was born as the greatest ever magician, the only one able to perform the perfect magic. Civil society was born as the magic of the transition, the essence of a longing for change. It was given the power to identify and articulate that change, as classical institutional or representative mechanisms were overlooked. A representative of a small Serbian NGO commented:

"In January 2000 [before the fall of Milosevic] I was invited to Sweden for a meeting with a minister... Later in the same year, in November [after the fall of Milosevic] the same minister had a meeting with President Koštunica. So I was his contact in January and who was I at the time? Someone working for an NGO, which had five employees and some projects and computers. But to him, I was Serbia!"

Paradoxically, the less representative and marginal an NGO was at the onset of the change, the more legitimate they seemed to the West, due to their non-alignment with existing institutions. Conflict resolution, democratization, NATO, the EU, human rights – everybody, including the state and the mushrooming political parties, were aware of the key narratives of post-communism. There was no conflict over these narratives and even forces, linked to and attached to, the ancient regime were unable to generate an alternative discourse.

The problem lies not in the content or authorship of these narratives, which were imitative rather than innovative, but it lies in the speaker. Civil society was given the power to articulate the ideals of democratization most authentically.

What comes after the comes next for civil society already been attained, at new EU member states, Balkans? What discourse sphere with alternatives, which are different from state and political par-

Civil society accomplished its purpose of being the bearer of the ideas of the transition, but what should its purpose be after the transition?

grand narratives? What ety after these goals have least to some extent in the if not yet in the Western does the civic sector of- in enriching the public topics, priorities and visions those provided by the ties?

Civil society accomplished its purpose of being the bearer of the ideas of the transition, but what should its purpose be after the transition? I'll outline my reflections on these questions, articulating four points of tension and three directions for change.

The Dilemmas

Professionalization - Commitment

A perfect command of English, communication and teamwork skills, the ability to manage projects and fundraise effectively: there are no visible differences between the requirements of the civil sector and that of private business. Competent, dynamic and efficient - this is the profile of a successful NGO activist.

This new professional is so self-confident that he creates his own arena in which to excel, with a language he masters (project speak) and an ambitious aim (building democracy) that he is equipped to achieve.

The declared objective of this arena is to show solidarity with the weak and the vulnerable, with the most visible result being the emergence of strong citizens. On one level, the theme of justice prevails – less discrimination, more equality and the empowerment of the disadvantaged. On a more practical level, the most substantial achievement of civil society is to establish economically independent, self-confident citizens, who view the state critically as long as their income is not dependent on it. Civil society is an alternative to the state in terms of its ideas, but even more so, in terms of the ethos of this more autonomous, free, open and cosmopolitan social group.

Paradoxically, this result has never been defined either as an aim or a possible outcome. Reinforcing the position of the middle class through the income generated in the NGO sector is undoubtedly a positive result. What is less clear-cut is the professionalization of democracy. At the beginning of the transition, one Bulgarian politician in his address to an art forum, formulated a remarkable distinction when he said “We, the democrats and you, the sculptors”. He had been persuaded that democracy also needed sculptors, not only democrats, yet he was unable to imagine sculptor-democrats. If the civil sector is a place characterized by efficient managers and professional democracy, is there room for the citizens themselves (the amateurs) to act, search, propose new ideas, experiment and make mistakes, to innovate?

If the civil sector is a place characterized by efficient managers and professional democracy, is there room for the citizens themselves (the amateurs) to act, search, propose new ideas, experiment and make mistakes, to innovate?

The Governmental-Nongovernmental Sector

I work with a French NGO. Its experienced lawyers search for even the slightest, almost indiscernible hints of a discriminative discourse in all the decrees and instructions, which the ministries or any other public institution send out to the administration.

They are highly critical of any abuse of human rights. So who is funding this vigilant and critical eye, which is unforgiving of any examples of state negligence whatsoever? It is the state itself.

Here, the governmental and nongovernmental sectors are closely linked. Yet, instead of financing a civil society which will act as a counterweight, curbing its excesses, the state often protects itself behind “crony NGOs”. Many state and party gurus have NGOs of their own which play a double role: They absorb funds intended for so-called civil society, giving their approval of the degree of democracy evident in every decision, strategy or program. These are NGOs which are almost never seen “in the field”, which are however, on the lists of partners, proudly demonstrated by public institutions to show their “openness” and “ability for dialogue”. NGOs as the hidden face of power is a lesser evil. The bigger one is that these NGOs are often characterized by nepotism, the diversion of funds, and corruption.

Independence Issues

A great problem of civil society, among others, is that it's self-referential. It is what it has chosen to be. It is proud to be independent of the state and the market, but how should we deal with that independence when it proves to

be dislikeable or even distasteful? How do we handle nationalists and extremists? The problem lies in what stand civil society should take. Should it befriend the environmentalist and forsake the nationalist? Or should it put definitions aside and create a public space, where the environmentalist could debate on national identity and the nationalist could rally against an illegal building set to be built in the local park?

It is much more labor-intensive and budget-consuming to launch a humanitarian campaign to support vulnerable groups than it is to conduct a "survey" on their needs.

Civic Participation - Scientific Research

NGOs were the great hope for the social sciences in the early 1990s. The economic crisis ousted science from financial priorities. This was even more apparent in the social sciences, which were reforming much faster than the state. The non-governmental sector proved to be the only option for researchers to attend international forums for the first time, for new ideas to be studied, for critical reflection to be developed. We consider the early development of entire fields to be related predominantly to NGOs. This is true of minority, ethnic and gender studies, anticorruption analyses and human rights.

Today two distinct profiles could be outlined. Firstly, there are researchers, making use of their leading positions in the non-governmental sector to fund their own studies. Secondly, there are NGO activists, who are making use of science as a watertight alibi for absorbing funds. It is much more labor-intensive and budget-consuming to launch a humanitarian campaign to support vulnerable groups than it is to conduct a "survey" on their needs. There is a moral issue here and a question of how funds should be absorbed.

The normal functioning of science is not just a matter of financing, rather it is an academic environment of results, publishing serious policy suggestions and peer-reviewed publications. All these checks traditionally used by science to protect scientific integrity are easily neglected when projects guarantee funds for publishing. Printing replaces editing and self-evaluation replaces peer reviews.

Blurring the borders between science and civic participation is not entirely healthy for either. It makes science less professional and diverts resources from civic initiatives.

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The Change

The year 2008 proved that ideas such as "yes, we can", "change" and "hope" can energize and mobilize millions. It is fascinating that there is no rulebook to follow and that we have to create our own path for development. My personal reflections on a radical rethinking of the civil sector involve three key areas:

Autonomy

A real civil society will begin when NGOs shake off their dependency on donors. They will be able to do this not only by diversifying their financial resources, but also generating and stimulating civic energy without monetary coverage.

Financing ought to be channeled into activities, rather than into structures and into initiatives, rather than into wages.

Deinstitutionalization

This should apply to NGOs. There is no reason for NGOs no reason for NGOs to con-civil society. NGOs are a terpretation of civil society. civil society is seen in terms such as churches, universi-eratives. NGOs should not point where these organizations are unable to develop civil initiatives, clubs, ad hoc groups and networks in a number of different and flexible forms. The focus will no longer be on structures to be supported or maintained, but rather on citizens who unite around specific goals and activities.

6 months for institutions of representative democracy; 6 years for a market economy; 6 decades for a civil society.

as well as other institutions. to stop existing and there is tinue to be identified with specific post-communist in- In developed democracies, of the diversity of structures ties, trade unions and coop- engulf civil society to the

De-professionalization

Being a citizen ought not to become a profession and efficiency should not replace creativity and activity. A radical transformation of the main players operating in civil society is needed, as well as discovering the volunteer. It took decades to shift from the vote censitaire to universal suffrage. Post-communist NGOs should not be turned into a "democratic census", civil society has to be open to the educated and cognisant, as well as to everyone else. A civil society is built through the empathy and activity of everyone, from farmers to teachers, to immigrants and intellectuals, to owners and civil servants, to students and representatives of minorities.

It was Ralf Dahrendorf, who mapped out the agenda of the post-communist change: 6 months for institutions of representative democracy; 6 years for a market economy; 6 decades for a civil society. In the first two decades there

has been a lot of society and politics in civil society. Now the time for the citizen to play a role has come. The grand objectives have been achieved, so now developing civic imagination has become a must.



Anna Krasteva is editor-in-chief of the journal *Southeastern Europe*, published by Brill. She is director of the Department of Political Sciences and of CERMES (the Centre for Refugees, Migration and Ethnic Studies) at the New Bulgarian University in Sofia, Bulgaria. She is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, a member of the international scientific board of the network *Maisons des sciences de l'homme* in France, as well as of the international scientific board of the Institute for Central, Eastern and Balkan Europe at the University of Bologna. She has been awarded the international scientific honor of « Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques ». She teaches courses on

ethnic and migration issues at the European master in Sarajevo Democracy and human rights and regularly gives lectures at European universities and institutes of political sciences.

*Civil society in Poland
- some remarks by a
historian of ideas By
Andrzej Waskiewicz*

There was completely different story of civil society during the era of the resistance movement. Andrzej Waskiewicz means that it takes time for bourgeois to turn into citizens and in the meantime civil society is relying on a few enthusiasts



**Civil
society
in Poland
- some
remarks
by a
historian
of ideas**

I am a historian of ideas, and not a practicing sociologist or a social activist. Yet, as well as being an academic teacher, I also used to publish a monthly journal devoted to public affairs and teach young social and political leaders. Now I am involved in setting up a liberal arts college, so I've had a chance to see the idea of civil society being translated into social practice.

Paradoxically enough, for once, social practice preceded the idea; usually in Polish history, it was the other way around: imported social ideas were discussed by the Polish intelligentsia before they affected Polish society. Contrary to Marx's theory, the consciousness of Polish elites frequently did not reflect reality, or if they did, it was the realities of other nations. The years 1980-81 were different. What the people of Poland did then, was both spontaneous and surprisingly mature. Had martial law not suppressed their activities with brute force, they might have evolved into an active citizenry forming a dense network of NGOs. Yet this experience also showed that such activities may be in vain when they lack state protection, let alone state support. Thanks to Solidarity's comeback in 1989, some of these ideas and practices were resumed.

After December 13th, the social enthusiasm of 1980-81 was quickly stifled. Just a handful of Solidarity activists turned into active conspirators, while most of them turned into family men and women. The scarcity of basic necessities induced the attitude of individual adjustment to the hardships of everyday existence. People came together to form mutual assistance networks for the exchange of basic goods. Those in conspiracy lived within closed circles in an atmosphere of intimacy. The rules of clandestine work breed trust, but it is always limited to a few insiders, and accompanied by as much mistrust of (numerous) outsiders. So conspiracy by no means promotes greater civility than does private life; in fact, it can resemble it and occasionally be a substitute for it. Even if people trust one another and collaborate on a non-profit basis, there is no civility without a public sphere; this was the case in the Poland of 1982-1989. Actually, the communist authorities forbade even such forms of collaboration as building societies that allegedly posed a threat to the socialist order.

Strangely, and yet this time in line with Polish history, civil society came back as an idea. Not without a Polish intellectual contribution and based on the Polish social experience of 1980-81, this idea resurfaced in the mid 1980s. It was addressed to a society which was but a shadow of the one which had inspired the Western theorists a few years earlier. The 62-percent turnout at the first semi-free elections was not an accident. The passive attitude towards public life had not changed overnight. And the idea of civil society was demanding. Contrary to what we can find in Locke's, Hegel's, or even de Tocqueville's works, it was a purely normative idea. It set such high standards of public life that very few, if any, societies could fulfill them. This is a well-known story, so it will suffice to say here that civil society was simply meant to be a substitute for the state, and so it was easy to ridicule. Since this idea became one of the principles underlying the new social and political order, the critics could say that it served the ruling class as an excuse for not doing what the state is supposed to do. Do it yourselves because we cannot do it for you. And this was a com-

The idea of civil society was demanding. Contrary to what we can find in Locke's, Hegel's, or even de Tocqueville's works, it was a purely normative idea. It set such high standards of public life that very few, if any, societies could fulfill them.

pletely new idea to the Polish mentality, since the communist state had called for patience and sacrifice on such occasions.

Of course, there are a number of striking examples of how civic initiatives sorted out problems which the authorities had, for years, been unable to address. Yet those examples cannot be said to be representative; rather, they serve as a counterpart of the capitalist myth of 'shoeshine boy to successful millionaire'. Perhaps most Poles would have been happy under the communist regime if only they had been given a little more freedom to organize themselves with- out being hampered by thousands of absurd reg- ulations or simply by the lack of good will on the part of the officials. 'They' failed to solve many social issues, but did not allow citizens to solve problems themselves, either. How- ever, after 1989, the state have the state for? Few people become com- munity activists out of the pure need to act in the public sphere, most do it out of a private need which can only be met by public action. No wonder that the idea of civil society in its normative form was embraced mostly by the intelligentsia: it resembled the old idea of public service, the one to which this social stratum was said to be devoted and which defined its social status. For some time in the early 1990s, a characteristic social advertisement was shown on Polish public television: a group of actors pushing a cart with a Polish national flag and calling their com- patriots for help.

Few people become community activists out of the pure need to act in the public sphere, most do it out of a private need which can only be met by public action.

The weakness of civil society in post-communist countries is widely attributed to the burden of their past. However, not all social and political apathy can be explained by that, nor do the hardships of everyday life provide a better or more complete explanation. The withdrawal from the public sphere in the late 1980s and early 1990s was accompanied by focusing on family life and also on consumption, which at that time was quite limited because of the scarcity of available goods. Yet the appetites had been awakened, and they could soon be satisfied in mushrooming supermarkets. Even before Poland became a democratic state, it had turned into a would-be consumerist society. Thus the labor pains of civil society cannot be seen exclusively in the context of the struggle between the old and the new social, economic and political systems. Certainly, the remains of the old system were an obstacle to the emergence of civil society, but the new order promoted it only to a limited extent and, at the same time, created conditions that did not encourage civic initiatives.

There is an old controversy over whether capitalism and democracy are mutual friends, as most mainstream social scientists assume nowadays, or bitter enemies, as some leftist ones have traditionally claimed. The case of Poland cannot be said to serve as an example for the proponents of either approach. The said consumption was not the product of mature capitalism but of corrupt socialism. If we say that it drives the people's attention towards the private instead of the public sphere, we should rather follow Machiavelli's bitter remarks that wealth makes them indifferent to the public good. In Poland, the concern for wealth has found a noble justification: the needs of the family. The family is the central institution for most Poles; all the surveys show that happy family life makes them personally happy even if they are disappointed with politics,

the Catholic Church and other public institutions. And yet, happy people may be unhappy citizens. As unhappy citizens they tend to blame the state and its agenda for all the miseries of public life, and this explains why they are in favor of a strong state, whatever that means.

The black legend of civil society is based on the assumption that its institutions undermine the state. In fact, this is one of many half-truths. As shown by Robert Putnam's classic study, citizens' associations make local government more effective in northern Italy, than in southern Italy, numerous. The authorities are not responsible for social life. Yet all this will change if we simply change the associations become "con-foreign money", fund-Such people and organization of government tribute these thoughts mistrust towards so-characteristic of Jean-

For Rousseau, all kinds of social institutions bring inequality into political life and corrupt the state which works at the service of the wealthy and the mighty. In his view, such organizations are nothing more than agents of particular private interests multiplied by the number of their members.

where they flourish, where they are far less ties are stronger if they for every aspect of so-sound unconvincing if vocabulary and associations", foundations: risers: "swindlers", etc. nizations stand in the policy. One could at-to populists, but such cial institutions is also Jacques Rousseau,

often mistaken for one of the founding fathers of modern democracy. There is no social sphere in his republic that is a sphere between the individual and the political. For Rousseau, all kinds of social institutions bring inequality into political life and corrupt the state which works at the service of the wealthy and the mighty. In his view, such organizations are nothing more than agents of particular private interests multiplied by the number of their members.

As we know, the whole truth is that civil society comprises a plethora of social institutions. There are associations of medical doctors and associations of people wronged by them, corporations of lawyers and clubs for their wives. Some of them bring together people with a concern for the public good, while others are watchdogs of group interests. The former are hailed and don't need any justification and the latter often become targets of populist campaigns. True, not all of them have been set up to serve the public interest, and yet, as de Tocqueville teaches, they all do, in a sense, when they protect individuals, many or just a few, against the almighty central government. The examples are numerous. They do it in their own self-interest and society as whole benefits from that. But it can be the other way round, and evidence for that is also abundant. All in all, even though they may not be professed advocates of democratic government, by limiting it they serve it better than the 'true believers'

Thus, we needn't love them for that, nor do we have to particularly worry about them. They are based on vested interests, and interests make them self-sustained. In fact, the reputation of civil society rests upon these bodies, as they can easily spoil it. The exclusivist policies of many vocational organizations make them ideal targets of government actions and provide an excuse for limiting their autonomy. And they could, with very little effort, do something more than improve decent conduct. They could support public benefit organizations which have won public sympathy for NGOs by their disinterested activities and devotion to public causes. They could offer their know-how: legal assistance, accounting services, help in fund-raising, PR, etc. to those small organizations

that cannot afford it within their own limited means.

Small organizations have often lots of enthusiasm which cannot be properly turned to public benefit because they are rather “clumsy” in the bureaucratic context; no wonder many of them are losing heart when faced with the “rules and regulations”. And this is a great loss, because the strength of such organizations lies in interpersonal relations. Their members are often friends in the old sense of the word that is they are supporters of a public cause, just like the Friends of the Constitution of the 3rd May. Or they are just friends, a small, tight-knit group of people, for many of whom acting together, whatever their cause, is one of their formative experiences. Bigger groups, which have crossed the organizational threshold, cannot work properly without any institutional culture. And the very notion of “institutional culture” sounds abhorrent to people afraid of routine. And yet routine is not the equivalent of callousness, an organization is not a rigid hierarchy, and pursuing a career does not necessarily mean betraying one’s calling. In short, the point is to combine enthusiasm with efficiency.

Communal activity has been diminishing in recent years. The romantic phase of the development of civil society seems to be over.

Polish sociologists notice that communal activity has been diminishing in recent years. The romantic phase of the development of civil society seems to be over. The group-profile of the Polish intelligentsia is changing; its young generation much more closely resembles the professional elites of other states. In the long run, for civil society to survive, its idea and practices have to be spread to other social strata. Most importantly, to the middle class which is not yet very numerous in Poland and tends to keep itself to itself in the popular gated communities. In fact, most of the new housing estates in big cities are closed to non-residents. In the spirit of Rousseau we would say that it will take time for the bourgeois to turn into citizens or, being more realistic, one would hope for the next generation to discover enlightened self-interest and civility. Before they do so and develop “the habits of their hearts”, just like Alexis de Tocqueville found them in 19th century in America, we will have to beat a rhythm to the heartbeats of enthusiasts: the most spectacular civil society success in Poland is the Great Christmas Charity Orchestra, a striking example of how enthusiasm and professionalism can go hand in hand.



Andrzej Waśkiewicz is Deputy Head of College at the University of Warsaw's Collegium Artes Liberales which works on interdisciplinary studies in the fields of social sciences, the humanities and natural sciences.

A photograph of a modern office interior. The ceiling is a dark, grid-like structure with recessed lighting. Large windows with dark frames are visible, showing a view of a multi-story building and greenery outside. The text is overlaid on the image.

A hitchhiker's guide to philanthropy

Philanthropy is built on mutual benefit and community, charity is a vertical transfer from those who have to those who don't, claims Chris Worman, arguing that CSOs own attitude is the main hindrance for successful sustainability through local fundraising.

It was a dark and stormy night... A colleague and I were waiting for the bus home from a village where we were working. For some reason, the bus drove straight past us – literally leaving us in the dust. Plan B was hitch hiking. Unfortunately I look like a Viking and my colleague looks like a member of Hells Angels (albeit a smiling one). We did not think we had much hope. Sooner or later, the autumnal darkness of Transylvania descended. We were considering a campfire when a gentleman stopped. As we made small talk on the ride the kindly driver asked about our work. We described a campaign to encourage citizens to use their 2% tax redirection in support of the projects and NGOs they think best serve the community. The helpful chauffer pondered the concept for a moment then said, “No way. People here don’t help each other.”

Our ability to connect with people like him, will determine our success or failure in the next 20 years.

Let the irony sink in for a moment. Here, the man who stopped to pick up two strange characters in the middle of the night was arguing that people like him do not perform mutually supportive acts. The icing on the cake was when he would not take any money to cover his gas. “My pleasure” he said as we thanked him.

I believe this story is telling about civil society in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the challenges faced by the civil society movement. This story matters because it is one average man's reflection on our collective work. Somewhere along the way, individuals like him, members of the society we serve, seem to have been left out of the civil society loop. Our ability to connect with people like him, will determine our success or failure in the next 20 years.

Without active philanthropy, and the pursuit thereof, there is not much hope for our field.

I have chosen to look at the disconnect between our chauffer and civil society through the lens of philanthropy. First because I believe that without active philanthropy, and the pursuit thereof, there is not much hope for our field. Second, developing philanthropy is my job as the director of a community foundation and these are the questions we deal with everyday. Third, I believe CEE Civil Society has developed a line of charity-focused development that is unsustainable, questionable in its service to civil society, and in need of rethinking as the era of major foreign donors draws to a close and the European Union becomes our new reality.

CEE Civil Society has developed a line of charity-focused development that is unsustainable and questionable in its service to civil society

Grassroots giving and philanthropic foundations

Before proceeding I should clarify what I mean by 'philanthropy' and 'charity' and how I see them as different. Webster's Dictionary defines philanthropy as “goodwill to fellow men, especially: active effort to promote human welfare.” At a recent conference I heard a group postulate that philanthropy can be further divided into philanthropy of community and philanthropy for community. In their terms, philanthropy of community is based on people helping people in a mutually beneficial and reciprocal form of self help. When discussing philanthropy in this article, I mean philanthropy of community. Thus, when

I speak about philanthropy, I mean the 'active effort to promote human welfare' based in mutually beneficial systems for self help. This may not be altruistic enough for some but we will get to that later...

Philanthropy for community, on the other hand, as defined by the group from South Africa, involves resource transfer from those of high net wealth, to those of lesser net wealth. I will call this charity. If you look up the definition of 'Charity,' you find terms and phrases such as "giving, aid given to those in need, institution founded on charitable gifts, etc..." Charity, unlike philanthropy, is more of a financial proposition and inevitably involves more than a transfer of wealth. To access charitable gifts, one must accept a transfer of ideals, morals, and priorities.

On one hand we have philanthropy as a more horizontal, mutually beneficial, peer-to-peer, community support system and on the other we have charity as a more vertical transfer from those who have to those who have not. Before addressing the assertion that charity has become the modus operandi of CEE civil society, it is helpful to consider some historical context contrasting this region and the United States. Why the United States? Because in most of my discussions regarding civil society in CEE, NGO folks refer to U.S. models, often on dubious grounds.

First, a brief history of philanthropy in CEE...

Pre-communist philanthropy in Eastern Europe seems to have been primarily a system of charitable patronage. Beginning in the Middle Ages wealthy families built churches. Wealthy churches occasionally built schools and hospitals, often based on gifts from wealthy families. Later, groups of merchants sometimes organized funds for a civil project to aid in commerce. By the turn of the last century in our community there were some fascinating examples of charity such as a miller who donated his Saturday profits to charity, a women's group who raised funds for children, and some middle class organizations such as book clubs, hunting clubs etc... In our community (and I doubt this was unique) there was also a parallel philanthropic tradition based around communal work. This tradition was based on work, not wealth. Where work needed to be done, citizens organized themselves and their resources to complete projects.

History of philanthropy in the United States is somewhat different. While charity existed, civil society seems to have been much more focused on systems of mutual support. The Colonies (later the United States) were set up to export their resources with as little investment as possible, forcing citizens to create their own institutions. Volunteer organizations arose to cover everything from fire-fighting to libraries, universities and militias. The 'Founding Fathers,' understood that these small, locally driven organizations taught civic duties, and entrusted them with the responsibility of creating good citizens and teaching responsibility in the inherent capitalism of the American system.

As industrialization began shaping modern America, philanthropy also industrialized. The first large foundations (Carnegie, Rockefeller, Ford, etc...), sought efficient and 'scientific' approaches to understanding and solving 'root causes' of social ills like poverty and hunger. A class of NGO professionals was cultivated and they came to see their work as different from the myriad of local credit unions and food shelters who were dealing with the effects of these problems.

Some argue that this process has actually weakened civil society by redirecting power from local communities to a class of NGO professionals who manage the charitable order. Regardless of its current form, American civil society spent hundreds of years as a largely philanthropic, mostly voluntary, sector, building trust and indoctrinating citizens. The movement began as a grass roots response to local needs and, over time, has morphed into a blend of major charitable donors and locally driven organizations.

While this was happening, the rise and fall of communism and the erasure of non-governmental civil society. What happened after communism? One of the most amusing answers I have received is that "someone said we need to get a civil society, so we got a civil society." Civil society promised democracy and healing for the 'post-communist man' who is still often derided and driven by self-interest alone. Civil society promised to rebuild social capital and major donors have invested significant amounts pursuing this promise. But how to lay the foundation of civil society - grass-roots philanthropy or the more 'scientific,' charitable approach?

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Charity picks up the tab for philanthropy and the challenges therein...

It seems like the answer has been a combination of both with a tendency towards charity. Enlightened donors have supported the development of grass roots philanthropic society through a system of charitable contributions. These contributions were necessarily charitable in nature. Funding had to come from somewhere, and since there was no visible indigenous civil society, it had to come with a model, morals and ideals which could offer guidance and a rubric to measure results.

In short, charity was supposed to pay for philanthropy. Did it work? Yes and no. Yes in that in most countries in the region, philanthropy and volunteerism are reportedly on the rise. There are thousands of local NGOs, and young people are getting involved in the civil sector (albeit often against the wishes of their parents).

On the other hand, our Good Samaritan chauffeur did not believe philanthropy had a chance. Nor would he associate stopping to help us with philanthropy (which it is if you accept our earlier definitions of mutually beneficial "good-will to fellow men, especially: active effort to promote human welfare"). The driver's disbelief, reflective in some ways of a lack of understanding of, or trust in, NGOs, indicates that the philanthropic ideal has not been communicated to regular people. Thus, charity paying for philanthropy has not fully succeeded. This is partly the fault of local NGOs who have not communicated well or invited people like our driver to participate in philanthropy. In my experience, few CEE NGOs communicate well, citing reasons ranging from lack of confidence or media savvy to outright shame. Whatever their reasons, community members like our driver don't get the message. I have heard from numerous NGOs that

communication with locals 'is not necessary thanks to foreign support, which is fine because we don't want to do it anyway. It feels like begging.'

This difficulty in communicating is complicated by the language in use. Audre Lorde's famous statement 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' suggests it is basically impossible to conceptualize a new system when using the language of an existing one. I believe there is some of the same happening here. CEE the civil society development organizations who train them, have been trained in the process of charity by foreign donors while being asked to seed philanthropic ideals they could never have practiced.

The combination of skills, a charity-based model, and the people what to do it is easier, keeps the alive. The system shows fundraising which focus

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donors, in trainings where developed NGOs push theoretical models which have few practical examples in CEE, and anytime an NGO leader feels entitled to say that average citizens don't know what they need and don't have the time to care. It becomes apparent in their fundraising when NGOs copy and paste their 'need' statement from one application to another to meet donor needs without stepping outside to ask anyone whose needs they are ostensibly to meet.

There is real danger in perpetuating charitable models because charity is not motivational to average people. It does not reach out and build social capital or invite people into the civil sphere. One reason for this is that the power structure implicit in charity is too often patronizing. I have seen civil society professionals walk into communities and explain without any hesitation what needed to be done to fix the local problems and local people. Unsurprisingly the programs never took root and did not find support from locals like our chauffeur. Who likes to be told they have problems instead of asked what problems need fixing and, moreover what those problems are and how to fix them, instead of being asked what problems impact their daily lives? And is this the point of building a civil society? Or is it an attempt to force one?

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When I ask specifically about encouraging local philanthropy, NGOs tend to trot out flashy acts of charity such as rewarding big donors with media coverage and galas. This can be lucrative but may prove unsustainable and self-defeating in the long-term. Big donors are often managed through Donors Clubs (yes, we have one too) which are often not based on mission, but on being part of a group which has the power and responsibility to give. Clubs are easier to manage but when markets crash, big donors disappear, quickly undermining sustainability as we have all seen in recent months. An often repeated note in support of major donor is that

if a few big fish contribute, the little fish will follow. When we talk to average citizens, however, they have proven highly skeptical of large charitable giving, often convinced that it is somehow money laundering. In fact, it threatens to turn regular citizens away as they have been shown the rewards system for major gifts and begin to question the efficacy of their own smaller contributions.

Though big donor giving can be an important part of philanthropy, promoting only big donor charity can be self-defeating. If average people are not motivated to invest in mutually beneficial systems, they will not learn the value of investing in civil society and soon there is no foundation from which to develop local fundraising capacities, involve volunteers or get communities to solve local problems. People learn helplessness; they learn that the best way to solve a big problem is to wait for a wealthy person to come along and fix it for them. If there is no long-term training of locals then there is no long-term trust building and the big local donor of tomorrow's charitable campaign will simply not exist. Further, we have found local donors more apt to give if the masses are shown as supportive.

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What about philanthropy? And whatever happened to Altruism?

So, if professional NGOs are perpetuating charity systems, what about the rest of civil society? In our experience, there is a healthy grass-roots movement that is fairly philanthropic in practice. As a grantmaker we are constantly encouraging small grass-roots initiatives to market themselves and reach out. A critique we hear from professional NGO folks (reflecting the root cause vs. effects argument) is that these small initiatives do not really change anything. I would argue that these small initiatives, driven by people who see a local problem and wish to solve it, represent ideal civil society. We believe, as an organization, that by encouraging small initiatives based on real local needs and solutions, the initiators may be inspired to establish nonprofits and continue their work. So far we have been rewarded in this with 4 new and sustainable initiatives beginning out of 20 grants in the last year.

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And, if charity can lead to a bit of downward spiral, can philanthropy be used to build civil society? I hear a lot of doubt because philanthropy too relies on social capital. However, though there may be little trust from person to person, the building blocks of social capital are here. Individuals, when directly, asked will often volunteer, give to a cause they understand and organize around issues relevant to their lives and the future of their children. We have seen this in our work both locally in our small town and in nearby villages. Secondarily, after decades of deprivation, individuals seem quite happy to act in their own self interest. This is a feeling that can be harnessed but requires us to drop some pretense around altruism as a necessary component of philanthropy.

But we often hear NGO professionals claiming citizens should participate out of some altruistic purity of soul and intention. And I agree with this in principle,

so why question the efficacy of promoting altruism as part of philanthropy in CEE? Without getting into a debate about whether or not altruism even truly exists, we can perhaps agree that an environment that encourages people to perform altruistic acts is lacking in CEE where individuals have no recent background in philanthropy and little understanding of how NGOs are currently serving them. Another reason to question altruism as motivational lies in language and recent history. Since volunteerism is a good example of altruism, I offer the following quote about the perfect volunteer:

"He should have a great sense of duty, a sense of duty toward the society we are building, toward our fellow men as human beings and toward all men around the world... And along with that: deep sensitivity to all problems, sensitivity that rebels against every wrong, Each and every one of you must change reality, how to make it

Individuals, when directly, asked will often volunteer, give to a cause they understand and organize around issues relevant to their lives and the future of their children.

with that: deep sensitivity to injustice; a spirit whoever commits it ... think about how to better..."

Sounds great. Sounds like de- 'what makes a good volunteer' we hosted this year. But this by Ernesto 'Che' Guevara de-Young Communist. The similar-promoted by selfless (altruistic) society and communist propaganda brings up an interesting point. As with fears around using the word 'volunteerism' due to an historical context of forced labor, could it be that the very language of civil society as we understand it, built upon altruistic idealism, sets off alarms in CEE?

descriptions from the session of a workshop speech was delivered scribing the perfect ity in the terminology service to civil soci-

Inviting and showing by doing

If so, and this deserves some study, we need to reclaim this language through positive examples and leadership. In the meantime, however, we simply cannot rely on altruism. What we can trust people to do is look out for themselves. This self-interest can be leveraged into philanthropic acts based on mutual interest, particularly if the entry bar is set low, leading to a base from which philanthropy can grow. The challenge to all of us then, is to develop the communications and programs that show individuals that acting for community is in their own self-interest. We have seen this in our work through simple, concrete actions such as volunteer playground renovations. We asked the community if they would like to revive the communal work tradition that was mentioned in the history section. They said yes and we said, where? Bloc associations and local groups identified playgrounds, provided labor and some funds. On the first day, more than 100 volunteers painted and repaired equipment at 4 playgrounds. Afterward, several organizations applied to our small grants fund to do their own renovations. It was very personal, concrete and direct - - you can make the playground your kids use a safer place to play. And, this program is becoming sustainable. We have launched an employee giving campaign specifically around this program seeking 1 RON (about .25 euro per employee) per month to keep the bar low. So far, we have more than 90% uptake and individuals are giving on average 5 RON per month. We included a 15% administrative cost to cover operations and this has been both appreciated and acceptable to donors.

More abstract philanthropy seems possible as well. For instance, the 2% for Odorhei campaign (the one our chauffeur had doubts about) asked individuals to redirect 2% of their taxes to local NGOs we had screened for quality programming and transparency. The campaign slogan was "What can my 2% do for Odorhei?" but the campaign also challenged citizens to exert a bit of control over this small percentage of tax, "keeping it in our community working for you." Again direct, but not so simple – this campaign required a leap of faith that the funds would go to work in the community without immediate visible results. And still individuals participate – over 3 years, campaign participation has gone up from 14% of local tax-payers to 43%.

A business example is a loyalty card campaign we launched with a local grocery chain. When the consumer uses the card, s/he receives a 1% discount plus special sales. Additionally, 1% of their bill is donated to the Foundation. The consumer saves some money and the Foundation benefits financially, which is returned to the community in grants. The business benefits financially through customer loyalty. Both benefit from the reputation of having organized something good in a difficult time. Unlike a sponsorship negotiation, this was an easy sell. As the fund grows and projects are supported, we will initiate the list of card carriers for volunteer and fundraising campaigns and they should be conditioned by their usage to respond. We hope it grows into a model for 'doing well by doing good.'

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Why bother?

Philanthropy is a lot of work. It is slow and the results are often small. Is it worth it? The answer to this question depends on what you think civil society should do – build social capital? Improve quality of life? Get individuals involved in their own futures? If you think it is any one of these then I believe that the focus on philanthropic systems is not only worthwhile, but necessary. Investing in philanthropy is an investment in your own organization and others because the process of building local support is educational and helps overcome the communications barriers described earlier in relation to charity. When you get someone involved in what you do, you can create a life-long supporter of civil society. This has been most apparent in our work with individuals who have become volunteers. Most of them cannot wait to volunteer again and we have redirected several of them to other organizations. They have become donors for the first time and more importantly, some of them have started their own initiatives. This is good for all of us.

Finally, with the exit of foreign donors (USAID in Romania, for example, built numerous NGOs before exiting as E.U. programs began and others are planning to depart) and the transition to E.U. funding it is imperative to develop local philanthropic systems. I have yet to be convinced that the E.U. is good for grass roots or medium sized civil society initiatives due to the inherent administrative challenges. With others leaving too and the E.U. not quite meeting the needs of civil society, we must lay the base for development locally. In our work, we must support and encourage small and medium sized initiatives that can inspire

and train future leaders.

Again, the work is slow but it means that we may build a sustainable movement. It also means that the next time my colleague explains what we are doing to a strange man in a car, in a field, in the middle of the night; he might be less incredulous... The future of philanthropy and civil society is in convincing this man and others like him, to come into our missions and see for themselves why our work is important to them and their community. As we look ahead into the next 20 years, I believe we must think honestly about how we approach development of the civil sector, show some social capital of our own and trust others to lead themselves as a basis for long-term development of our movement.

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Chris Worman has worked in the NGO sector since 1999. Starting as President of the Lawrence University Community Council, Chris worked with several NGOs in the United States including the Guthrie Theater and Special Olympics Minnesota where he served as Direct Marketing and Foundations Manager. In 2006, while training with Peace Corps Romania, Chris heard a presentation on Romanian fundraising mechanisms. Afterwards, Chris began considering the important role community foundations (CFs) might play in the development of Romanian civil society, the re-establishment of social capital, and how he might support this movement. Since then, Chris has played an active role in the Romanian CF movement and he organized the Odorheiu Secuiesc Community Foundation after building support for the concept within Odorheiu through the '2% for Odorheiu' campaign. In addition to OSCF, Chris has worked directly with, or presented workshops to, more than 250 NGOs on marketing and fundraising, serves as a consultant to the national CF movement and has written extensively on NGO development. Chris is also interested in rural development and has developed several programs including a social enterprise and a pilot rural biogas project because then he can play outside.



Concern + trust = hope

Codru Vrabie reflects on why civil society is being accused of inappropriate ties to politics and leadership issues that leads to burn out syndromes and one-man shows rather than movements

In early 1990, in just about the last weeks of my military service (I'd been drafted just a few months before the anti-communist revolution of 1989), Romanian TV went up in flames over some terrifying footage of HIV-positive children held in terrible conditions at the gruesome castle of a former nobleman, in a remote location of the Romanian North-West. I was only 18 and a half, and that was the first time I heard about civil society organizations coming over from Western Europe, with truckloads of humanitarian aid—food, medicine, clothes—to help the children, as well as seniors and adults, of a country whose rulers kept them famished, diseased and poorly clothed during decades of communist rule. On 26 June 2008, during an NGO-sponsored debate over the need to reform the Romanian Constitution, the former President Emil Constantinescu (1996-2000) blamed domestic civil society for the shortcomings of the current state of affairs, outlining the stark contrast between the civic activists' situation during the communist regime and after: Then, they were very few in numbers, and had no tools, no laws, no resources, but still achieved radical change; now, they are quite a lot, have all the necessary instruments at their disposal, but achieve nothing! I was shocked, and I felt wronged, because for the past ten years I'd been involved with Romanian civil society, affiliated to several NGOs, and even representing those involved in the fight against corruption on the National Integrity Council; because I believe that my actions of the past 10 years brought about change; because I do not feel we are so many, just as I do not think we have all the instruments we need... The question, then, is obvious: Against what standards and/or benchmarks should we measure success in civil society? Why are perceptions so different—at least between myself and the President?

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Controversy

In his speech of June, President Constantinescu clearly stated that:

"All misfits of the intellectual elite and civil society can be traced either to vested interests, to lack of vision or to intellectual laziness, that [generally] prevents the members thereof from being informed and knowledgeable about the things they discuss and debate. For 18 years, our civil society has obsessed with politics! Why? Because of its own ineptitude! It's easy to blame politics for not achieving things that civil society itself should have done. [. . .] I must tell you—if an objective judgment is in order—that politicians achieved, in 18 years, NATO and EU integration, the transformation of the economy. What has civil society achieved? The model of the lesser evil, types of pathetic debates, the creation—unique to Romania—of a lip-service press, unacceptable anywhere else in the free world. Hence, [in my opinion] Romanian civil society regressed, being weaker now than in communist times [. . .]. Having a civil society that pays tribute to political leaders, displays obedience to political power, or acts cowardly in relation to political institutions, is much more embarrassing, since there's no [authoritarian] pressure."

And this speech helped me identify more clearly some of the goals of civil society, from the early 1990s: Civic activists were set to remove all pressure from fundamental freedoms and the ability of Romanian citizens to actualize, and benefit from, those freedoms—association, expression, and private initiative, at the very least!

Frustration with the old goals makes them still relevant today! Many Romanians

still harbor the feeling that private initiative had been captured, since the early days of the 1990s, by exponents of the communist regime. They had connections, information, and managerial skills unavailable to the majority of the population, hence they've become the first "class" of Romanian entrepreneurs, regardless of whether legitimate or not. They have easily grasped the potential benefits of association in political parties, and are reported to have infiltrated the ranks of all political movements. While consolidating their economic interests with shallow political also pursued freedom of emasculating any and all tration. To me, this process sound (albeit ruthless) be-tage of a chaotic environ-mote individual prosperity naïve and immature pub-fact that we let it happen!

legitimacy, they have expression in effectively efforts at promoting lus-looks like a perfectly havior that takes advan-ment, in order to pro-at the cost of a placid, lic. Of course, I hate the At the same time, how-ever, this brief account may bring about an explanation as to why civil society is so obsessed with politics. Just as well, as, in understanding the need of those "illegitimate" entrepreneurs for economic prosperity and security, it becomes crystal clear why their front-end politicians actually achieved NATO and EU integration, as well as the transformation of the economy.

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Protracted Problems

As for civil society, per se, one can always look back, and try to learn from past mistakes... Who knows? Maybe the following inventory of problems that affected the growth of Romanian civil society would help us take on the challenge, and redirect our efforts towards a new change, towards finally achieving those original goals in the next decade. Let's take a look, first of all, at association: Reportedly, tens of thousands of NGOs have been established during the 90's but less than 25% thereof appear operational, when consulting the balance sheets submitted to fiscal authorities. Then, if I were to report on the number of effective NGO's that cater to the needs of issue-constituents or society at large I'd say it's little over 200. From this perspective, then, one may easily differentiate the drives for association. On the one hand, the external drive appears strongest: many NGOs were established in order to make use of potential tax breaks, to serve as cover for (marginally legal) commercial activities, to support underground political/electoral schemes. Indeed, most of them died out, in the meanwhile. On the other hand, quite a number of NGO's were established in order to take advantage of donor programs that injected sizable amounts of money into the Romanian economy. Many such "nonprofit entrepreneurs" withered away, being incapable of recognizing their links to a social segment, of focusing on serving the identified needs thereof, or simply of building a constituents base and of consolidating their value added in specific communities.

Let's assume the 200+ effective NGO's truly mirror freedom of association in Romania—the majority thereof operates at local or regional level within Romania, catering to the needs of very specific social and/or professional groups, while some 20 NGOs are extremely visible at central level. These NGO's, in turn, peruse freedom of expression to promote the views of their constituents, advance hot topics on the public agenda, contribute to shaping policies—indeed participate in governance, at all levels of government. Many politicians challenge

them on grounds of representativity, often times missing the point that numbers of voters cannot compare to constitutional rights—while an MP may have an electoral base of 50-100,000 voters, an NGO of “only” 5-50 members has an issue base of 20+ million right-bearers. Under these circumstances, courting a political leader that champions (for individual reasons) the cause of a particular NGO becomes an advocacy technique that should not be mistaken as lip-service, obedience or cowardice. Leaders and champions come and go, but the cause is there to stay! Indeed, to the naked eye, perceptions may be deceiving, and some NGO's may appear to have polarized the political inclinations of civil society, to have softened the tone towards some institutions, to have simply sold out to the highest bidder. But recent reforms in public management, decentralization, procurement, child protection, human trafficking, domestic violence, anti-corruption, justice, even elections, owe a great deal of gratitude to issue-based NGO's that had set the agenda, formulated policy alternatives, influenced decisions and ensured proper implementation.

What about private initiative, then, will you ask? A great number of these 200+ NGOs had to diversify their fund-raising techniques, in order to consolidate their budgetary needs. Income-generating activities that bring about 25-30% of an NGO's annual budget truly represent a breakthrough for the Romanian non-profit sector. The financial stability of their core operations, based on perfectly independent activities, reinforce the NGO's ability to pursue their mission and strategic objectives, as well as their involvement in governance. More interesting, the income-generating services that these NGO's perform actually cater

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to the needs of specific stakeholders, at the same time reinforcing their ability to gather relevant information, consolidating their credibility and legitimacy, supporting their capacity for effecting institutional change in relation to public authorities. Public support for such activities is growing, and NGO's benefit both from public and private money, either

via subsidies for servicing marginal groups, or via corporate social responsibility programs. Essentially, then, things are quite rosy for these 200+ NGO's, and I can sense your perplexity as to where are the problems of the Romanian civil society, or why are the original goals still relevant, 20 years later? I just argued that fundamental freedoms such as association, expression and private initiative are going quite well for a small number of NGO's—the challenge is to understand why this proportion is so small, at less than 1% of the total number of registered NGO's?

Challenges Ahead

Trust—social and/or public trust—is, probably, the greatest challenge for the Romanian civil society. Although opinion polls point to a constant increase of the public trust in NGO's, civil society still lags far behind the church and the army. Social capital is extremely low in Romania, very few people being able to trust their fellows with solving matters related to education in local schools, health-care in neighborhood hospitals, security in community police, garbage collection and sewerage in residential areas, etc. Paternalism, as instilled by decades of communist rule, and maintained by current politicians with vested interests, enforces an expectation that public administration is exclusively responsible for solving the problems. An attitude of learned helplessness in relation to public authorities—caused by, and/or entrenched with, a lack of responsibility—is quite pervasive at all levels of government. Thus, ordinary people

look with caution, even suspicion, at the most active citizens and their “odd” NGO’s. As a consequence, very few people feel the drive to associate in order to solve specific problems, and even fewer actually take the initiative to act upon that drive, get involved and express their opinion. Thus, the number of “genuine” citizens, truly involved in public affairs, who choose to experience trusting one-another, delegating tasks and contributing their own resources, is low—not as low as President Constantinescu evoked in reference to communist times, but not large enough to form the critical mass needed to finally achieve the original goals of the early 1990s.

Last, but not least, due to minimal numbers of people involved in civil society organizations and activities, Romanian NGO’s face a different challenge, namely elite fatigue. The lead-ership of the 20+ highly visible NGO’s active at central level has not changed a great deal during the past 10 years. As long as leaders do not change, ideas and objectives are unlikely to evolve—leaders, and organizations alike, tend to become entrenched in seemingly everlasting problems, in rather dubious crusades, in one-size-fits-all solutions. In the absence of elite rotation, some NGO’s lose credibility, being easily dubbed as “one-man show-offs,” the public getting bored with the same figure, the same topics, the same vocabulary, the same message. Of course, with little public trust and minimal involvement, there’s no room for NGO leaders to grow; in turn, without a selection base, current leaders simply cannot be replaced with equally capable, versatile and articulate challengers. Consequently, quite a few NGO’s face internal governance difficulties, especially when the leadership’s advocacy efforts appear to associate the public image of the organization with one of the political parties. The extreme tensions on the political scene, especially in the eve of the November parliamentary elections, with the three major political parties recruiting potential candidates from all walks of life, currently place the most visible Romanian NGOs in a state of dire fragility. Whether, and how many, of these NGO’s will collapse after the next elections is a question that still awaits an answer—a cruel answer that will teach us all a lesson in leadership, trust, initiative, expression and association.

Although opinion polls point to a constant increase of the public trust in NGO’s, civil society still lags far behind the church and the army.

Food for Thought

Now I know why I don’t always feel comfortable within the ranks of Romanian civil society—I think I managed to pinpoint, for me and for you, what might be wrong, where the inconsistencies lie. Of course, I share in the larger concern regarding the fragility of the Romanian NGO sector. I do not fully share President Constantinescu’s opinions, but I am now more aware of the problems lying ahead, as well as of the causes. Many more of us will learn valuable lessons from this retrospective, and will start working with the causes, in order to fix the problems. Actually, I trust that many fellow activists from the NGO sector already share my views—I am quite sure we will meet, and start exploring solutions, if not for the entire NGO sector, at least for the organizations where I am a member. When concerns meet awareness, and trust joins the problem-solving effort, there is hope for the Romanian civil society—hope in the ability to finally achieve the original goals of the early 1990s, as well as hope in the capacity to identify new goals and formulate new missions! Good luck, to all of us!

As long as leaders do not change, ideas and objectives are unlikely to evolve

Codru Vrabie is a trainer and consultant in the field of public administration and public service reform from Romania. He has international experience in non-profit and public management, administrative capacity and institution building, strategic development, fighting corruption and transposing provisions of *acquis communautaire*. Besides the 6 years spent with the Romanian Chapter of Transparency International, his work experience includes Access Info Europe of Madrid, Spain, the Romanian Institute of Training, as well as the Center for Legal Resources of the Soros Open Network in Romania. In addition to his native Romanian, he speaks fluent English, understands French, converses in Bulgarian and has a smattering of other European languages. Since July 2007, Codru is serving a 3-year mandate as CSO representative on the National Integrity Council in Romania. From Oct. 2007—July 2008, he was an advisor to the Speaker of the lower House of the Romanian Parliament on public consultation processes related to the upcoming European agenda. His latest NGO project relates to establishing a Bucharest-based think-do-tank regarding the implementation of European Union policies in/through Romanian public administration





Notes on the State of Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe

Darina Malova lists some inherent problems of the Civil Society today - generational, geographic and cultural gaps that are crucial to discuss further in order to revitalize an existing gloomy outlook on civic engagement in the CEE region.

The post-communist discourse in the CEE region has been dominated by the concept of 'civil society'. On the one hand, the mass anti-communist mobilization and revolutions of 1989 are perceived as the victory of 'true' and vibrant civil society, and on the other hand, a thesis on weak civil society in CEE has gradually become central to the discussion on the post-communist development. While the former opinions exaggerate the strength of civil society in the late communism, the latter ones usually fail to prove relevant empirical evidence because they compare all empirical indicators to the Western European countries or to the US, or they compare the state of civil society in CEE to the 'high' normative ideal. These two opposite extreme points have been framing most of considerations on the state and future of civil society and have increased a number of relativist evaluations leading to endless debates on definitions and measurement of civil society.

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Given the cacophony of voices I feel encourage to present my highly subjective opinions based on my previous research, academic knowledge and personal observation on the state of civil society in the region referring mostly to non-governmental organizations, which applied for support to CEE Trust. I look at a gloomy picture of civil society in CEE to uncover its strengths and weaknesses that usually cause conflicting evaluations and may shape the sustainability of civil society in the region.

1. The extraordinary and impressive number of registered NGOs in CEE does not indicate the real state of civil society. A majority of these organizations function as a 'sleeping beauty' because they are formal or they do not have strong contacts with the broader population and often are missing grass-roots activists.

2. Mass participation in any kind of associations, not only NGOs is very low. The degree of activity and membership of civil society organizations is minimal and mainly this leads to the image of 'weak' civil society.

3. The structure of civil society is unbalanced, there are different organizational sectors that are isolated and do not cooperate. (a) Organizations that have successfully transformed after the collapse of the communism but they are still dependent on the state/governments. (b) Charitable and recreational organizations without public missions. (c) NGOs and think-tanks that emerged thanks to the generous support of the US donors have become increasingly professional and often are viewed by the public as foreign imposed and privileged, therefore citizens do not tend to support them and participate in. Frequently, one can hear or read about 'ngo-ism' as a new ideology in the region.

4. There is a regional disparity especially related to NGOs and think-tanks that are located in capitals and missing in other regions. The only exceptions are environmental movements and their organizations remained among the most numerous, active and visible also on the regional and local level. The promotion of national and international networks among NGOs is also very important.

5. There is a generational gap in the composition of civil society; many successful NGOs and think-tanks have not prepared the second generation of activists. Moreover, youth organizations are missing from the public debates in the region. Either they are organizationally financially dependent on the state and/or individual institutional framework, such as Council of Youth in Slovakia, or this even more passive and the older generation.

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segment of society has submissive attitudes than

6. The institutional dependent civil NGOs is favor-environment, organiza-viability and infrastructure. In several countries there are no institutional and financial barriers for freedom of associations, laws on the tax assignment that enable citizens and companies to support organizations directly, and there are many legal channels for participation in decision-making, including acts on free access to information, the right to participate in legislation-making process by submitting 'a collective proposal' to legislative drafts published on the Internet and the right to petition parliaments or local authorities. However there are two limits for effective use of such channels. First, it is on the supply side, as citizens do not tend to participate and apathy is increasing. Think-tanks and NGOs tried to mobilize the public in case of serious issues; however, effects of this mobilization differ. Second, on the demand side 'political will' is missing, as politicians tend to ignore public proposal and public deliberation has not yet become a norm.

framework for truly in-society and particularly able. It relates to legal tional capacity, financial

7. Professional, business and employers' organizations and trade unions are better organized and their capacity to participate in decision-making is higher due to special institutional framework according to which drafts of legislation have to be submitted to selected groups defined by specific, laws. Despite this privileged position the recent research indicates that these organizations, especially trade unions, do have less influence on policy making than in the developed democracies.

8. Cultural foundations for an emergence of a vibrant civil society sharing liberal democratic values are weak. (a) The communist legacy has been constantly shaping patterns of behavior and therefore the most common orientation is not to take part - as well as assuming risk - by participating in public affairs. Public participation is still perceived as a risky enterprise. People tend to participate in organizations which are often financially dependent on the state – youth organizations, churches, labor unions. (b) Education

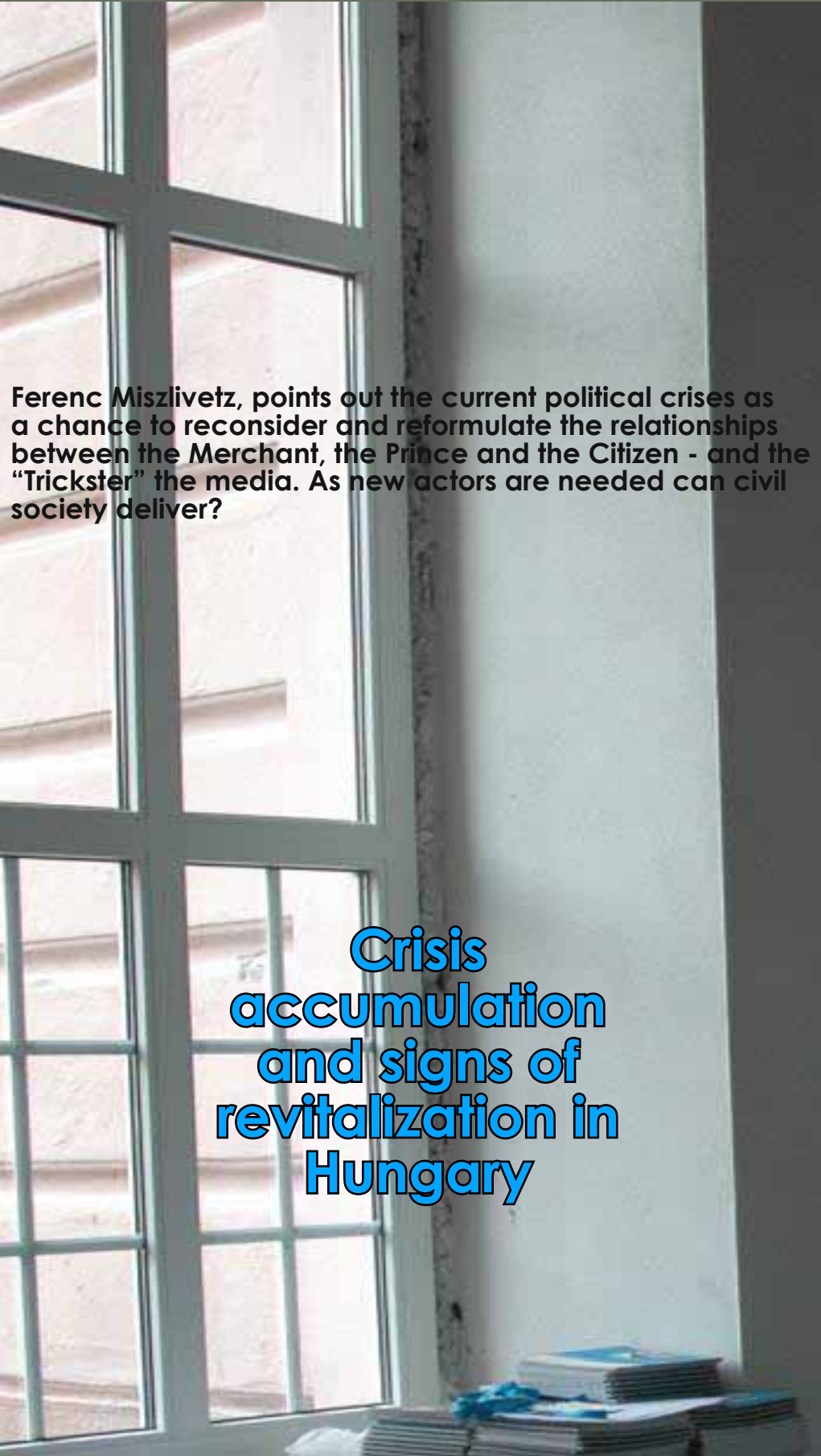
Especially younger generations are increasingly involved in 'uncivil' organizations, i.e. which do not share liberal democratic values, such as skinheads and rowdies.

is important; compare to the Western Europe or the USA educational level is relatively low in CEE and thus participation is also low. There are signs that especially younger generations are increasingly involved in 'uncivil' organizations, i.e. which do not share liberal democratic values, such as skinheads and rowdies. (c) A gap between the political elite and grass-roots has been deepening. Politicians once elected do not accept if media, NGOs and citizens try to make them accountable and this in turn increases political apathy.

9 Reorientation of NGOs and think-tanks to the domestic donors (big international companies) and European Union's funding schemes will require a lot of additional fund-raising skills and effective lobbying. Big businesses in CEE tend to establish their own foundations and assign their tax share exclusively to this foundation and also 'encourage' own employees to donor their tax assignment to these foundations. EU funding has own, very particular priorities and it is not likely that such activities as human right advocacy or watch-dog activities will be able to raise funding from these resources.



Darina Malová is Professor of Political Science at Komenského University, Bratislava. She has a Ph.D. from the Academy of Social Science in Moscow. Ms Malova has published many articles and contributed to several books, mostly on post-accession Slovakia, Institution building in Central and Eastern Europe and EU enlargement. Her recent publications include *Governing New Democracies*.



Ferenc Miszlivetz, points out the current political crises as a chance to reconsider and reformulate the relationships between the Merchant, the Prince and the Citizen - and the "Trickster" the media. As new actors are needed can civil society deliver?

Crisis accumulation and signs of revitalization in Hungary

Back in 1990 Hungary was seen as the most promising country east of the Elba. After the annus mirabilis of 1989, the country was expected to set an example to other former Soviet satellites in transition throughout the region. After nearly two decades, the question has been raised of how Hungarians managed to make such a mess of it all. Why did Hungarians fail to retain and capitalize on the early advantage and positive evaluation that it initially enjoyed? Beyond Hungary's borders – in London or Brussels, and in the new member states that Hungarians once spoke patronizingly about such as Slovakia, Romania and even in the EU candidate of Croatia, the same question is being raised.

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The deterioration itself was neither sudden nor unexpected – there certainly were and are people who sounded the alarm, but their voices were not strong enough. Their concern did not crystallize into a coherent critique or lead to a wider social discourse which aimed to identify solutions. This is primarily a symptom of the weakness of civil society and democracy.

Hungarian society and the political and economic classes, which now have a democratic mandate to lead the country, were largely, and still are, unprepared for deep European integration. Instead of trying to understand and utilize the new opportunities opened up to their society and the Central European region as a whole, they carried on where the party state had left off. Regrettably, there were many areas where this proved possible. As a consequence,

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various disintegrated segments of Hungarian society stand helpless, baffled, increasingly frustrated and sometimes ashamed and angry when faced with the jumbled mess of issues surrounding the robust processes of European integration, globalization and social and economic transition.

The only exception to this general frustration is a small economic and financial elite, which has shown no long term vision for the country's future progress as a whole. They have clearly not even come to appreciate how crucial, indeed, inevitable, it is to take social and political responsibility, even though this is becoming an ever more

inalienable part of the day-to-day activity of any self-respecting multi-national company. The idea of partnership between the Prince, the Merchant and the Citizen has failed to touch the Hungarian political and economic classes to any significant depth. The relationship between the three major actors is more imbalanced in 2009 than it was 20-25 years ago.

Democratic Deficit: The Citizen Loses All

In any society where the rift between external, institutional forms of democracy and its inherent content is permanent and still growing, democracy is in crisis. This is the situation that faces Hungary today. An increasing number of Hungarian citizens think that the machinery of democratic institutions does not serve their interests. Consequently they do not trust these institutions, or the politicians

who directly operate and control them. In these conditions, they do not participate, nor wish to participate, in the debates and actions that take place in the public arena. An opinion widely held amongst Hungarians is that, apart from a very few exceptions, members of the political class are motivated by their own interest in material gain and power. They do not believe that these politicians aim to defend and enhance the public good or that they, the citizens, do have enough power to influence them. A growing number of Hungarian citizens view the present form of democracy with fear, frustration or apathy, unable to identify with it at all. They feel like they have been abandoned. This is a particular fear of freedom and continues into a fear of poverty, which we could call a freedom-poverty syndrome.

The experience of freedom mingled with frustration and fear was not even ameliorated by EU accession in 2004. The de facto solidarity of the European Union has diminished noticeably toward the former Eastern bloc countries. To a great extent this was caused by the Big-Bang nature of enlargement. Beyond striving to keep the costs of enlargement as low as possible, subjective factors such as the generally uneasy atmosphere of core European countries also created an unfavorable context for deepening enlargement and worsened the chances of the process becoming an issue for wider societal concern. Even in the mature democracies of Western Europe, the deterioration of the welfare state and the prominence of the negative impacts of globalization, such as increasing illegal immigration, fear of terrorism, etc., have caused an upsurge in inward-looking and xenophobic attitudes and a loss of interest in the 'new democracies'. This means that only a few years after Eastern enlargement, a paradoxical situation has emerged - the rift between the East and West of Europe, which was expected to disappear both in a social and a social-psychological sense, seems to be widening.

Dealing with deficit

Even if the sense of accumulating loss is not conscious on a day-to-day basis, it lurks in a permanent sense of frustration, having a negative impact on the collective subconscious of society. Beyond the sense of being abandoned, Hungarian society feels trapped. Society is frustrated by a self-destructive sense of helplessness, and aggression and apathy are only enhanced by the fact that society sees no way out of the present situation in the near or distant future.

Social cohesion and integrity is at an absolute low point in Hungary today. The middle-class is weak and powerless, this weakness has many other components, but two of them tower above all the others. As the gates of freedom open wider and the challenges of globalization and European integration shed light on the truth, the lack of knowledge and competence appears more shocking than ever. This is also true of the lack of a sense of responsibility that should come out of a feeling of belonging to a community. In other words, besides a democratic deficit, Hungary now also has to reckon with an intellectual and moral deficit.

Failing to look in the mirror

Because Hungarian society did not take a look in the mirror at the moment of political change, it has not had the experience of democracy and freedom associated with 1989. The old and new political powers did not deem it necessary to lay the ethical foundations for a Third Hungarian Republic and for Hungarian

democracy. Hungarian society and, within that, the embryonic forms of a potential civil society had neither the strength, nor the experience, nor the culture to force this to happen. Thus, the process which came to be termed the democratic transition was nothing more than the transfusion of the thought and behavior patterns of the past regime into the world of democratic institutions.

If a society is unable to imagine that it can break out from a detrimental situation, it will never overcome that situation. For such a “vision” to come about, a society must be able to visualize itself as a political community. Without this vision it cannot make a success of the *res publica*, the affairs of the public.

Today the Hungarian Republic has become in many ways a formality, an empty shell, which owes more protection, legitimacy and content to the EU’s boundaries and institutions than to the sense of responsibility, commitment and mutual solidarity of its citizens. The worst absence is that of the common good, which in a dictatorship is declared from above, but after the dictatorship is over should be re-formulated by democratic means. This is something that was lost in the fervor of the redistribution of power and wealth that continues today. Instead of building a common good, the common bad has been accumulating during the past three decades – something that everyone can see and feel, smell and touch but which no one is willing to take upon themselves. In fact dismantling the public bad requires as much collective action and identification as the construction of the public good. The two are inseparable.

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Hungary, similar to other countries in the region, is now in a danger zone, in a borderline position. As Elemér Hankiss put it, “Central and Eastern European societies have grown far too entangled with their own problems. Their short-sightedness causes them to stay blind to the wider context”¹. Amid the chaotic conditions of liminality, the pressure to create a new order may bring about the disintegration of society and cause “distortion in its members’ mental structures and patterns of behaviour.”² “The society in question may sink into such profound crisis that regeneration comes only after a long time and at the cost of great difficulties, and only if the society is willing to undergo rejuvenation.”³

Hungarian society may irrevocably lapse into insignificance and disintegration unless the dangers are comprehensively recognized on a broad social scale. This needs to be followed by active programs, like the genuine renewal of institutions, of economic behavior, the behavior of political parties and civil society networks.

The increasingly oligarchic nature of political parties has led to the emergence of a hierarchic and impenetrable system of mutual political dependency which easily repels any external or internal criticism as well as any initiative aimed at purification or renewal. The oligarchs themselves use the politically correct rhet-

¹ See Elemér Hankiss, “Transition and Liminality: Possible interpretations of the transformation processes in Eastern Europe,” *Eurozine*, 2007 July 26, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-07-26-hankiss-hu.html>

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

oric of reform, dialogue and renewal that conforms to EU standards, so they are not easy to contest on the level of simple everyday discourse. Nor do we see much determination to contest them either on behalf of the centralized or the commercial media which has its own affiliations to respect.

In the 21st century the central principles informing social organization and governance are network and collateral organization, permanent flow, the integration of a growing number of people in local, regional and supranational decision-making, of interdependence. It is impossible to break out of the present situation. Hungary needs to accept, understand and learn to apply these principles in order to preserve and present its deepest culture, values and traditions. This may well be the heaviest price and the one which is most difficult to pay for the years that have been lost, for the ever-growing ineptitude and the resulting tensions and failures. To break with the paternalistic, authoritarian traditions and short-sighted visions of Kádárism and other, earlier forms of feudalism, to stop the habit of placing short-term individual self-interest above all else and protecting it to the long-term thinking in broad point, we're not the ones to with the culture of unreliabil-ication, false facades and achievement – these are all completed. Hungary won't through mentality of "we'll like we survived everything else". What it does lead to is the emergence of a lasting divide within the EU between the centre and the periphery, to structural dependence and subordination. This way Hungary may stake out its own long-term position.

There is no chance for a stable democracy unless it is built from below.

infinite, to break resistance to perspectives ("what's the decide anyway"), to break ity, pretension, miscommu-deliberate suppression of tasks that are waiting to be get far with the muddling survive this, too, somehow,

The relationships between the Merchant, the Prince and the Citizen, as well as of the "Trickster"⁴ who stands between them – the media – also need to be reconsidered and reformulated. This is a challenge which urgently demands answers on all levels of governance, economic and social life. This must be done within the framework of local communities, and on regional, European and global levels.

Nearly twenty years after the political turnabout, Hungary now needs a new social contract and must lay down the ethical, political, institutional and intellectual foundations for its 21st century democracy. There is no chance for a stable democracy unless it is built from below. It is, therefore, essential, that profound changes take place in the attitudes, consciousness and behavior of society. Democracy needs debate, increased self-confidence and a thorough consideration given to common affairs. The forms, frames and means of democracy need to be based on renewed and increasing social participation, many-sided discourse, and an open and constant search for consensus. This is a time-consuming process, particularly as the problems have accumulated and been left untreated. After gaining conscious awareness, the process of self-therapy can begin.

⁴ For a theoretical elaboration of the relationship between the four big players, see the excellent dissertation by Jody Jensen, *Globalizing Governance in a Multistakeholder World* (Budapest: Corvinus university, 2008).

Hungary needs a new age of reform. Facing up to the facts and the resulting process of self-therapy may be aided by spontaneously organized forums or increasingly rich networks of civil society, and enhanced opportunities for communication. Even so, the emergence of a new social consensus is a complicated and difficult task that cannot take place without profound insight, tireless efforts at alignment and a genuine openness to compromise.

The strange revitalization of civil society

2006 can be described as a demarcation line in the history of the state-civil society relationship in Hungary. After years of dependence, marginalization and being entrapped by political (left-right) polarization, subsequent waves of self-mobilization started in 2006. This occurred after the re-election of the Hungarian Socialist Party and the leaking of the prime minister's "lie speech". In this speech, the prime minister, who was also the party president at the time, acknowledged in a rather vulgar and emotional speech at a closed party meeting, that they were re-elected with the help of lies about the economic and social state of the country.

The deterioration of social and political trust, the growing anomie, the unfruitful relationship between a weak state and a weak civil society, culminated in a sort of genuinely "original crisis accumulation"

After the leak, people started gathering spontaneously in front of Parliament demanding the resignation of the prime minister. In the absence of a proper response, and also due to the lack of any dialogue, the spontaneous protests continued and included the use of anti-Semitic and anti-globalization slogans. Some of the protesters used ancient Hungarian symbols, which had been abused by the Nazis during WW II, such as the flag of Árpád. The ruling left-liberal coalition,

with the support of the vast majority of the media who focused on the right wing radicals, reproduced the old dichotomy: the protesters were proto-fascist populists tacitly supported and encouraged by the right-wing parliamentary opposition whose intention was to "bring politics to the streets."

The political crisis has deepened and enhanced the lack of trust in fundamental institutions such as the Parliament, the police and in democratic institutions generally. By 2008, the deterioration of social and political trust, the growing anomie, the unfruitful relationship between a weak state and a weak civil society, culminated in a sort of genuinely "original crisis accumulation". The global financial and economic crisis hit an already crisis-ridden and weakened country, adding new elements to the process of crisis accumulation. Surprisingly, the period of preparation and campaign for the European Parliament election motivated previously dormant elements of civil society. A second wave of self-mobilization took momentum: hitherto inactive or inward-looking local NGOs organized themselves into civil roundtables, demanding more influence in local governmental decision-making; internet web-portals offered their assistance in connecting the separated small civil society networks to each other, providing the vision of a new "network society", that is a network of networks. Set courageously against the manipulative official "wisdom" that there is no more space in the political palette, so there is no chance for a new political movement to become a real political player, young people organized two new political groupings: The Humanist Party and Politics can be Different (LMP- Lehet Más a Politika). These new democratic, liberal and pro-European movements are

the signs of a healthy social immune system in the light of a robustly dynamic extreme right breakthrough.

As a direct consequence of the lack of capacity and willingness of authorities to deal with the deepening problems such as poverty, unemployment and discrimination of a growing and more assertive Roma population, tensions among the Roma minority and non-Roma majority have grown into violence and even murder in the most under-developed parts of the countryside and in some of the larger cities in eastern Hungary. The Hungarian Guard found its legitimacy as a guarantor of security of non-Roma village inhabitants. Marching in uniforms similar to Hungarian Nazis in WW II, they reinforce fearful images rather than social reconciliation. Backed by the Hungarian Guard, Jobbik ("More Right", or "The Better One") launched an unexpectedly successful campaign and will have 3 MEPs to the European Parliament; meanwhile the liberals (SzDSz) have completely fallen out. The most likely explanation for the breakthrough of the extreme right is that they are directly addressing the Roma issue. In other words, Jobbik is gaining votes from all of the other parties who were unable to address a burning social and cultural problem, not because they are speaking about solving it or handling it.

The rapid, landslide changes in the political arena are not yet over. There is a growing vacuum between the well-separated world of the political "elite" and the rest of society. Whether new democratic groups can fill up this empty space supported by a dynamic civil society is an open question. Certainly, politics can be different, and today the overwhelming majority of Hungarian citizens believe that it should be different. What proportions and democratic quality these alternatives will take depends a lot on the networking – self-mobilizing capacity and organizational effectiveness of civil society. We will soon learn how much democracy has matured in the two decades of uneven and imbalanced transition, and whether a new and healthy balance can be made between the major players.

Ferenc Miszlivetz *is a director of the Institute for Social and European Studies,*

and Jean Monnet Chair at the European Centre of Excellence, Dániel Berzsenyi College in Szombathely, western Hungary. He is a Scientific Adviser for the Institute of Political Sciences at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He holds a Ph.D. in Twentieth Century European History and a doctorate in International Relations from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. From 2001 to 2003 he was a member of the SSRC steering committee on Global Security and Cooperation research project. In 2000 he was principal investigator in the European cross-border research project "Preparity" –Structural Policy and Regional Planning Along the External EU Frontier to Central Europe: Preparing for Eastern Enlargement. He has lectured at many European universities and institutions, including: the University of Bologna, Wissenschaftszentrum für Sozialwissenschaften (WZB) Berlin, Columbia University, the University of Vienna, the University of Salzburg, Babes-Bolyai University and has been very involved in European Integration issues throughout his career. In 2005 he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Hungarian Republic for international research and professional activity.





Civil Society 2.0?

Civic organizations post EU accession – the burn-out syndrome

- A Very Subjective View -

Ioana Avadani provides us with a list of issues, highlighting categorization of civil society in two groups, lack of internal and external support, common misconceptions among the public and internal organizational problems affecting the future.

A bit of casual history

The “civil society” was quite an alien concept in the communist countries and it remained so for many years in the so called “transitional democracies”. Even now, most Romanians associate the “civil society” with just a couple of NGOs and they tend to keep those accountable for what happens (or not) in terms of public reaction. Usually, powerful civil social actors – religious organizations, trade unions, etc. – are not perceived as being parts of the “civil society”. Other mechanisms, especially public participation, are more elusive, not being perceived as being materially relevant for the society.

The first NGOs that appeared after the fall of the communism were democratic values, or to re-situation somehow imprinted the CSOs as organizations perceived as gathering in human rights advocates/demunity-based, social needs immediate solutions to clear

The first NGOs that appeared in Romania after the fall of the communism were dedicated either to democratic values, or to relief administration.

The organizations catering for less obvious group interests – animal lovers, alternative cultural organizations – are not considered to be mainstream. While the numbers multiplied (there are currently some 70,000 NGOs registered in Romania), just a couple of hundreds are really active – and with only a handful enjoying significant public recognition and/or notoriety.

in Romania after the dedicated either to relief administration. This the whole evolution of that, until this day, are two main streams: the defenders and the caterers, delivering and present problems.

From the recent history prospective, there are some differences between the two main types of NGOs. The HR advocates are perceived as being the “big” organization (in terms of annual turnover and amount of projects run rather than number of staff), visible, aggressive, connected with the centers of power. Their apparition was stimulated (and in some cases, was helped) by international players and they preserved this connection with the international governmental and non-governmental scene (including by being quoted in international documents). This support from abroad also functioned as an “import of credibility”. They are mainly national in their coverage and (mostly) Bucharest-based. Through their programs, they managed to impact public policies, legislation and affect the rules of the game at large, at societal level.

The CSOs delivering social services are mostly small, local, community-based, less visible outside their constituencies and struggling for public recognition. Through the services they provide, they impact immediately and beneficially the life of their constituencies and beneficiaries. Of course, there are notable exceptions that are testing the rule, without infirming it.

Given this unbalance in terms of visibility and public profile, some of the characteristics of the “big organizations” have been projected, generally and uncritically, to the whole civil sector. Therefore, the “civil society” has played, in some periods, the burden of being (perceived as) the real opposition of the country, in times when the political opposition was weak. Moreover, the “civil society” is perceived as being more of an “intellectual elite” rather than grass-root initiatives of concerned citizens, being build top-down, relying more on foreign aid than on the contribution of their members/constituencies/local donors.

There are also negative features associated with the “civil society”. Given to some distorted political discourse meant to dwarf the criticism of the NGOs, they are labeled as “burning/eating/stealing foreign grants”. Their critics tend not to take into consideration their contribution to the development of the society or the specialization of the most serious organizations, focusing more on the costs associated with their functioning. Accessing foreign money (especially European funds) is sometimes perceived as something surreptitiously dangerous and malevolent. Unfinished and un-digested public debates on corruption consolidated the idea that the European funds are there only for the use of the “shrewd” and dishonest.

Against this troubled and sometimes unfair background, the civil society faces some problems that may amount to a systemic crisis if not dealt with properly.

Current challenges for the CSOs

Constituency identity crisis

While the CSOs delivering social services managed to clearly define their constituencies and associate these constituencies as an element of their brand (as low-profile as it may be), the human rights organizations still lack such a clear definition in the public opinion. Their activities deal with rather fluid and “ethereal” notions such as freedom, respect for civil liberties, accountability, democratization – but these are not strong social values. People either do not care for them, or consider that they are/should be embedded in their lives, given as such, once the country “graduated” the democratic test and joined the European Union. Constituencies as broad as the entire society are hard to monitor, hard to evaluate in terms of impact (especially when measurable indicators are expected). Concepts and ideas to which little or no social value is attached – such as the human rights matters, especially those dealing with minority rights – are difficult to advocate for. The CSOs involved in this field have the difficult task to fight the authorities for an enabling environment for the exercise of such rights, while “forcing those rights down the throat” of inexperienced, unaware and rather amorphous targeted audiences. Paradoxically enough, the EU accession made the work of such organizations more complicated, as both the external pressure and the internal expectancy decreased. Given this low level of social implication and valorization, the very legitimacy of such organizations is at stake.

Constituencies as broad as the entire society are hard to monitor, hard to evaluate in terms of impact

No internal support for the civil sector through CSR

The “democratic graduation” came with the expectable and foreseen exit of the main international donors, who have provided the main resources for the CSOs. In theory, their place should have been filled up by the increasing local resources, mainly coming from responsible governments or concerned businesses, via their corporate social responsibility programs. The experience of the last years demonstrated that CSR is just a budding concept – often misunderstood, misused and abused by the business sector. One time too often, the CSR programs are used as PR or advertising opportunities by the companies. They support CSOs social programs, but ask the recipients to make sure they get the deserved visibility, through contracts that resemble more to advertising clauses. Even a quick analysis of the agendas of the most CSR programs indicates a heavy “social agenda” – most of the companies’ priorities are associated with

poverty reduction, children, education, environment and, sometimes, health and domestic violence. None of the CSR programs includes democracy, participation, transparency or accountability. This prompts us to believe that the CSR programs are just an expression of the “emotional vampirism” present quite frequently in other sectors of the society (media, populist political measures, etc), a conduct building on people's sympathy and emotions rather than on clearly identified needs and priorities.

Many civil society activists feel the need to reassess their positions and evaluate their priorities.

No external support for CSOs

Romania's accession into EU put the local CSOs in a rather awkward position, as they found themselves competing for support on a larger and more diverse market. Nobody denies the value of competition, as long as it is fair. But in this “project funds field”, the battle is not at all equal, as local CSOs have to compete not only with larger but similar organizations in Europe, but with companies specialized in project management, with significantly larger turnouts and access to resources. As the accent, in most of the public bids, is put mainly on the management capacity – rather than on the actual content expertise, the local CSOs find themselves in junior positions (just delivering experts for the international consortia) or downright at the losing end of the process. While most of the local CSOs developed “survival strategies”, setting up alliances and partnerships with larger foreign organizations, the issue of their secondary importance in such programs persists.

The burn-out syndrome

Many civil society activists feel today the need to reassess their positions and to evaluate their priorities. Given the vast expertise they accumulated and the diverse and multiple contacts they socially established, as well as their management skills, they are highly appreciated on the consultancy market. Therefore, a significant number of CSO people took the leap into the business field, “depopulating” the civil sector. Such an attitude is perfectly understandable and justifiable – especially given the financial benefits. The question of CSOs is how to keep such good, qualified, experienced people, as well as how to attract “new blood” into the sector. It appears that the initial enthusiasm for the non-profit sector wore off, as the new generations seem to be more pragmatic, more career-driven and more competitive.

The organizational scarcity

This aspect is closely related to the previous one. Most CSOs are built conservatively, from the point of view of the human resources, as most of them are project-based funded. Therefore, there is little margin for steady, consistent growth inside these organizations. They cannot offer a predictably climbing (and attractive) career-path (promotions, etc) to young, ambitious professionals. Most Romanian CSOs are too small to grow from the inside, while it is very difficult for them to grow institutionally. Moreover, for most CSOs, their identity is strictly related (sometimes even overlapping) with the one of their leaders. While this helps the visibility, it weakens, on a long term, the institutional construction of those organizations, turning them in the public's eye, into “personal projects”, rather than in entities with mission, goals and strategies.

Ioana Avadani is the executive director of the Center for Independent Journalism in Bucharest. She has experience of some 15 years in the media field, having worked as a news agency editor, a TV editor and as a media developer and is dedicated to a freer media and real citizens' voices being heard.





Istvan Rev suggests that we have to reexamine some of our assumptions about engagement and to ensure more open societies in the future, make the effort to bridge growing gaps by opening our eyes for the ways of the young.

In case the Communist systems had collapsed forty years ago, in 1968, it would have been extremely difficult to reach an agreement at the roundtables. The potential participants at that time would have come with incommensurable views, radical, experimental, utopian ideas about self-governance, common (as opposed to private and state) property, support to the second economy, reconfigured peasant communities, influenced by the idea that in order to be a realist one should demand nothing less than the unimaginable. That was the time of the new left, anthropological romanticism, national liberation, radical critical thinking, when young people, especially, but not exclusively students, played a central role in the international public dis- years later, at the time collapsed, the ideological wasteland, there except the fantasy about "end of history", well-stitutions of seemingly well- and parliamentary democ- the elected, seemingly en- instead of Vaclav Havel's naïve post-political, post-parliamentary, post-consumerist utopia of the "power to the people" in his "Power of the Powerless". By 1989, the democratic oppositions had already given up their longing for autochthonous, human-faced solutions, and settled on the attainable. The lack of real radical alternatives left no choice but to import, take over practices, institutions, ideas from the West, and this ideologically uninteresting moment made it possible to reach quick agreements at the roundtables; there were no real inspiring discussions, although the moment was unprecedented in the sense that something truly new, previously unheard of could have been built on the ruins of the collapsed structure. Fortunately that did not happen, and the former Communist world did not become once more the experimental ground of large-scale untried and extremely dangerous social experiments. The countries joined the "Partnership for Peace", NATO, WTO, the World bank, IMF, the European Union, became almost normalized in a somewhat perverted way: mixing routines, practices, reflexes of the one-party-state with ideas and structures of market economy, liberal parliamentary democracy and anachronistic, conservative ambitions of the imagined past.

By 1989, the democratic oppositions had already given up their longing for autochthonous, human-faced solutions, and settled on the attainable.

formation of national and course. Fortunately, twenty when Communism in fact landscape looked com- looked around, saw an ide- was nothing on the horizon, possibility of the imminent uninspiring practices, the in- functioning market systems racies, power exercised by lightened political elites,

Left leaning ideas and utopias became compromised during the decades of state-socialism, so for young people who were born or socialized after the Col- lapse, the almost only remaining option nowadays, in search of radical utopias, are mostly radical right-wing ideas and movements, inherited from an

The only remaining option nowadays, in search of radical utopias, are mostly radical right-wing ideas and movements, inherited from an imagined, unreal past improperly understood.

imagined, unreal past improperly understood. The break around 1989/1991 immediately turned the re- cent past into an alien world; it did not seem to be the prehistory of the present but a different country, the elements of which could be resurrected at will. It became almost impossible to find a reasonable, in- telligent way back to the past; history was lost once more, after it had been lost several times during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', most dramati- cally after the World Wars. There was no time, no op-

portunity to face history either on the national, regional, European or global level, to make use anything one – in principle – could have learned in a serious responsible way from the past. This situation makes rational discourse about important social issues extremely difficult.

Young people, born around and after the Collapse live in a different world than their older contemporaries: according to studies conducted both in the East and West, young people are nowadays influenced much more by their peers than by their parents or teachers; they live in their own world saturated by information of their own choice, conversing mostly with members of their age-group, influenced by limited and highly selective websites, seduced by focused and targeted advertisement campaigns. Members of older generations do not even know much about the world of the younger people, since they do not see the magazines, publications, entertainment younger people consume in the solitude in front of their computer screen. The magazines at the newspaper kiosks that are visible for passersby do not tell much about the consumption habits, interests of these younger generations, since they consume news and information increasingly on-line.

Schools, traditional institutions and meeting places become more and more outdated, obsolete; teachers are lost, force the young people to go off-line, and what they can offer seem more and more useless, uninteresting. These developments lead to the breakdown of meaningful communication between members of different generations. These trends do not necessarily lead to social anomie; people find real and virtual communities among their peers, mostly but not exclusively on-line; new types of networks are formed; new ways of communication and collaboration are being born; new methods of learning are discovered and introduced. A few decades ago the early adopters of new technologies were customarily people between 30-50 years of age, nowadays the earliest adopters are mostly young people between 12-25. Under these new conditions the traditional meaning of the “political” and the “social” become undermined and useless, and in order to become contemporaries of ourselves, we should accept the fact that the familiar terms, settings and structures should be critically and creatively reexamined.

After 1989, we live in a world where the borderlines between macro-and micro-interventions became emerging since the end possible for local actors to Today it is possible to or- nization; to form a move- movement; to act politi- to a political organization. for all those actors who fluence, and gently direct the characteristics of the that movements do not

Information, in this new media landscape is usually decontextualized, unstructured, uninterpreted, and aggravate to a growing general experience of life without fixed context.

visible ways, there is no or less hierarchy; cooperation is decentralized, there are tacit, mostly unstated rules. What motivates people in taking part in collaborative actions are elusive social clues, people are widely distributed both physically and socially, and meet regularly in the virtual place. The news they consume are both extremely global, but at the same time local as well: young

people live mostly in their own immediate circles, but consume global news almost real time. Information, in this new media landscape is usually decontextualized, unstructured, uninterpreted, and aggravate to a growing general experience of life without fixed context. The new movements emerge by themselves, rather than being organized from top down by traditional organizers. People should feel that they are able to self-identify with the aims and ideas of the projects they take part in. What would just seem to be a way or infrastructure of communication, are in fact tools of “emergence”, self-organizing means, ways of collaboration, cooperation, voluntarism, activism. Young people are sensitive to political and social issues, but the repertoire of these issues differ from traditional concerns (access to information, access to knowledge in general, self-determination, autonomy, individual liberties, human rights in a wide sense, the right and opportunity to move – physically and virtually – right to relevance, etc.) Since they are able to organize themselves instantly without prior preparation or without any formal organization, there is an important element of unpredictability and unforeseen character of their actions in concert.

For philanthropic organizations, international NGOs, instead of supporting of well-definable movements in traditional ways, it seems wiser to support issues, explorations of problems, individuals with unique ideas

For philanthropic organizations, international NGOs, instead of supporting of well-definable movements in traditional ways, it seems wiser to support issues, explorations of problems, individuals with unique ideas, who can act as “hubs”, helping to create real and virtual space for decent new ideas, help changing the character of traditional ways of education and instruction, to help change the relationship between teachers and students, support rational and relevant public discussions in novel ways about important social, cultural issues, to recognize that the borderline between the social and the cultural is changing in

a dramatic way. It is important to help to gain access to public information, to make information about crucial public issues available, in order to make state and local officials accountable in decentralized, non-political ways. It is crucially important to help launching relevant, important, even very small-size projects. Although it may sound paradoxical, the attitude, motivation, and beliefs of people, especially young people, are formed by as a consequence of their choices and actions, and not vice versa, despite the received wisdom of traditional pedagogy and economic theory. “It is our actions” – stated Aristotle – “that determine our dispositions”. We do and chose certain things, not because we have certain ingrained predisposition, but because of our repeated actions that teach us how to choose, what to think, what attitudes we should embrace.

What seems to be the sphere of technology is in fact not just technology but the eminent sphere of the social. Technical devices are as much part of political, social, and moral life as social practices, laws and regulations. Technology enables people to contribute to the production or shaping of public goods in new ways. Our world is shaped not only by ideologies, beliefs, narratives but by the ways technology is used for the common good. It is possible to shape the ways how technologies (in the widest sense of the term), cooperation, collaboration are used in positive ways that contribute both to the well-being of the individual and the community at large.



Isván Rév studied at Eötvös Loránd and York Universities. He has worked on the economic history of the post-World War II period, and his narrower field of research is historical anthropology. He has been actively involved in ecological issues and published numerous articles criticizing the environmental damage caused by centralized economic planning. Mr. Rév has been a visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley, a fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and a research fellow at the Getty Center in Los Angeles. He was a founding member of the "Danube Circle", a past winner of the Right for Livelihood award (the alternative Nobel Prize) of the Swedish Parliament and in 1995 he was the recipient of the New Europe Prize. Mr. Rév was one of the founding editors of *The Budapest Review of Books*, he is a professor in the CEU History and Political Science departments, the director of the Open Society Archives and the chair of the Open Society Institute (OSI)-Information Sub-Board, member of the OSI Board of Directors. His most recent work is *Retroactive Justice - Prehistory of Post-Communism* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2005).



The current quandaries of NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe

International funding and steering has created unrooted CSOs in CEE and with little contact with grassroots, increasingly dependent on EU funds designed far away from reality, Jiri Kopal is arguing that civil society is incapable taking a lead in society

In the last two decades, freedom in both the private and public spheres has grown in Central and Eastern Europe at an unprecedented rate¹. The development of civil society has been due, in large measure, to the extraordinary level of aid – idealistic if not always far-sighted – given to non-traditional organizations in the region such as watchdogs, think tanks and advocacy groups. The most generous grants came largely from foundations in the United States, with smaller contributions from the British, Canadian and Dutch embassies or programs supported by their ministries of foreign affairs. In contrast, in much of continental Europe, from Germany and Finland in the north to Portugal and Greece in the south, there is no strong tradition of supporting watchdog or advocacy organizations that are independent of government and political parties and their foundations and funds.

In awarding grants, foundations and embassies wanted to bring about change in various areas of these sealed societies, with thousands of former members and secret police had been irrevocably aim was to create strong law, a system of natural enshrined in law and recent decades, continue of this kind have helped achieve both commercial for ordinary citizens. In these, however, despite 'small revolutions' between 1989 and 1991, the very concept of 'change' remains traumatic for most people, who prefer to cling to traditional practices within their political and professional circles. Many of them cannot bring themselves to countenance the adoption of good practice from other countries that will lead to the stricter observance and protection of the rule of law in their own.

Many NGOs face a very difficult challenge in finding ways to replace the idealism and financial support provided by US foundations and some European governments with funding from sources in Central and Eastern Europe

previously hermetically their many hundreds communist party members, whose integrity damaged. An important root for the rule of law and practical principles enforceable by law. In continuously-evolving systems Western societies to social success and dignity post-communist societies – what could be termed

Consequently, many NGOs face a very difficult challenge in finding ways to replace the idealism and financial support provided by US foundations and some European governments with funding from sources in Central and Eastern Europe, given that their societies and citizens do not yet have a tradition of charitable giving² and do not have many counterparts among the older EU members in the West as models for inspiration.

Here I would like to present some potentially controversial arguments that I hope will encourage further critical reflection and a lively debate on the development of civil society, or at least those parts of it involved in governance and the rule of law.

¹ While in Britain, France and Germany, anti-terror measures after 11/9 began to interfere with the right to privacy more or less immediately and were combined with the increase of Big Brother technologies, these developments only started to have an effect in Central and Eastern Europe some 3-4 years ago, as can be seen from government approval of dangerous policies and legislation.

² With the exception of ad hoc humanitarian crises such as earthquakes, floods, tsunamis and the like, or even on occasion aid to children in orphanages or the homeless.

Professional NGOs, but to some extent artificially created

Are full-time, fully paid up employees of NGOs part of civil society, or are they simply ascending another kind of career ladder? Some dissidents from the communist era have been embittered on seeing that the kind of work that they did previously on a voluntary basis has been remunerated for the last fifteen to nineteen years by foundations that come to the region only on condition that the grantees can communicate with them in English. As many of these NGOs also prioritize and promote interests held by sometimes unpopular minorities – here I could mention the conditions in different places of detention (such as prisons, orphanages, psychiatric hospitals, care homes or asylum centers), the Roma community, the mentally disabled or the influence of transnational corporations – these organizations are sometimes regarded as somehow unnatural, at least until there is a visible or overwhelming problem that needs to be solved. It is also very common in these societies to feel that politicians and the state or regional authorities should be responsible for preventing and solving any and all problems or tensions.

Now consider those international NGO Board members who come from various English-speaking countries to Central and Eastern Europe for quarterly meetings with no actual constituencies in the very countries they criticize for trampling on minority rights or endangering the environment. Are they pursuing their own agendas, or providing a career for permanent or temporary international travelers? Do NGOs of this kind contribute to civil society? They often lack any counterpart or active ally at a local or national level, and it is therefore difficult to see how their policies can benefit specific individuals in practice nowadays. How do others at a national level regard their role? Shouldn't we question the legitimacy and validity of their arguments for change in practices that they criticize at a local level? Wouldn't calls for change be more successful in the long term if they were based on relationships of trust and active involvement with people and institutions at the grassroots level, rather than external criticism?

Wouldn't calls for change be more successful in the long term if they were based on relationships of trust and active involvement with people and institutions at the grassroots level, rather than external criticism?

When public interest NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe collaborate, they agree to focus on only a few major issues at any one time, since the problems to be addressed are so vast. The authorities have a great deal of power but are also largely indifferent, while corporations violate workers' rights and pollute the environment on a regular basis. The NGOs find that it is not realistic to rely on people who do voluntary work in the evenings but have full-time jobs during the day. Whereas Western European civil societies depend to some extent on part-time volunteers, in Central and Eastern Europe volunteers (except for university students) are overwhelmed by the work to be done and their achievements are usually limited to public announcements and one or two events or round-table discussions. As a result, a 'volunteers-only' mode of operation without professional administrative back-up does not constitute a driving force capable of bringing about societal change. Without long-term financial support, NGOs are unable to create stable independent institutions or trusted think tanks that can advocate and press for legislative changes or pursue cases that have languished in court for years. Western European societies tend to respect the rule of law as a consequence of discussing and solving problems more gradu-

ally and naturally, over a long period of time. Societies in Central and Eastern Europe, however, don't only have to overcome the legacy of paternalism and draw closer to the Western European model, but also face the same new challenges as other parts of Europe and the world.

Civil society, without leadership from lawyers, economists, academics and the like, tends to mature only in the wake of tragic or emotional events.

Civil society, without leadership from lawyers, economists, academics and the like, tends to mature only in the wake of tragic or emotional events. Such events may help launch successful careers on an individual basis, for example in politics, which can occasionally have a positive effect. At the same time, catastrophic situations make it far more difficult to construct stable civil institutions that are committed to achieving long-term goals regarding the rule of law and are able to remain independent from the centers of power.

If the professional NGOs were able to persuade at least some sections of the local population that their goals would benefit society, members of the public might be willing to contribute a small percentage of their salaries or commercial income to support them, thus replacing foreign sources³. Between three and six NGOs in each country of the region, some of them with an international humanitarian focus, did stage public campaigns that were featured in the media and generated a certain amount of public support. But a handful of NGOs do not create a civil society. If the majority of professional NGOs, many of them defending the interest of marginalized groups, were unable to persuade the public that they deserve their backing, do they lack legitimacy? Are they incapable of doing anything more than managing a few EU projects, while sometimes concealing their true goals from the eyes of an indifferent and unwieldy EU bureaucracy⁴ at the same time? Do these NGOs deserve to survive or not? I personally have always thought not, as it is unfair to expect that external sources will always support such national NGOs on a permanent basis. Societies get what they deserve, both with regard to politics and civil society. But is this not too harsh a judgment in a globalised world, where in some places people need the support of those with similar values and a similar style of working based elsewhere to implement goals that increasingly frequently go beyond national boundaries?

What should be done when, after almost twenty years of unprecedented levels of international philanthropy, the next stage of development could easily see

³ Attempts to replace foreign sources of funding with corporate charity have proved unrealistic because businesses in the region tend to be small with very limited and strict project criteria lacking the wherewithal to fund even a single salaried member of staff in an NGO for a year, and often providing no financial support at all. Moreover, charity from the business sector is at best only a partial solution, since entrepreneurs starting up new businesses usually have enough trouble drawing a salary themselves, let alone generating enough profit to fund an NGO. In addition, there are then fewer capable people available to work on public interest protection, as the best of them have to take part in activities that compete for profit.

⁴ I cannot imagine anything as far-removed from the citizen as this otherwise quite useful formation of European states. Have 'leaders' ever in the history of mankind previously attempted to submit something as unreadable as the Lisbon Treaty (a refrigerator service manual would be more comprehensible) to the public for a referendum – even if in order to achieve very important and necessary outcomes for the ordinary citizens of the EU? How can such officials understand what is required to develop and support civil society at a national let alone a local level? Only with the help of national governments and their authorities which are very often blighted by conflicts of interest, corruption and passive resistance to reform of the rule of law and law-enforcement?

matters of public interest falling increasingly under the influence of the state⁵ and four to six political parties (as well as their foundations and think tanks), with the input of civic volunteers in last place? How strategic and far-sighted will those idealistic philanthropists feel when they see their legacy vanishing in this way? What actually is their legacy? Do they have any idea?

What disadvantages should be considered in connection with the inevitable growth of the information society (since the advantages are more or less clear, and will not provoke critical discussion)? IT development cannot replace face to face communication between people. Meetings and discussions among NGOs are particularly useful for sharing knowledge, information, experience and insights. However, NGO personnel in Central and Eastern Europe have met only very rarely in the last three or four years, especially when compared with previous years. NGO members in Western Europe meet a little more regularly, often paying their own travel and hotel expenses.⁶ NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe, on the other hand, are unable to bear the cost of travel and accommodation, and invariably need project support.

Many web pages are never visited and are of little use to anyone when a project ends after 1 or 2 years.

There is a lack of key contacts in NGOs in this region who are able to communicate on the international arena. The very few 'focal people' in any particular NGO are generally overwhelmed by the volume of international e-mail communication, as they will be working simultaneously on specific national projects at the same time. As a result, many contacts never get a chance to develop, also because of the impossibility of even succeeding in arranging to meet.

Many web pages are never visited and are of little use to anyone when a project ends after one or two years. The sites are not sufficiently interactive and NGOs do not have enough money to pay administrators who can coordinate discussions on 2.0 web profiles every day. Although some volunteers have the ability to craft such web pages and blogs successfully, they seldom participate in key matters such as legislative proposals, impact litigation, long-term advocacy strategies or practical advice on lobbying politicians. They simply spend most of their free time on the internet, replacing 'pub discussions' with 'internet discussions'. They do not have a place where they can meet regularly and lack the energy and strategies for improving the issues about which they have been complaining. The solution has to be closer association with more

23-27 year-olds without any previous work experience, particularly in an NGO – have been trained under EU guidelines to use only formalistic criteria

⁵ These societies also successfully functioned for a long time in the western part of continental Europe, established chiefly because of the fear of socialist promises from the Soviet bloc after World War II, with the tremendous expansion of the welfare state, predominantly in the seventies. There are of course many advantages and disadvantages to these developments in comparison with the former communist bloc countries that have now become EU members, which will have to be debated in the future.

⁶ Members of NGOs in the West typically have higher salaries than those in Central and Eastern Europe, which come from different sources (for example university posts or independent jobs in fields other than their volunteer involvement in NGOs). Some – especially in the Netherlands – work only four days a week and therefore have more time for civil activities. NGO volunteers in the West are also more likely to be more idealistic about their work.

professional organizations. Problems can occur if these people prove to be individualistic and uninterested in being part of a wider movement or structures managed on a different basis from their blogs and forums.

EU project policies

Problems abound when EU grant policies are managed at the local level, quite apart from the well-known problems concerning the unbelievable length of time it takes to administer grants and calls for proposals directly in 'Space Shuttle Brussels'⁷. All too often, the EU's bureaucratic software malfunctions, and NGOs often confront complicated IT systems that fail before a proposal is completed. Here again, IT development can play a rather negative role.

In addition, although EU forms can readily accept quantitative criteria, they fail to provide for the entry of qualitative data, particularly those that address human rights and other issues of public interest. At the end of the project, administrators and evaluators – 23-27 year-olds without any previous work experience, particularly in an NGO – have been trained under EU guidelines to use only formalistic criteria. This has become humiliating for some NGOs, and many organization heads refuse to tolerate this approach. Some of them have already left or less abandoning public potential and abilities will be the EU's technocratic evaluators among the new EU leaders. On the other hand, it is true that there have been problems with transparency and accountability in the civil society sector, so these complicated systems have been developed partly to counteract fraud. Therefore one could argue again that civil society in the EU has got what it deserves.

A lot of money has been wasted, which is not unusual during transitional periods.

National and local NGOs from Central and Eastern Europe are currently not in a position to maintain a presence in Brussels and are consequently unable to promote their ideas and interests or influence policy there. Nor can they expound on concerns, for example, about the invasion of privacy threatened by the current EU antiterrorist and data retention policies. This is easier for the few international organizations with real clout; but these often have little real contact or involvement at a local level. Such NGOs are also better placed to enlist the support of EU bureaucrats for their international projects, many of which are entirely impractical. Those that focus on different forms of discrimination have particularly lacked any positive effect at local level.

Partial conclusions

Over the past twenty years, some modest accomplishments have gradually helped to improve respect for the rule of law and public interest protection. However, a lot of money has been wasted, which is not unusual during transitional periods. This has also led to failures in building strong institutions that develop from the grass roots. Some projects have been tarnished by fraud and mismanagement, and these grave failures have generally not been discussed

⁷ Oldag, A., Tillack, H. M. *Raumschiff Brüssel: Wie die Demokratie in Europa scheitert*. Argon Verlag, Germany, 2003, 320 p.

openly in order to save face for the funder and the grantee. So these shortcomings in civil society management have been cloaked in silence.

The response to such cover-ups and the disappearance of US-based foundations and some ministries of foreign affairs programs from the scene should not be merely to replace them with EU projects which again would be tied to a large institution and a particular form of money management, as this tends to smother rather than support the development of a self-confident civil society. EU policies are anything but progressive when it comes to the development of the rule of law that at the same time takes into account the interests of civil society at the local level.

If we really intend to build a genuine civil society both within individual countries and between them throughout this region, support should come from the grass roots on the basis of direct dialog with ordinary citizens and from newly established foundations (if there are any donors generous enough) in the coming years. But those in the wealthier sections of Central and Eastern European society are hardly likely to support NGOs that continue to protect the interests of poor, marginalized or unpopular groups. In their view, the state should be responsible for supporting these people, or at least larger organizations (even if their remit is wider than merely providing social services instead of the state) as it did during the socialist era or as is the case in a slightly different form in Austria, Germany or Scandinavia. Some NGOs, compelled by financial concerns, will start or continue to work on issues that are 'sexier'; others will only carry out state policies (as the state helps to distribute EU money) and some will cease to exist at all. In this latter case, public interest issues will go undefended, and other proposed changes will fall by the wayside due to lack of support.

Jirí Kopal is chair of League of Human Rights (LIGA), Brno, Czech Republic, which he initiated in 2002, and Deputy Secretary General (for Europe), International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Paris, France. He earned his law degree from Masaryk University in Brno and spent a semester studying and carrying out research at the University of Basel, Switzerland, at the Max Planck International Public Law Institute, Heidelberg, Germany and in the Center for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University, New York, USA. Jirí started his public interest activities in 1999 as a volunteer for the Environmental Law Service. Since 2002, he has been a member of two committees of the Czech Government's Council for Human Rights. He was appointed Deputy Secretary General of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) in 2007.



**From democracy to kleptocracy
and back?**

**The unfinished business of
democracy in CEE**



What happened with the mobilizing power? Juraj Mesik is disappointed 10 years after the Slovak civil society campaign of 1998 and warns for the serious political problems and concerns that are left unanswered.

In the dark days of December 2008, sitting in this corrupt country, it may seem strange, or perhaps even inappropriate, to start my review of the past 20 years by reminiscing about the glorious days of civil society in Slovakia in 1998. This era marked a halfway point between “then” and now. Without the surge in civil society activity in 1998, Slovakia and, to a certain extent, the whole of east central Europe would look very different ten years on.

Although we are unlikely to ever have sufficient scientific data to prove that unequivocally, based on the data we do have, we can argue that civil society played a critically important role in what became one of the major success stories of post-communist transition in Europe. The authoritarian regime was overthrown and Slovakia was put on a trajectory towards full EU and NATO membership.

To fully understand the situation today and speculate on the future, we need to start in 1998 - the high water mark of civil society in Slovakia. The third sector, which was a key element of active citizenry in Slovakia in 1998, had quite specific features. Dušan Ondrušek, a prominent Slovak NGO leader, described it in terms of a deformed human body (“a homunculus”). While it had a big head and muscular arms, its body and legs were small and weak. What from today’s perspective appears to be a structural problem, was a more or less natural result of the evolution of NGOs’ active role in the country’s struggle for orientation in the first decade after the fall of communism. To contribute to the fundamental fight over Slovakia’s geopolitical affiliation, the think-tank, advocacy and campaigning capacities of the sector had to grow to disproportional dimensions. This inevitably left other parts of the sector weak.

NGOs’ quick retreat from power politics after 1998 consequently pre-determined the pitiful status of Slovakia’s civil society today. If we return to the analogy of the deformed human body, in the past decade the third sector has lost much of its strength in the head and arms, while failing to build a stronger body and legs. It’s no surprise then, that without a civil society watchdog, Slovakia is currently characterized by a gradual but steady shift towards a non-liberal democracy and a deeply corrupt government. The country remains formally democratic, but the people (alt. citizens) have a rather limited influence over public affairs. Public authorities, and political culture as a whole, are dominated by corrupt political parties controlled by oligarchs lurking in the background.

Political parties today are using their power for two very straightforward aims: Firstly, to sell cheaply whatever is still publicly owned and can be sold. This includes land, concessions and any other kind of public property; and secondly to buy products for public use from the private sector at exorbitant prices. This includes cars, arms, construction works, everything.... Party “friends” are involved in both types of transaction. This situation is symbolized by the current ruling coalition, two members of which were actually defeated in 1998. These are the populist Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and the extremist nationalist and anti-Hungarian Slovak National Party (SNS).

This turnaround was made possible by the quick retreat of civil society players from their prominent role in public and political life, in other words by the naïve and premature depoliticization of NGOs and their networks

The gradual shift towards a fundamentally corrupt klep-

tocratic form of government, or rather a return to this phenomenon, started shortly after the breakthrough in 1998. It occurred under the coalition government formed with crucial help from civil society organizations. This turnaround was made possible by the quick retreat of civil society players from their prominent role in public and political life, in other words by the naïve and premature de-politization of NGOs and their networks. Not only is the current government corrupt on a major scale, it is also a government that understands the potential threat of civil society to the established regime. It is therefore innately hostile to civil society, as it is hostile towards any remaining outlets of free and critical media. Unlike the pre-current coalition is more constrained by rights EU. It is also much less weaker civil society, and in the country. It does aggressively against the of 2008, civil society in to succeed in mobiliz- that could present a real role of corrupt political Not only are NGOs and civil society organizations too weak in terms of their human and material resources to represent a threat to the establishment. The population at large is satisfied with the situation.

Not only are NGOs and civil society organizations too weak in terms of their human and material resources to represent a threat to the establishment. The population at large is satisfied with the situation.

1998 government, the intelligent and more guaranteed by the threatened by the now the overall atmosphere not need to behave too NGO sector. At the end Slovakia is very unlikely ing people on a scale threat to the established parties and oligarchs.

Let me start with the social reasons for civil society's current low levels of influence on public matters. First of all, the psychological profile of Slovak society today compared to what it was in 1998 is entirely different. At the end of 2008, Slovakia is part of the EU, NATO, the Schengen Zone and will even join the Eurozone at the start of 2009. Thanks to these anchors to the West, albeit combined with very cheap labor and several reasonable policies introduced by the post-1998 government, over the past several years the economy has grown at a record speed. Unemployment has dropped to less than 8 percent. It is still among the highest in the EU, but a significant improvement on the 20 percent recorded in the late 1990s. These fundamental achievements have given most of the population a high level of personal comfort and a range of prospects for the future. In 1998, many Slovak citizens were saying "if Meciar stays in power, I will emigrate from this country." No major changes are needed today – if you are not happy here, you and your family are free to move elsewhere within the European Union and return if and when you choose. It's no longer a stressful process, especially for those who are young and capable.

This movement is indeed the reality for many Slovaks. Around 250,000 Slovaks – mostly those who are young, dynamic and well educated – are working and living outside the boundaries of Slovakia, in the Czech Republic, the U.K., Ireland, Germany, Italy, Scandinavia and elsewhere. In addition to this, around 20,000 university students are studying outside of Slovakia. For a small country of 5.4 million people, this is a very significant number of the working-age population. When it comes to potential rebels, activists and agents of change, the proportion outside the country is even higher. The opportunity to leave the country is wide open, for the benefit of Slovak citizens, but also for the benefit of our corrupt status quo. Too few people with the right profile remain to push for eventual change.

The second critically important change compared to 1998 is a result of the massive spread of information and communication technology over the last 10 years. Linked to this potentially very beneficial trend is a deep fragmentation of public debate, due to the growth of the blogosphere. Information, views or ideas presented in just a handful of key media outlets in 1998, such as the daily SME, were able to reach maybe 80 percent of the key players in civil society as well as many other important people. To reach a comparable segment of the active citizenry without significant money today is much more difficult, if not impossible. The position of printed media has been weakened by the growth of

While it is much easier for each and every citizen to spread information or express his or her ideas, it is much more difficult to reach a critical mass of people in order to stir public debate about critical issues

electronic channels, which are preferred by the younger generation, as well as by the commercialization of printed media, TV and radio stations and their high dependency on advertising as well as popular, light topics and images. While it is much easier for each and every citizen to spread information or express his or her ideas, including political ideas, through the myriad of blogs, it is much more difficult to reach a critical mass of people in order to stir the widespread public debate about critical issues that is essential for affecting change. With just a handful of free media outlets in 1998, the change was, paradoxically, much easier to bring about than it is today.

Looking at the dire situation of the third sector and civil society, most people describing its weaknesses will start by talking about a lack of money. This is indeed a very important factor, but to me the high level of burn out and the loss of leadership in the sector is actually more important. In 1998, NGOs in Slovakia benefited from strong leadership with a rather high level of legitimacy and respect throughout the NGO community across the country. The situation was never simple, but the leadership was there and the sector and society at large benefitted from this reality. Several of the key individual leaders of the Gremium of the Third Sector (G3S) or OK 98 Campaign were experienced politicians, including former government ministers and MPs. The OK 98 leadership disappeared naturally with the completion of the OK 98 campaign, but the end of the G3S was not inevitable, nor desirable. It happened after several critical G3S leaders stepped down and allowed the sector leadership to be filled by much less experienced individuals. These new leaders lacked the necessary vision, drive and political experience. Within just a few years, the Gremium ceased to exist as a relevant political player, leaving the arena of "big politics" open only to political parties and oligarchs.

The second most important weakness in the sector is indeed related to money. It's not so much about the quantity of money available, but more about the quality. Critical financial support for NGOs' political work before and shortly after 1998 came from the American private and public donors. However, U.S. donors never intended to remain active in Central Europe in the long term and they gradually left Slovakia soon after 1998. Perhaps too soon. The logic behind this early departure was complex, but clear – Central Europeans became part of the EU and NATO, two of the elite clubs of the world. The need for American resources in other parts of the world may be much bigger. Moreover, it was clear, that the EU would flood new EU member states, including their civil so-

ciety organizations, with much more money than the U.S. ever could. And the reality is that tons of money did come through. Unfortunately, however, it came with massive bureaucratic restrictions and to finance priorities defined by Central East European (CEE) politicians and European bureaucrats, not by citizens and citizens' organizations of either the new or old member states.

European donors, both public and private, proudly ignored the opportunity to learn from American experience in CEE and about U.S. grantmaking strategies and practices that played a critical role in the democratic transformation of the region. Our West European counterparts proudly believe that they know better than Americans – and the citizens of new EU member states – what democracy is and how to build it. Unfortunately, they never did know any better and certainly do not know any better now. While interpreting that as intellectual arrogance is a bad sign, an even worse option is that they simply do not care about the quality of democracy in new member states. Whatever the reason, the consequences may be very costly, if the cancer of excessively corrupt politics and illiberal democracy spreads its long arms from Bratislava, Warsaw or Bucharest to Brussels and the older EU member states in general.

The reality is that tons of money did come through.

At the end of 2008, citizens of Slovakia are still happy and blissfully ignorant about the upcoming economic crisis. Civil society organizations are fragmented and lack politically literate and skillful leadership as well as financing. And there is no longer a "big theme" to mobilize people behind as there was in 1997-98. Could the next big theme be fight against corruption? Or climate change? Upcoming energy crisis? Or the fast decline of the middle class and the growth of poverty when the economic crisis starts to hit really hard?

The economic crisis may indeed prove to be a big opportunity for civil society to challenge the corrupt and not only in Slovakia. opportunity to expose a sensitized population, policies which served garchs at the expense of ordinary citizens, in cases and transport sectors, the issue of falling stan-crisis presents us with ma-cas with major risks: If civil people around real and populists and nationalists the tried and tested themes of the 20th century - nationalism, isolationism...

If civil society fails to mobilize people around real and forward-looking issues, populists and nationalists will mobilize them around the tried and tested themes of the 20th century - nationalism, xenophobia and isolationism...

How to mobilize people around primitive instincts has been common knowledge for centuries. How to do it around complex global issues is uncharted territory. Where to find resources for this more sophisticated form of mobilization is another major challenge. No public or wealthy private players in Europe seem to be aware of the risks that have emerged over the last few years in CEE and can "infect" the rest of the Union. Even abuse of billions euro from EU funds

for unjustified, flawed projects is being ignored by west Europeans, who pay for them, fueling further culture of institutionalized corruption. They also seem to be ignorant of the fact, that changing realities require a change in approach and strategies.

I know we should be looking for what we, the Slovaks, Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, Bulgarians and Romanians, can do ourselves to improve the situation instead of pointing towards someone else, in Western Europe or elsewhere. There is no point in playing blaming game. But with receptive ears in Amsterdam, Berlin, Copenhagen, London, Madrid or Paris and channels for mutual dialogue open, we all could be in much better and safer situation. We thought the 20th century was exciting, maybe it was just the beginning.

Juraj Mesik 's educational background, as well as the first part of his career, was in biomedical research. 1989 marked a change in his professional focus, as he turned to politics. From 1989 to 1990, Mesik served as a member of parliament in the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly in Prague and was chairman of the Green Party. In 1990-1992 he was director of the Department of Social Context at the Ministry of Environment in Prague, administering a federal grant program, which supported NGO development and environmental awareness. From 1993 to 2002, he was the Director of the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe (EPCE) in Slovakia (now known as the Ekopolis Foundation). From 2003 to 2008, he worked as senior community foundations specialist for the World Bank in Washington D.C. throughout his career, Mesik has been extensively involved in the development of the environmental movement and the wider third sector. From 1982 to 1992, he served as chairman of the local branch of the Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protectors (SZOPK). Mesik was elected to the City Council of his home town Banska Bystrica in 1998 and to the Regional Parliament of Banska Bystrica in 2001. He is the author of numerous articles which have appeared in a range of publications and internet portals.





**“The sleeping giant”
- the church’s
relationship with civil
society**

The church plays an active role delivering standards and messages in more religious CEE countries, but solidarity, openness and potential for cooperation with civil society is true only for a limited number of church organizations says Maria Rogaczewska

Although the religious landscape of CEE is changing dynamically, the relationship between the Church and civil society in many countries in the region remains crucial. In this paper I will primarily focus on the CEE Church that I know best from my own research – the Catholic Church in Poland. I hope this analysis will, however, lead to some more general conclusions, which may then inspire further discussion about other major churches in the region.

The churches of CEE, which are mainly Roman Catholic, held different positions in the public sphere in 1989, largely dictated by their history under Communism. The Roman Catholic Church in Poland arguably enjoyed the strongest position. By 1989, the Polish Church was the undisputed winner of the battle it had been waging against Communism for over 50 years. It possessed astounding resources of popular trust, spiritual power and symbolic capital.

Although the religious landscape of CEE is changing dynamically, the relationship between the Church and civil society in many countries in the region remains crucial

For José Casanova, the Polish Church played a key role in the region's changing geopolitical situation. “The surprising, some would say miraculous, elevation of Cardinal Wojtyła to the papacy as John Paul II, his triumphal visit to Poland in 1979, the rise of Solidarity a year later, and the collapse of the Soviet system in 1989, bringing to an end the Cold War and the division of Eastern and Western Europe, altered radically the march of history and global geopolitical configurations,” he observes.

It is important to remember, however, that the strong position of the Polish Catholic Church within the public sphere and its prominent objection to political institutions in 1989 did not result in it changing into a civic institution. Maryjane Osa, sees this as a consequence of mistrust between the church and civil society, and warns against any oversimplification of the historical relationship between nationalism and Catholicism in Poland. “First, many of the Polish clergy and Catholic virtuosi were wary of civic rhetoric during the 1980s, considering this to be a smoke screen for a liberal, pro-secularist movement to separate religion from public life,” she notes.

The privileged position of the Polish Catholic Church is directly linked to the role it played in Polish society throughout its history. Unlike the majority of other national Catholic churches in Europe, such as those in France, Spain, Ireland or the Czech Republic, the Polish Church has practically never allied itself with the state against society. On the contrary, the Church has usually strived to be in alliance with society against the state. This is a marked difference compared to many other European countries, where the alliance between the state and the Church made religion and religious institutions instruments of power.

During the partitions of Poland in the nineteenth century and under the Communist regime, the Catholic Church in Poland was institutionally very weak in comparison to its counterparts in Spain, France, Ireland or Italy. This phenomenon manifested itself in a number of ways. Due to the restrictions imposed first by imperial forces and then by communist authorities, up until 1989 there were very few Catholic schools in Poland. This contrasts starkly with the situation in Ireland for example, where almost all schools had been under Church supervision since the early nineteenth century. The ratio of clergy, monks and nuns to laity

has also traditionally been relatively low in Poland. Furthermore, faith-based charity initiatives were banned or strictly supervised by the state apparatus.

On the other hand, the Polish Catholic Church managed to establish itself as a great moral and spiritual authority during this period. This made it a very powerful player in the public sphere after the fall of Communism. In many respects, over 20 years later, it is still one of the strongest mobilizing forces in Poland. Polish people still engage in Catholic rituals such as pilgrimage, open-air masses, processions and religious holidays. It is important to appreciate that this religious activity is usually very temporary, restricted to a specific context and not connected with everyday life in Poland. I would therefore claim that the impact of religious commitment on civic commitment is small and not unproblematic in contemporary Poland.

Defining the Church after 1989

In the early 1990s, just after the fall of the Communist regime, Catholic bishops and the Catholic media in Poland started to mobilize the Church’s resources. They attempted to rally the faithful against developments connected with rapid modernization such as the growing presence of minority groups, cultural liberalism, consumerism, sexual morality and the changing role of the family. These panicky reactions towards modernization sometimes resulted in heavy-handed intervention by Church representatives in parliamentary proceedings, policy-making, public education and public debate. The main success of the Catholic Church during this period was the introduction of Catholic religious education in all public schools. This decision was taken without any public discussion or consultation.

The crusade against rapid modernization also became one of the main priorities of some grassroots Catholic initiatives like “Radio Maryja”. The Catholic radio station and its charismatic leader, Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, attracted hundreds of thousands of volunteers and supporters. This is not to say that these attacks constituted a fully coherent movement enjoying universal approval within the Polish Catholic Church. The rapid progress of modernization after 1989 put the Church in a difficult position. Whilst it was critical of many aspects of modernization, it still wanted to preserve its role as a ‘stabilizing’ and ‘integrating’ force in Polish society. This ambivalence is still prevalent in the Church’s actions and official statements today, leading to very different situations developing in different parts of Poland. Some bishops are very open to cooperation with civic NGOs, and welcome the democratization of religious institutions, supporting the introduction of measures such as financial transparency within parishes. Others continue to treat the idea of building bridges between the Church and the secular world with skepticism.

The challenge of social welfare

Poland’s Communist welfare system collapsed in 1989, ushering in a period of 20 years of inconsistent and largely ineffective social policy. This has led to high levels of social exclusion and poverty as well as little social cohesion in Poland. To an outside observer, this may seem surprising or even shocking, in the country, where the Solidarity movement was born. A liberal tendency in social policy was apparent in a number of areas. On the eve of the twenty first century, there was a high tolerance of chronic and wide-scale unemployment among

young people and women. Benefits for families were scarce and there was a lack of practical support for the long-term unemployed. Poland had the lowest number of pre-school and day-care utilities in the EU and disabled people and women were largely excluded from the labor market. An American-style labor market was also in place. This was characterized by low regulation of employer-employee relations and little protection of workers' rights, particularly in low-paid jobs, which were dominated by women. This situation is in strong opposition to Catholic teaching on social values, which encourages solidarity, and prioritizes the common good and human dignity. There is still a lot of research to be done if we are to fully understand this discrepancy between the values of the dominant religion and the actual welfare regime in Poland. This is a puzzle, but also a very practical problem.

There is still a lot of research to be done if we are to fully understand this discrepancy between the values of the dominant religion and the actual welfare regime in Poland.

The key to understanding this discrepancy may lie in a certain evaporation of substantial parts of Catholic social teaching from the pastoral strategy and statements issued by the Polish Catholic Church. James Bagget described a similar process of evaporation in American parishes, as "the ability to avoid connecting the Church teaching to social structures, public policy and broader understandings of community." I find the concept of evaporation that Bagget uses an inspiring analytical tool. Pastoral letters written by Polish bishops up to 15 years after the fall of Communism were published as Polish society struggled to survive the period of economic shock therapy. In these letters the critical voice of the Church, so cherished by Casanova in his account of the Polish Church during the Communist period, was either weak or very abstract. Polish Bishops focused on cultural battles and defending Catholicism's role in Polish identity. They chose to separate, on a conceptual level, a free market from morality. They favored abstract considerations about the dignity of work, instead of accentuating the need to recognize the unemployed. The implicit acceptance of, or at least neutral position towards, neo-liberalism is not only evident in official documents, but also on a pastoral and organizational level. One of the most influential Catholic think-tanks in Poland, Tertio Millennio Institute, was founded by a Dominican father, Maciej Zieba. Financed by the American Enterprise Institute, it lists the promotion of reconciliation of a free market with Catholic teachings as among its most important goals.

In terms of the practical application of Catholic social teaching, it is indisputable that since 1989 there has been a significant increase in the number of Church-based charities in Poland. There are 38 autonomous branches of Caritas and in cooperation with Caritas-Poland they manage hundreds of day-care centers for children, the homeless and the elderly. Caritas organizes holidays for thousands of children at risk of social exclusion each year and coordinates many large-scale seasonal initiatives, such as distributing material aid to those in need, usually before the most important religious holidays. There are also influential charities backed by the Polish Orthodox and Protestant churches, like Eleos and Diakonia. There are other charities, which count the Catholic Church as their biggest donor. Almost all hospices and centers for the terminally ill in Poland are led by Church or faith-based organizations and most volunteers in these centers are practicing Catholics. A considerable number of initiatives are

managed by nuns and monks, which help children and the elderly and manage youth centers in Poland's biggest cities.

A relatively new trend is Church-based social entrepreneurship, with a few social-economic initiatives starting up in some of the poorest regions of Poland. Last but not least, a well-developed network of Catholic parishes, over 10,000 in total also provides basic help for those in need, though the scale of these initiatives is not accurately known. According to official data from the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church (ISKK) there are about 340 various Catholic movements and faith-based organizations in Poland, with approximately 2 million members. This accounts for less than 10 percent of the population, not a significant percentage in a country where half of the population still attends Church regularly.

Bearing in mind the substantial institutional growth of Catholic initiatives after 1989, it is interesting to discover that many of these organizations, while trying hard to combat the social consequences of shock-therapy, had difficulties attaining official recognition within the Church. Projects which promise to provide extensive and long-term help, such as those aimed at the unemployed, only made it onto Caritas-Poland's agenda relatively recently, when huge amounts of European Union funding were made available to Poland. Undoubtedly, the low level of social cohesion in Poland is first and foremost a consequence of the failings of post-communist social policy. The Catholic Church, especially grass-roots faith-based organizations led by monks and nuns and parish-based lay people, softened the social consequences of economic shock-therapy.

Grass-roots faith-based organizations led by monks and nuns and parish-based lay people, softened the social consequences of economic shock-therapy.

On the other hand, Church leaders contributed greatly to legitimizing a certain discourse in the public sphere, which came to characterize the 1990s. In this discourse, the neo-liberal economy was treated as something self-evident and plausible. Social problems were seen not as something with structural origins, which therefore required structural solutions, but rather as something rooted in the personal, or cultural, deficiencies of the individuals or groups affected.

Analysis of Church documents published in the nineties in which social problems were discussed proves that Catholic social teaching was treated by its authors as an abstract, unearthly ideal rather than a set of critical tools with which to make a moral assessment of Poland's economic situation. The primary concern of these documents was not the concrete threat to human dignity linked to impoverishment and social exclusion, but rather various, mostly cultural threats to an imagined community - the nation and its Catholic identity. In these documents, Polish society was conceptualized as one organism, with the unity of that organism, rather than justice, prioritized as a common goal for all those to whom the documents were addressed. There is one crucial exception. In sermons given during his Polish pilgrimages, Pope John Paul II diagnosed quite succinctly the concrete threats to human dignity and the deep lack of solidarity in Poland. The details of the Pope's teachings were, however, usually overlooked in the collective excitement and sense of celebration surrounding his pilgrimages to Poland.

A thorough analysis of the position of the Catholic Church in the public sphere during the first decade of transformation is crucial to understanding the fate of the Catholic religion in Poland in subsequent decades. Many of the faithful, disappointed with the official position of the institutional Church, which was very conservative and focused on defending the status quo and blind to new social and individual problems, had two basic options. Firstly, they could lose trust in the institutional Church and stop practicing Catholicism. The statistics show that many people took this option. The biggest reduction in practicing Catholics occurred among the long-term unemployed, the young, the poorly educated and the working class. There is a clear trend among Poles to lose interest in the Church’s teachings. According to data from the European Value Study, in 2008 only 35 percent of Poles admitted that the Church offers the right answers to Poland’s social and political problems, down by over 12 percent since 2005.

The second choice available to the faithful was to use Catholic teachings as a symbolic resource for their own innovative actions and critical thought. This was the case with Radio Maryja, which separate from the mainstream Catholic media, articulated the popular sense of powerlessness and disappointment. The relationship between this radical social movement, which attracted approximately 1 million supporters, and the Polish Episcopate, has always been very problematic.

Radio Maryja, which separate from the mainstream Catholic media, articulated the popular sense of powerlessness and disappointment.

The Episcopate has been very reluctant to solve the Radio Maryja problem, and the station has always enjoyed strong support from a number of bishops. To an extent, Radio Maryja developed as a lone critical voice, representing one of the few manifestations of Catholic public religion in Poland after the glory days of the Church’s struggle with Communism.

Many new Catholic organizations and movements still interpret religious ideas in primarily individualistic terms, as a means to pursue individual perfection rather than guarantee the common good and solidarity

Poland’s experience shows that the way in which churches and other religious institutions act on the eve of a radical transformation is critical to the fate of mainstream religion in a rapidly modernizing society. Catholic social teaching has not been successfully used in Poland as a vehicle of morally driven, public criticism of injustice. It is not providing effective inspiration for innovative practices of solidarity. It has been used rather as a sometimes randomly selected set of recommendable ideals, to be realized in the private lives of individual members of the faithful.

Many new Catholic organizations and movements still interpret religious ideas in primarily individualistic terms, as a means to pursue individual perfection rather than guarantee the common good and solidarity. Religious education in schools is also rather abstract and theoretical, which makes it difficult for young people to translate religious ideas into everyday life. Furthermore, there is a problem with the pluralism of attitudes within the Church, which is more often a source of conflict rather than a source of fruitful cooperation and innovative practice. Many honest and engaged citizens have felt deeply divided between a supposedly good, supportive, compassionate Church, personified by Radio Maryja’s charismatic Father Rydzyk, and a supposedly bad Church,

personified by Catholic intellectuals, the elite and liberal bishops, allied with the rich middle class in big cities.

Going forward

The Catholic Church in Poland still possesses the greatest assets and mobilizing power of all NGOs active in the public sphere. It is still trusted by most of the Polish population. Church institutions, especially Catholic parishes, enjoy excellent legal opportunities and tax privileges due to the Concordat between the Vatican and Poland. Parishes and Church-based organizations can legally cooperate with all authorities, cultural and non-governmental institutions. Another important asset is the relatively high level of education amongst most of the clergy and the number of Church-based educational institutions such as kindergartens, schools and Catholic universities.

The problem with maximizing the potential of these great assets and thus having a stronger impact on civil society is two-fold. Firstly, there is a time delay with Church structures in Poland. These structures are still more heavily grounded in the past, when the Church was forced to act as a monolithic institution to defend itself against the Communist regime, than in the present conditions of a pluralist society. There are still huge problems with opening up executive positions within Church structures for the laity. All the major positions in the biggest Church organizations like Caritas are monopolized by members of the clergy. There is still a great amount of distrust towards lay people in daily parish life. Only about 10 percent of Polish parishes have a parish council which includes lay people. This distrust between the clergy and the laity seems to be mutual, but once it is successfully overcome, parish life will be able to flourish and we will start to see cases where a parish effectively becomes a local community development center.

All the major positions in the biggest Church organizations like Caritas are monopolized by members of the clergy.

The second barrier to the Polish Church having a greater impact on the development of civil society is the crisis of religious-based education in Poland. This may seem astonishing in a country where most children still enroll for lessons in Catholicism in public schools. The problem lies in the fact that this education is highly theoretical and abstract. Religious education in school cannot replace a real education system for prospective Catholic leaders, who would have a strong leadership profile and strong sense of working for the common good. Such leaders and future committed citizens are only trained in a few faith-based organizations, such as the Scouts of the Republic of Poland, the Alliance of Families, Opus Dei, Comunione e Liberazione and The Club of Catholic Intelligence. A further problem is that this education is usually reserved for the children of members of the upper and middle classes and intellectuals. There are few Church-based initiatives focused on the future generation like the Siemacha youth centers in Cracow, or Catholic sports organizations such as SALOS or Parafiada, which are open to all young people, regardless of their social background.

The official stance of the Catholic Church still underlines the basic role of the family in a child's development, but in actual fact the Polish family has lost its prominent role in the younger generation's education. Radical change in gen-

der roles, demographic changes and the strong pressure put on employees by the labor market, alongside the growing influence of consumer culture mean that families are less and less able to engender a sense of civic ethos and leadership qualities in the younger generation.

Church-based initiatives could have a huge impact on the formation of future civic leaders and committed citizens, not only in Poland. When families and schools lose a degree of authority and involvement with children, religious organizations can teach them altruism, encourage them to prioritize the common good and give them a strong and lasting motivation to actively try to improve their society. We also have to remember that in a country like Poland, as well as in many other CEE countries, Church leaders are still more important than the institution of the opening future generations faith-motivated volunteers out the promotion of lay to overcome the gender cratic system of decision-heavier emphasis on a Catholic Social Teaching in the contemporary social world, culture and economy.

Church-based initiatives could have a huge impact on the formation of future civic leaders and committed citizens

I hope that these changes will gradually take place within the Polish Church, making it once again one of the most important allies of civil society in Poland, as it was under the Communist regime.

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Maria Rogaczewska

M.A., born 1978, is a

PhD Candidate in Sociology and junior lecturer at Warsaw University. Her scientific interests focus on sociology of religion, and the role of religion within civil society and public sphere. A member of Experts Board of CIVICUS Civil Society Index in Poland. A member of Community Development Unit of Institute of Sociology in Warsaw. As a researcher and expert, she has cooperated with Polish-American Freedom Foundation, Klon-Jawor Association, Ministry of Social Policy in Poland, School for Leaders Association, and other non-governmental and public institutions. Writer and publicist (publishing in "Wież", "Tygodnik Powszechny"). Passionately interested in the ideas of participative democracy, public sociology and social innovation. A co-founder of "Amicta Sole" - Catholic Women Initiative for promoting women in the society.



Representation is “out” – younger generations are all about limited issues, small groups creating small change before dissolving and moving to the next. But how can it produce real effect – and what can established civil society learn asks Milla Mineva.



Divided demands

Recent protests in Bulgaria highlighted wide-scale discontent with the nation's government. But with protestors divided and clear, common aims difficult to establish, attitudes to, as well as the organization of, the political sphere will have to undergo a major transformation before civil society in Bulgaria is given a clean bill of health.

Small groups, divided societies

Referring to contemporary societies as fragmented is commonplace in social sciences circles. The term describes the disintegration of a society into a myriad of small groups, which each tend to be heading in their own direction. Identifying all the reasons for this disintegration would be impossible in just a few words. Nevertheless, we can identify some of the more influential factors.

Overvaluing homogeneity in the nation state a shift towards overvaluation state was opened Last but not least, the eral discourse put comat the centre of society. played a role in the ety. This fragmentation is ever-increasing number These choices help to construct a more defined individuality in members of a society.

It is no accident that the Internet's relationship with activism is not limited to activism within the net, which became apparent in developments such as the copyleft movement.

neity was the cultural model. There was then ing difference as the na-up and undermined. hegemony of neo-lib-petition and the market All of these shifts have fragmentation of soci-in evidence daily in the of choices available.

On the other hand, we tend to explain social inequalities as a consequence of choice rather than of social circumstances. The idea of lifestyle now dominates where once class and strata were the key considerations.

It is important to remember that when a discourse of aesthetic inequalities dominates, this does not necessarily imply that efforts are being made to change this domination and create a different society.

Small groups are formed around these individual choices, leading to what Mark Penn refers to as microtrends. The Internet is not at the heart of the formation of these small groups. However, social networking sites in particular may play an important binding role in their creation and organization. It is no accident that the Internet's relationship with activism is not limited to activism within the net, which became apparent in developments such as the copyleft movement. Activism which uses the Internet as an important tool is also very popular and effective today.

The secret of these small groups lies not only in the fact that they are formed around individual choices, but also in their ability to change aspects of everyday life. They are therefore able to build up a profile which can be drawn on again for future civic action.

The withdrawal from the political

Paradoxically, the everyday efficiency of these small groups tends to lead to their withdrawal from the political sphere. Currently, at least in Bulgaria, there

are examples of small groups coordinating successful campaigns to effect urban policy. If a united group of citizens is able to turn around decisions, then many people will start to question whether voting is actually worth the effort.

If a united group of citizens is able to turn around decisions, then many people will start to question whether voting is actually worth the effort.

That is precisely why we see many active environmental groups, for instance, refusing to take part in the political decision-making process. A rather interesting example from Bulgaria is the BG-Mamma online forum. This community of mothers organizes charity events and attempts to protect the social rights of mothers. They have stubbornly refused to define their actions in political terms, even when they are having an impact on the social policy of the central authorities. They define their activities as civic ones. They see themselves playing a supportive role to mothers, and do not attempt to view these interests in the context of society as a whole.

The only form of political participation which has appeared to be adequate lately is direct democracy, or perhaps a more appropriate term would be ad-hocracy. I would nevertheless claim that direct democracy in this context does not mean a strengthening of the political sphere. On the contrary, it may even mean a radical rejection of the political sphere.

The demand for a daily referendum was the only demand shared by all the different groups that protested in Bulgaria in January. It was hoped that a daily referendum would rescue the decision making process from corrupt and ineffective politicians and put it back in the hands of the general public.

Although many groups supported the protests, their differences eventually led to disunity and prevented them from reaching their goals.

Power would then be expert-driven. In this sense, direct democracy turns out to be a form of withdrawal from the political sphere. Individual groups would vote on issues directly related to their area of interest and expertise. Environmentalists would vote on environmental policies and so on. Other groups would not be active in the daily referendum on environmental issues. This is based on the assumption that putting power in the hands of those who are the most well-informed would lead to choices being made that are the best option for everyone. If some voters are not happy, the votes could be cast again on the following day. It is obvious that there is a problem with representative democracy in Bulgaria. I have my doubts, however, that direct democracy is the solution.

There is another important consequence of the efficiency of small groups. They are so internally homogeneous, that they are often unable to negotiate with other groups. The protests in Bulgaria in January were initiated by a number of different groups –students, environmentalists, mothers and farmers among others. Although many groups supported the protests, their differences eventually led to disunity and prevented them from reaching their goals. As the protests unfolded, protestors discovered that they had different demands and even different ideas on how to protest. On the second day of the protests, the environmentalists began a silent protest. As this tactic was not adopted by all the other protesters, the environmentalists looked like a colorful, quiet and depressed

group in the frontline of the protesting crowd. While the environmentalists kept silent, the students desperately tried to make the whole square resound with the national anthem. The nationalist leaders and their supporters, who were also genuinely protesting unlike the provocateurs present on day one, were shouting slogans such as "Resignation!", thus giving shape to the whole protest. As the actions on the square were broken up a similar break-up was evident in the protesters' demands. Some wanted video surveillance and a police presence in the Studentski Grad part of Sofia, where most of the city's students live. Others wanted a ban on Internet tapping and bugging. Another group wanted to take back control of the state. All of them eventually demanded support for the Bulgarian bee-keeping industry. After a failed attempt at agreeing upon clear and collective demands, the protesters only succeeded in demanding an amendment to the law on referendums, and the protests naturally came to an end without any major achievements.

The demand for the government to resign raised on the second day of the protests could not be taken seriously, because no one was offering an alternative.

In actual fact, the main problem is that none of these groups could convert their private demands into civic or political ones. No group was able to look beyond the horizon of their own, small and homogenous group. The demand for the government to resign raised on the second day of the protests could not be taken seriously, because no one was offering an alternative.

The main problem of small groups is that they are not expansive. Secondly, because of their homogeneity, they are not willing to talk to other groups and negotiate a common position. They are so convinced that their demands are right and just that they do not see any sense in re-negotiating them. They are only looking for experts to put them in an effective and legally binding format.

The re-invention of the political

There are a number of key problems that active civil society is facing today. The disintegration of society does produce small and active groups, but it also leads to the loss of a common, relatively neutral space, in which these small groups could negotiate their interests. An even more critical problem for the effective operation of civil society is that these new small groups are formed around specific private interests. They are so effective at protecting these interests that they have no desire to make an effort, and hence we don't see them making an effort, to participate in any debate on the common good.

Their idea of utopia is the fulfillment of all private interests at the same time, and all that is needed to create this utopia is an expert. The work of small groups counters that of other similar organizations, so meeting everyone's expectations simultaneously is not possible.

The sphere in which the common good could be discussed no longer exists.

The sphere in which the common good could be discussed no longer exists. It disappeared along with the disappearance of a common, relatively neutral, public space. There is no longer a forum for critique of the state and its practical withdrawal, for critique of the political sphere, and power in general.

Added to this is a broader, global crisis affecting ideas relating to the public

good, and the rise of the neo-liberal discourse from Thatcher's time up until the end of the Bush era.

Times may be changing however. We are already seeing evidence of the economic crisis making the hegemony of neo-liberalism seem less legitimate. I also interpret the election of President Obama as an indication of a return to the political sphere. In Eastern Europe such a process will be a lot more difficult because of the historical context in which it needs to take place, namely in post-transition societies. The agenda for the transition process has already been successfully implemented. Market economies and democracy are already in place.

The market economy, however, has been profoundly delegitimized, and not because of the crisis, which has not yet been felt so strongly in this part of the world. Sociological surveys indicate a steady trend, economies are growing and so is social discontent. The problem is that the market proved not to be the instrument of justice it had been seen as at the beginning of the transition. Democracy is there but people have a growing feeling that they do not participate in the decision-making process.

When people cease to be able to envisage an alternative future, they cease taking political action. Coming up with new, alternative political projects is what can bring citizens back to the political sphere

If we leave all the external factors aside, we see that it was the politics of consensus which actually killed the political sphere. People changed their governments all the time, but they never succeeded in changing the course of their political actions. Seen in this perspective, refusing to vote in elections became a completely rational choice. People will naturally begin to question the logic of legitimizing parties as their representatives if those parties do not offer alternatives in which they recognize their own interests.

In my view, along with the refusal to vote, an even more disturbing trend came about. People began to resign themselves to the political sphere, to see it as something over which they have no influence. When people cease to be able to envisage an alternative future, they cease taking political action. The dismissal of the politics of consensus in which ideological differences are blurred is the first essential step in the come-back of the political sphere and in encouraging participation in it. Coming up with new, alternative political projects is what can bring citizens back to the political sphere, what can bring them back as participants, not as passive observers. The renewal of civil society may be dependent on a reinvention of the political sphere.



Milla Mineva has an MA in Cultural Studies, and she is doing PhD in Sociology at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridsky, where she now is assistant professor in the Sociology of Culture. Her research includes projects on Socialist consumer culture, National identity, Cultural patterns of European enlargement. In 2008 she was involved in the project *Microtrends*, realized by Open Society Institute, Sofia, Center for Liberal Strategies and "Capital" newspaper. The aim of *Microtrends* is to analyze the social processes from micro-perspective identifying small, counterintuitive, but active groups with potential to cause social changes. The results of the project have been published recently in the book "Guide 2020".



Monika Balint shares her experiences of the difficulties of change – both while transforming her organization from a political youth network to a local formal NGO, and the long term investment necessary to change the atmosphere in a local urban community.

**The policy of small steps
– experiencing local development**

When an association of young activists goes into partnership with local government to work on a large social regeneration program, this long-term cooperation requires new working methods and a different kind of knowledge. When ZöFi, a previously informal group of green activists did precisely that, they started to realize some of their own limitations as well as the limitations of the other participating groups. Although the participation of local residents and civil organizations is a crucial element of such a neighborhood program, perceptions of what form that participation should take can be very different. For ZöFi, this meant fundamental changes to the organization itself.

Ups and downs of civil society in Hungary

There are some aspects of the development of civil society in Hungary, which are unique to post-socialist countries. The political changes and peaceful revolutions of 1989 were based on the rise of new civil movements and organizations. In the 1980s, formal and informal activist groups and civic forums were organized in response to certain issues, such as the construction of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Waterworks. Others aimed to initiate dialogue on the state of democracy and the possibility of change. These organizations had strongly political agendas. Many of them formed the basis of new parties, as the dream of holding the first democratic elections became a reality. Some former activists became politicians and members of the new parliament. The nature of this strong connection between organized politics and civil society has changed over the past twenty years. It did, however, have a strong impact on how civil society was rebuilt, as well as on how civil society organizations are perceived by the general public.

International funds, like Phare, and other organizations that helped to improve democratic conditions by providing financial and professional help for civil organizations, independent cultural institutions and fledgling charity groups played a key role in development in the 1990s. Their activity was perceived with both hope and suspicion. For many, these sources helped to start the process of improving social, ecological, economic or cultural conditions in the country as well as developing new institutions and their networks. In some cases these initiatives grew and became independent, others proved to be less sustainable and collapsed after the often paternalistic help of the state and international organizations was withdrawn. Skepticism was largely linked to a fear of being colonized, and concern that international interests would influence the development of Hungary's cultural, political and civil spheres.

At the turn of the new millennium, when some political parties gained influence both in the economic sphere and the media, civil organizations also started to depend on party politics.

At the turn of the new millennium, when some political parties gained influence both in the economic sphere and the media, civil organizations also started to depend on party politics. This often did not help their development, and also contributed to the public's perception of the sector. In some cases, corruption in the political sphere was linked to corruption in civil organizations. In 2002 party politics again strongly invaded civil society, when the so-called Civic Circles (Polgári Körök) were formed by Fidesz, a right wing party, after losing the elections. The Civic Circles aimed to question the legitimacy of the government, but the initiation of civil forums and groups by a political party shook the

foundations of the sector.

The politically influenced and strongly divided media has also provided negative representations of the civil movement. Organizations have therefore had to find new ways of communicating to challenge misleading representations. When people started to lose faith in the political system, civil organizations had to think about the ways in which they can gain trust and show alternative methods of civic engagement. Information and publicity remain crucial to civil organizations.

From a group of activists to an institutionalized organization

ZöFi – Hungarian Young Greens is an association of young people from different professional backgrounds who share an interest in social and ecological issues. The organization was founded in 2001 and has subsequently changed

Unlike most green organizations, the majority of the members of ZöFi studied human and social sciences, communication, sociology or anthropology.

a lot, with many members leaving and new ones taking their place. At the beginning, it was a group of friends interested in green politics. Instead of official political activity and lobbying, ZöFi relied more on activism, street actions, protests, media hacking, printing fanzines, making documentary videos and cooperating with some, more radical, green and anti-globalist groups. This relatively informal activity helped to generate publicity, as well as attracting more and more members, supporters and

partners. ZöFi is not a traditional green organization in the sense that it has rarely organized programs based directly on ecological phenomena. Our activity, as noted in the ZöFi manifesto written by Gábor Csillag, has mainly been reflecting and introducing an overall more ecologically and socially engaged view. We also provide examples of how this can be achieved on an everyday level, by making lifestyle changes and taking action. Therefore, disseminating information through different media actions, public events and education is one of the main elements of our activity. Unlike most green organizations, the majority of the members of ZöFi studied human and social sciences, communication, sociology or anthropology.

In parallel to the professional development of members, the core group of ZöFi in the past few years has changed. It has become more institutionalized, and started to develop long-term projects, and apply for large grants and financial support. We are still using the experience and know-how gained in the past, but the structure and the dynamics are somehow different. Our activities and institutional structure are becoming similar to that of other NGOs, rather than less formal activist groups. With this change we are facing new tasks, goals, and problems.

One of the positive elements of this development is that we have been able to

Pictures from Zöfi activities in a neighborhood of Budapest



create a stable office, and engage in long-term projects and cooperation. This needs more planning and work, and therefore some of us have become part-time or full-time ZöFi employees. The negative side of these developments is that the task of sustaining this new environment and work required by the projects themselves sometimes requires more resources than the staff and members can offer. For example the renovation of the office took almost a year and lots of voluntary work was needed. During this period many of us were spending our free time on this work, and not on developing new activities. As the work was not visible, we felt that we were also becoming less visible. This kind of work requires lots of commitment and in contrast to the street actions, does not give those involved a sense of instant gratification. These tasks do not represent a good opportunity to attract new members. Furthermore, the long-term projects are more complex and in many ways, they require a deeper understanding and commitment. The Magdolna program, for example, is something that might only interest a few people. In many cases, our activities do not resemble projects run by other green organizations. We are only able to delegate some tasks to volunteers, such as newspaper and festival work, and it is obvious at this stage, that we have to develop a new system of working with volunteers.

The task of sustaining this new environment sometimes requires more resources than the staff and members can offer

The organization is still open by definition, but its structure and operation is becoming somehow more closed and less appealing to young students and activists, who were our original target group.

The organization is still open by definition, but its structure and operation is becoming somehow more closed and less appealing to young students and activists, who were our original target group. Realizing this problem, we had to develop new projects directed at students, and more recently we applied to an NGO for a professional investigation into the state of our organization, and help in improving it.

Going local – from green activism to neighborhood mediation

In 2008 we opened an office and became involved in a long-term project, the Magdolna Program. Through its local development company, Rév 8. Plc., the local government of Józsefváros district 8. of Budapest launched a long-term regeneration program for the district. By dividing the district into 11 quarters, they have developed different plans for each quarter, with each gaining a new name. The quarter, which is geographically at the center of the district, was renamed Magdolna, after a positive-sounding local street name. Giving it this nice, female name was the first step in creating a new positive identity for this unpopular quarter. Magdolna is something of an experimentation ground. In this area local residents and civil organizations will work together to bring about change by improving social, economic and physical conditions.

Effective cooperation between participants is therefore crucial.¹

¹ The program and related data can be seen at: Magdolna Regeneration Model Program - www.rev8.hu, The Jozsefváros Mid-Term Urban Development Program can be seen at www.jozsefvaros.hu. Sources of statistics include Rév8 and Studio Metropolitana: Regeneration in Budapest – Józsefváros, Magdolna Quarter Program information booklet 2007 and Magdolna Negyed survey by Sándor Erdosi, Rév 8. 2005-2007.

ZöFi joined the project in response to an appeal for civil organizations to participate that was made by Rév 8. Plc. in 2006. Organizations from different backgrounds could apply for empty and run-down office space. The local government offered help in the renovation of this office space in return for involvement in the renovation process and organization of projects connected to the aims of the Magdolna Quarter Program, especially in community development. Although ZöFi is not a social organization, and has little experience in community development, its young members found cooperating the program challenging.

Where a community has to be strengthened and an active civil sphere has to be built, the development of the public sphere is a must.

We knew little about local development, but we had a lot of experience in activism, generating public discourse and mobilizing volunteers. Many of us are also engaged in the 'global education' program – teaching schoolchildren and high school students about global social, economic and ecological issues from a green perspective. Civil engagement of the inhabitants in local issues and therefore civil organizations in the quarter are



weak. Where most of the population is poor and face an everyday struggle for survival, participating in decision-making and in the improvement of the area are far from their priorities. Apart from offering a variety of programs for kids and young people based on our experience in global education, and lobbying for including green elements in the development program, we decided to propose tools that can meet some basic needs. Crucial elements of our projects are communication and publicity. Where a community has to be strengthened and an active civil sphere has to be built, the development of the public sphere is a must. Our experience in acting publicly was something we could offer to this community. We decided to start a new and independent local newspaper,

where inhabitants and institutional partners can talk about their experience of the regeneration program, the positive and negative aspects, and their needs. Also we take part in and organize forums with other organizations. Through public art projects and cultural events we also generate debate, and try to attract the attention of not only those living in the quarter, but also of other inhabitants of the city, who might still have negative associations with the area. Some of the programs that we have so far found to be successful include creating gardens with local residents, organizing regular free markets and creating the Magdi local newspaper.²

Experiencing change

We have gained a lot of positive and also negative experience in the past few years. As we are still committed to the project, we have to have a clear idea of the

The bureaucratic structure of the local government is something that defines every move made, and creates barriers.

areas where our help can be useful. ZöFi might look professional in some cases, as its members have their own professional background, but it is a civil organization. We are not social workers, or community developers,

architects etc. We cannot take on the responsibilities of other public institutions or NGOs, but we can help direct those institutions towards the real needs of those people we have regular contact with.

Our personal experience shows that there are some problems which are almost constant and their origin seems to be structural:

- Poor communication.
- Poor levels of knowledge about civic rights and tools used to prevent them.
- A clash between different institutional structures.

The bureaucratic structure of the local government is something that defines every move made by the development company, and creates barriers. The problem of poor communication stems from strategies employed by local government offices. Even if many people employed by the development company are sensitive to the needs of the people they meet during the program, their activity is restricted. Timescales also vary dramatically. The local government needs a year to make one decision, the organizations involved need a further few months to prepare their next steps and residents demand immediate action if a problem occurs, or if they have been promised something.

Many of the local residents have no knowledge about the regeneration program. Most people did not know a year ago that they live in the so-called "Magdolna" quarter, which is a basic element of acquiring any kind of feeling of local identity. People can support the program only if they have some information about it, and then only if they find its aims match their own interests or

² For further details of the activities see www.zofi.hu





beliefs. Even civil organizations, which applied to take part and other partners, are rarely informed about the next steps. This is the result of both working with organizations with completely different structures, and poor communication methods. It took more than a year for the institutions involved to sign a contract on the renewal of the offices and the community development plans. It was only half a year later that the organizations could sign a rental agreement and get the keys. This setback in development brought six organizations closer together. After almost one year of not being informed, ZöFi organized a meeting of the six organizations involved in the development program. We contacted Rév 8. Plc and the local government and started to complain and show our commitment to start working. This improved the communication to some extent.

The commitment of civil organizations can be seen in two basic elements: we were and we are ready to take on the fictional name of the Magdolna Community and use this name in our projects. We see it as a tool to clarify our target group and the physical boundaries of our activity. The name is fic-

tional, but the houses and the people who live here, are not. The other element of commitment is some kind of restriction on our activity in this area, according to the needs of the community and the programs of other partners. That means, we cannot push programs that do not completely meet the needs or the interests of the local inhabitants, and we have to inform all the other organizations about our future activities and plans. Furthermore, we have had to make plans together with some other organizations. These organizations have different backgrounds and professional knowledge, but similar interests. Communication between us is essential to avoid any of us becoming redundant. Both these elements are different from the critical and free attitude of the activist organization that ZöFi used to be. I think these self restricting elements are generated by a need for cooperation and can be justified through making the goals clear and carrying out conscious self criticism. These elements are required from other partners too. This is where negotiations about roles and tasks can start.

There are only a few dozen people in the area who have the means to be active in public debates and fight for their own good. Different organizations, including Rév 8. Plc and ZöFi, organize forums on local issues. In most of these forums there are only a handful of people (in an area of 5000 inhabitants), and those who come do not represent the interests of all the groups in the quarter. In August and September ZöFi will start an investigation into this phenomenon. With the partner organizations, especially with social workers, who have lots of personal experience, we will try to find either new ways of bringing and involving people in these forums, or use other tools for building the local public sphere.

It is hard to demand community development in an area, where the community has never been united, and in a quarter, which has never existed before.

It is hard to demand community development in an area, where the community has never been united, and in a quarter, which has never existed before.

The society of the area is not one community, but this fiction will slowly start to become reality. As people find their own goals in the programs and find ways of connecting to it, these interests can create something like a community, integrating the different groups.

Breaking down barriers

Taking part in this long term program was, and is, a real challenge. After a period of merging with the new space and the new area, losing lots of energy and even members of the organization in the process, we have got to a point where the positive side of engagement in this local program is becoming visible. We are getting credit for our activities, and also our activities are much

We have got to a point, where institutionalization is not something we have to regret, and definitely not something we can step back from.

more visible by now. We are again able to involve new people in our work and increase cooperation with other organizations. Now it is clear to us that change cannot happen in a short period of time, but can be achieved through taking a series of small steps, while the position of every partner is reinvestigated again and again.

Self criticism, as I mentioned is an important element in this cooperation, but it is also important for the organization itself. We have got to a point, where institutionalization is not something we have to regret, and definitely not something we can step back from. Stepping back would be a radical decision, which can be made, but it goes against the structure that was recently created, with the material sides of the institution, and our engagement in long term projects. This engagement is something that can be fulfilled as I mentioned with a constant re-examination of our position, if we are to be aware of whether the steps we are taking originate in our aims, or are generated by external need. At this point, our position has to remain one of a mediator in this new network of people and organizations, helping barriers to be broken down. Parallel to this, we have to develop programs that are based more on the original, more universal aims of the Young Greens.

Mónika Bálint is a sociologist, cultural worker, activist and project coordinator at ZöFi - Hungarian Young Greens. Her field of research is participation in art projects and community development. As a local activist she has been involved in different projects in the Józsefváros, district VIII. of Budapest. She has also worked on some additional projects, including the Magdi Fesztival, a 3 days Romani - Hungarian festival, which took place from 14-16.05.2009, Magdolna Quarter Community projects, with ZöFi- Hungarian Young Greens 2008-2009. www.zofi.hu and on Normal is different. (Bipolar projects) KIMI Budapest – Theater an der Parkaue, Berlin. (<http://www.winterakademie-berlin.de>), She was also organizer and curator of Filmplönik, www.up-budapest.hu





Redefining NGOs

NGOs risks “losing touch” due to alienation from citizens, problems finding a common language with normal people and tendencies towards self-centered and undemocratic organizations with poor management skills, warns Primož Sporar

Sure people know about us. We claim to pursue the public's interest and refer to ourselves as civil society organizations, or in Slovenia, mostly as NGOs. You can't avoid us. When legislation is being adopted, roads are being built or new jobs are being created, whether that's on a local or international level, we are always there.

We claim to know the terrain, to have an awareness of people's needs and interests, we say we represent people, we say we have solutions, but we certainly had solutions to the lack of democracy. Twenty years ago, when there was a clearly defined and visible challenge, combating the lack of participation in our society, it was easier. Ad- for NGOs for at least ten years during and after the transition period in all CEE countries. "No democracy without NGOs" was

Twenty years ago, when there was a clearly defined and visible challenge, combating the lack of participation in our society, it was easier.

resent people, we say do we? In fairness to the we certainly had solutions racy. Twenty years ago, defined and visible chal- lack of participation in our lack of participation in our dressing this aim worked years during and after the countries. "No democ- the slogan.

But in the face of new global challenges, NGOs seem to be much less convincing with criticism that we're teaching our grandmothers to suck eggs widespread. Still remain teaching people to suck eggs. It seems that the mantra "Projects, projects, projects" is just not enough anymore. It seems that people working for NGOs are becoming more and more like many international experts. They travel a lot and learn more and more about their area of expertise, but all this has a limited impact. They spend time on planning, writing projects and establishing programs, evaluating the key issues, sitting in conferences and developing standards, taking care of salaries and offices, paying debts and spending money, but what's the outcome? You could be forgiven for asking whether I'm talking about the administration or NGOs, they are starting to sound very much alike. But they're not alike. They differ even in their *raison d'être*.

The many millions of NGOs imply millions of *raison d'être*, but we are united by one factor – almost all of us think our work is in the public interest, that we are needed and effective. We complain that it is the political, legal and fiscal environment that is not enabling us to play the role we would like to, but is that the real reason for our ineffectiveness?

We have to face some facts. The managerial skills of people working in the NGO sector are hardly comparable to those evident among their counterparts in the business world. Many NGOs are less democratic than public institutions, sometimes they are even autocratic and above reproach. It's also rare that NGO experts possess a similar level of knowledge as experts from universities. NGO breakthroughs are limited compared to research institutions. Rarely can NGOs claim that they represent people as elected representatives do. They rely on foreign funding so are largely independent of the economic pressures affecting the business sector. They are also often top-down organizations largely driven by donors. Even their goals are frequently donor-driven, with their existence more closely related to the salaries of employees than the potential benefits for the target group. Political dependence on the

Planning, writing projects, establishing programs, evaluating issues, sitting in conferences, developing standards and spending money - but what's the outcome?

Many NGOs are less democratic than public institutions, sometimes even autocratic

government in power also harms the integrity and identity of the sector and gender equality remains an issue. Family and worker friendly values are not always promoted. Can NGOs claim to be using advanced management techniques, e NGO systems, participatory foresight exercises, social responsibility standards, benchmarking techniques and open coordination scoreboards? No, largely they can't.

All that can be changed. And we are seeing the sector develop in that direction. We are attempting to be perfect across the board, but is that really the ultimate goal? Should our focus be to employ more people in the sector, to earn more money, to help more people, to account for a bigger proportion of GDP? Are we trying to imitate the Slovenian public healthcare system, with its 7 minutes per patient, so that we have 7 minutes per victim of violence, refugee, asylum seeker, Roma and poor person? We are being told that privatization of public services is THE chance for the sector, that NGOs provide effective and low-cost services. We are increasingly playing a simple socio-economic role and unconsciously becoming factories for forgotten people.

After the first exodus from NGOs in the nineties, when people from the sector emigrated to political parties, it seems we are witnessing a second. We seem to be deserting and abandoning our roles. The sector's energies are being spent on finding our role in the world of capitalism and neo-liberalism, instead of on creating a vision for the ultimate open society. Maybe that's no coincidence. Filling out forms to create statistics about how good we are is slowly undermining our human face. Implementation is conquering innovation. And I can imagine that many people are not displeased with us for doing the paperwork instead of living in the real world and being the annoyance we used to be. But do not be mistaken, faith coming from the government in our ability to provide cheap services is more of a result of their equanimity for our target groups than an indication of trust in our work.

We do still have empathy for our target groups, you can see it in our eyes. We are still trusted by the general public, which makes a clear distinction between us and most public bodies. Although if you listen to NGO representatives explaining poverty, abuses and discrimination, you almost get the impression that they need all this sorrow for their existence. Maybe there is a fear that our work could result in citizens who are so active that they no longer need NGOs. They have to continue to depend on us if we are to continue to be necessary, we are good at having the monopoly on problems. I think competition from other sectors would do us good. Do we ask our clients for feedback? Have we evolved in line with their changing needs over the last decades? You can see evidence of that in some individual NGOs, but the sector as a whole has largely not changed much. People, jobs, the weather, governments and cars have changed, but how have we? Just getting older is not enough. We still expect the external world to understand us even if we don't provide any explanations, we think the need for our existence is that obvious. What is the biggest change in the perception of NGOs over the last twenty

The sector's energies are being spent on finding our role in the world of capitalism and neo-liberalism, instead of on creating a vision for the ultimate open society.

years? Would shifting our empathy and services to unashamedly reaching people be such a revolutionary step? Being as good as we think we are, we could easily earn the money to guarantee a continuing stream of clients. Hopefully it won't come to that, but getting closer to the real world seems to be an increasing trend. Maybe that was recently established associations in the NGO sector in Slovenia, however, as a trade union established in the last year, a civil one? The bottom line is that technology, globalization, NGOs, compared to other sectors, are overly concerned about their approaches. They have no idea where to go.

Do we ask our clients for feedback? Have we evolved in line with their changing needs over the last decades?

the reasoning behind the creation of (reach) managers in Slovenia. This is probably unlikely, but the idea of NGO workers was also social dialogue replacing it is that in an era of information and the financial crisis, NGOs, do not seem to be coming up with new approaches. They have no real idea about where to go.

The cult of laziness and abundance is also influencing our work. How else can we explain the evolution of new, local initiatives, organized by citizens themselves targeting concrete problems? They are informal, ad-hoc and problem-oriented. They receive no funds and these activists seldom approach the professional and formal NGOs which claim to be there for them. It seems that we are slower, less flexible, and are losing touch. We do not need regulation from government, but need to be regulated by people and their needs. Unfortunately, not many NGOs are interested in such projects.

Let me remind you of a child's approach. They are spontaneous, sincere, frank, open, direct, honest and sparkling — true friends. It is so nice to see them being disobedient. They play rather than plan to play or convince others to play. There is wisdom in their games. There has to be, otherwise they would not be happy. Are we happy in the NGO sector? Instead of talking, planning and convincing donors and governments to allow us to interact, we should be disobedient and just interact more with our clients and friends. In the coming European Year of Creativity and Innovation, using the child's approach may be a niche.

Primož Šporar is attorney at law acting as an Executive Director of Legal Information Center for NGOs in Slovenia. He is actively involved in projects and programs in the field of human rights protection, development of the alternative dispute resolution methods and development of enabling environment for the work of the civil society organizations in Slovenia and the European Union. He is a member of different working groups for preparation of legislation and initiator of many NGO programs in Slovenia (CIVICUS Civil Society Index, US AID Sustainability Index, Cross Border Mediation training programs, establishment of the Association of leaders of Third Sector etc). He actively participated in numerous international events and acts as a mediator and a mediation coach, as well as asylum seekers counselor and children advocate. Šporar is the president of the Slovenian Union of Mediation Organizations (MEDIOS) and a member of European Economic and Social Committee – EESC where he represents Slovenian NGOs.





**Civil
Society
- always
a good
thing?**

There is plenty of “bad” civil society—xenophobic, political and nationalistic groups that fit the discourse perfectly. Content – not form – should be the thing that matter in 2009 means Rafal Pankowski

We are all committed to the idea of civil society. We look to civil society to provide a model of social organization which would satisfy our individual and collective goals. We heard it many times. Together with democratization, Europeanization and human rights, civil society is a notion which arouses respect and sympathy across Europe. Indeed, civil society in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe has a special role to play in the ongoing reconstruction of the system. We should assist it and help it become stronger and more effective: in this way we help the societies who had suffered from political oppression and social underdevelopment. That is the standard discourse we are all too familiar with.

A question can be asked, however, is civil society always a good thing? In other words, is it necessarily a force for the good? Can there be instances where civil society itself can be seen as a part of the problem rather than of the solution?

Let me add, I do not mean the marginal cases of corruption or political manipulation which happen in civil society networks. That is, in a way, normal and goes down to imperfect human nature. Civil society is composed of humans

If civil society is understood broadly as a mode of social self-organization, a platform for collective action based on shared goals and ideas outside of state institutions, then many of the largest civil society phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe are hardly compatible with the democratic ideal at all.

and it would be highly surprising if it were free of certain sins which are typical features of any society and any social enterprise.

What I have in mind, is not the individual shortcomings of isolated organizations or individuals involved, but a more general point about civil society being part of the problem.

Andrzej Waskiewicz writes: 'The weakness of civil society in post-communist countries is widely attributed to the burden of their past. However, not all social and political apathy can be explained by that, nor do the hardships of everyday life provide a better or more complete explanation'. I would add that many of civil society's problems have deep roots in its very heart.

My main field of expertise as a social scientist but also as a civil society activist is the subject-matter of racism, xenophobia and nationalism. The relationship between the idea of civil society and nationalism in Eastern Europe is rather complex and I don't want to discuss its long history here.

If civil society is understood broadly as a mode of social self-organization, a platform for collective action based on shared goals and ideas outside of state institutions, then many of the largest civil society phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe are hardly compatible with the democratic ideal at all. The social movement around Radio Maryja in Poland has a plethora of institutionalized expressions. Besides its media operation, it consists of foundations, educational institutions, associations and fund-raising initiatives, all the standard elements of civil society activism. It involves and mobilizes several hundred thousand people. At the same time, it is openly hostile to pluralist democracy, minority rights, and tolerance. It is radically nationalistic and outspokenly anti-Semitic.

The All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska) is a nationalist youth organization.

Civil Society - always a good thing?

Its tradition goes back to the 1920s and 1930s, today it is largely composed of skinheads. It is responsible for violent attacks against its opponents and against minorities. It has served as a support pool for the extreme-right political party, the League of Polish Families, which until not long ago was a part of the Polish government and which still controls Polish state TV. At the same time, the All-Polish Youth declares itself to be no more no less a non-profit educational non-governmental organization, caring for the patriotic education of its members, looking after national heritage, and conducting other noble activities. It has duly applied for the official public benefit status under Polish NGO law. Roman Giertych, its founder and long-time leader, referred to the All-Polish Youth as a wonderful example of civil society flourishing in Poland. Can we really accept the extreme-nationalist skinheads as yet another expression of civil society? Wouldn't the ideal of 'civil society' lose much of its moral high ground if we are satisfied with such a purely technical procedural approach?

Nationalist movements such as the All-Polish Youth or Radio Maryja preach hostility to democracy – therefore we can fairly easily distinguish them from the more genuine expressions of civil society attached to democracy and human rights.

Things become more problematic, however, when the radical right-wing groups learn the language of democracy and human rights and employ it routinely to gain international legitimacy and to advance their nationalist agenda. The further East we go, the more often we encounter such linguistic confusion, to the point where we can doubt the usefulness of the civil society concept as such.

Across Eastern Europe the commonly interpreted in versal terms. The nation-frame of reference and organization, as opposed

The notion of citizenship, too, can be employed in ways which are not really compatible with human rights ideals.

The notion of citizenship, ways which are not really rights ideals. The focus on shared citizenship in a democratic polity is fine, when access to citizenship is not denied. Look at Latvia, a European Union member state, to witness a very different reality.

notion of democracy is national rather than uni-state remains the main the highest form of human to Soviet federalism.

too, can be employed in compatible with human on shared citizenship in a

The ideological notion of Europe, so central to contemporary civil society discourse in our region, has had some disturbing connotations in history, associated with colonialism and so-called Euro-centrism. Today it may be used to legitimize exclusion of those without Schengen passports. It also serves as a justification of quasi-racist attitudes towards those cultures which are symbolically placed outside of the construct of European civilization, not least the Russian culture.

Are we not easily manipulated by the rhetoric of civil society and Europeanization or Westernization? In Moldova it often means little more than Romanization, a unification with the neighboring Romania on the basis of ethnic ties. It also means a symbolic ethnic cleansing and a depreciation of minority traditions in one of the most multi-cultural countries of Eastern Europe. But a very large part of civil society in Moldova, sponsored by Western donors, subscribe to the idea

of Westernization as Romanization.

The Ukrainian Orange Revolution was seen as a perfect expression of civil society in the making and it was received enthusiastically by Polish and Western public opinion. Today we see, things have been rather more complicated and we understand that the discourse of a democratic civil society is often employed by interest groups that have little time for authentic grass-roots democracy or for minority rights.

In today's Russia, civil society activists and human rights defenders frequently find themselves in an exotic alliance with National-Bolsheviks waving a flag combining the symbols of the hammer and sickle with the swastika. It is another sad example of civil society becoming a rather ambiguous concept or, paradoxically, becoming a rhetorical tool of essentially anti-democratic, even pro-totalitarian, social forces.

Would it not make sense to dispose of the notion of civil society as an unequivocally positive (progressive) phenomenon?

As we see, East European civil society comes in different shapes and colors, not all of them necessarily likable. As we know, Antonio Gramsci famously analyzed civil society as a field of struggle for hegemony, whose outcome can never be taken for granted. Would it not make sense to dispose of the notion of civil society as an unequivocally positive (progressive) phenomenon? Perhaps we can do without such a focus on civil society as a solution to social problems. Would it not be wiser to be more cautious and more brave at the same time: to go beyond the formalistic approach to civil society as such, with its ritualized rhetoric framework, and to look at specific expressions of civic activism, to identify those initiatives which genuinely promote the good values such as human dignity, equality, tolerance and anti-racism or, dare I say, healthy cosmopolitanism? Whether or not we would define them as 'civil society', is in my view secondary.

Rafal Pankowski is the author of *Neo-Fascism in Western Europe* (Polish Academy of Sciences: 1998) and *Racism and Popular Culture* (Trio, Warsaw: 2006). He has written widely on racism and nationalism for publications including *The Economist*, *Index on Censorship* and *Searchlight*. A resident of Warsaw, he is the Deputy Editor of *Nigdy Wiecej* ("Never Again") magazine and a research program coordinator at the Collegium Civitas in Warsaw.





2 voices from the sidelines

For Rayna Gavrilova, the Sofia demonstrations of early 09 raised questions about distribution of labor between formal civil society organization and informal groups, while for Milena Leneva the social network activism proved that not everyone is apathetic.

Last week I went out to protest. The protest was organized by students, environmentalist, mothers, and farmers. All of them had different reasons to be angry with the state. I was angry that our government failed us yet again, by proving to be the only European government totally dependent for natural gas supplies on one country: Russia. Probably James Chowning Davies quoted in a Transitions Online article ¹ was right: we have started believing, naively, that we live in normal democratic states where the interest of citizens and market rules frame our governments. And when we are betrayed we become very angry. I stayed at the sidelines: supporting fully the requests of the environmentalists, harboring sympathy for the students with no clue what the mothers and farmers wanted.

The protest turned ugly because extremists usurped it. There were claims that some of them were paid to do so. Some participants in past protests declared the meeting a failure because it didn't have clear objectives. True. The organizers claimed that they were not political. I strongly disagreed - of course they were political, just not partisan. By claiming being non-political you leave all the important stuff to the politicians that everybody hates. The level of organization was mediocre. I didn't see many registered civil society organizations helping the organizers: they have other strategies how to work for the public good. The trade unions sneered. The official student organizations withdrew the morning of the protest - God knew why.

Last week I also read a text by a Bulgarian sociologist, commenting on national data from a major representative survey of European values. He had entitled his text "A-Sociality". He saw in the responses no appreciation, readiness, motivation and practice of anything collective, outside of the family - the No. 1 value for Bulgarians. Zero solidarity, zero participation, zero trust. He saw no society and stated the obvious: if there is no society there could be no civil society. And then staying at the sidelines of the protest and in front of my



National protest in front of the Bulgarian Parliament, January 2009



¹ www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=304&NrSection=2&NrArticle=20303



computer (before and after) I saw civil society's new avatar: Civil Society 2.0. Out of the 3000 protesters at the Parliament Square 2000 had arrived when mobilized through a Facebook group. The mothers came mobilized by BGMama, the biggest internet forum of young mothers (and also older mothers, women in general, and effectively, anyone who cares).

Yesterday the protest-but in much smaller num-time I knew where the formed a coalition, pre-convincing all the parties ruling and opposition) to blaming the practice of ing specific reforms of the Center for Liberal State-market Economy among others were pressing the establishment from the other side - and exactly at the same time. Are we witnessing a new stage in the life of civil society, entailing this time a division of labor?

Spontaneous activism needs spearheads. What will be the relationship between the intelligent, motivated, persistent, professional NGOs and the angry activists?

ers were out there again bers - 500, may be. This big NGOs were: they had pared a document and in the Parliament (both sign a joint declaration buying votes and endorselection law. TI, OSI, the gies, the Institute for Mar-

Labor is rarely aesthetic, regular efforts are needed to prevent it from turning ugly. Such coveted spontaneous activism needs spearheads - how and from where? What will be the relationship between the intelligent, motivated, persistent, professional NGOs and the angry activists? Something is brewing in Riga, Vilnius and Reykjavik. Greek farmers are blocking the border. Is this civic activism? There are clearly many questions - join us in search of some answers!

Rayna Gavrilova is Executive Director of the Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe, based at the Sofia office.





Two weeks ago I did not know we could achieve this.

Major protests have been organized in Bulgaria. Eco-activists, students, mothers and agriculture workers all have their own demands on the government. Multitudes of people went to the streets and in front of the Parliament to declare their needs. These protests were interesting in many aspects, however, we will focus your attention on only one of them – the creation of the online network behind the protests.

How did it all start?

It was Monday and Teodor, one of the Bulgarian ecological activists, came up with the idea that it would be good to give an opportunity to people who wanted to participate in the protest but didn't have the possibility; to express this support somehow.

Two creative individuals found two programmers - one of them studying and working outside of Bulgaria. A web site was developed overnight and all of the participants had to work throughout the day. Initially the idea was only to count the visitors who declared support for the protest in front the Bulgarian Parliament. We decided that it would be optimal if everybody browsing the site were able to read the exact demands of the protestors. It soon became evident that all the visitors to the site had to be able to declare not only their support, but also express opinions and give suggestions to the Bulgarian government, Parliament and directly to the protestors. So the web site didn't end up only a counting machine of numbers of supporters, but also became a place for sharing opinions and discussing them.

What actually happened?

There are some extremely interesting facts about this site.

1. Knowledge about the site was disseminated exclusively from person to person. There was no time for optimization. Less than 1 percent of the people found the site through Google or other search engines. About 80 000 unique visitors browsed the site about 450 000 times, knowing about it only through their friends and referring sites.

2. Perhaps the chosen site domain (www.feelfriendly.com) was not a very appropriate name for the site. However as this domain was already available for us from another project idea, we decided to use it here, pressured by the short time we had ahead of the protests. Now there are a lot of people in Bulgaria and around the world who know about this protest site, but few of them know its name.

3. This site became more than the intended counter of supporters – it became a parallel demonstration related not only to the protest. Most visitors participated in the discussions and over days there were more than 1800 comments and

Most visitors participated in the discussions and over 3 days there were more than 1800 comments and suggestions.

tors dis-3 suggestions.



4. Most of the people signed their names even though this was not a requirement on the site, showing that they wanted to stand behind their position.

5. About 10% of the traffic was from abroad, demonstrating that Bulgarians abroad were able to show their support through the site.

6. Finally, many people volunteered with diverse support throughout the whole project. We received numerous offers of volunteer help and especially with the mammoth task of classifying and analyzing the multitudes of comments on the site, many strangers helped out.

What are the main conclusions?

Social networks work. The distribution over less than 15 hours to about 35 000 unique visitors making about 120 000 hits the first day the site existed, is amazing when taking into account the modest number of Bulgarians all over the world. This experience demonstrates that even without any other means of communication one interesting idea can reach thousands of people in a very short period of time - even before the official media can react and follow suit.



Milena Leneva works for Future Now in Bulgaria



eParticipation - a new sphere of NGO activity?

eDemocracy is hard form a political and social point of view rather than a technical one: visibility and impact is posed against risk of government high jacking and legitimacy problems, discusses Simon and Matej Delakorda.

A new sphere of NGO activity has emerged in recent years in Slovenia, as a number of NGOs have started to take a more web-based approach. A number of on-line projects have been introduced, such as the Slovenian Civil Society e-Participation web service¹, The Citizen's Forum², the NGO e-Participation portal available during the Slovenian EU Council Presidency³, The Citizen's forum for the European elections 2009⁴, Open-source NGOs e-Participation platform⁵ and the e-participation platform for NGO involvement in establishing the Law on voluntary work⁶. These projects aim to strengthen civil dialogue and utilize the internet to support participatory democracy.

Maximizing the impact of this new arena has understandably led to some challenges and dilemmas, for the NGO sector, which we will outline here and will, hopefully, form the basis of further discussion.

The real challenge

A number of ad-hoc e-participation projects and successfully implemented applications are not seeing much traffic or interaction because internet users are simply not paying attention to them. There are three main reasons for this. Firstly, the application is intentionally or unintentionally badly promoted to the general public or focus groups. Government institutions are not usually keen to promote on-line participation tools which are already available. They fear a potential rush to participate and management other problems. NGOs, on the other hand, often do not have enough resources to promote their e-participation projects on a larger scale, particularly through traditional mass media.

A number of ad-hoc eParticipation projects and successfully implemented applications are not seeing much traffic or interaction because internet users are simply not paying attention to them.

Secondly, the eParticipation projects are focused on relatively minor or highly technical expert issues, which may be irrelevant to the general public and their quality of life. If this is the case, NGOs have a duty to explain these complex issues, relate them to everyday life experience. They have to explain to people why the issue is relevant to them and how their participation can improve the situation. Never-the-less, a much more effective way to rally people around e-participation is to base projects on public problems and policy issues, which directly concern a larger proportion of the population.

Thirdly, there is often little evidence of how these e-participation projects will impact public opinion or decision-making processes. Potential users do not know how the results of e-participation are going to shape policy issues, problems or public perception. Improving this situation requires feedback from governmental institutions and politicians, monitoring any impact on legislation or changes in public perception of a particular issue and the degree of mass media recognition. E-participation is therefore often more of a political and social challenge than a technological one.

1 www.e-participacija.si/en
2 www.epractice.eu/en/cases/citizensforum07
3 www.predsedovanje.si/en
4 www.evropske-volitve.si
5 www.okno.cnvos.si
6 www.sodeluj.net/pic-ceetrust/

Sustainable success

NGO e-participation projects, although not for profit or market-oriented, are often very demanding in terms of both organizational and financial resources. Open-source Internet applications and user friendly web 2.0 applications enable NGOs to establish their own e-participation applications very quickly and with minimum costs. Whether or not an NGO successfully implements e-participation, however, depends on its mobilization capacity, decision-making impact, community building, technical security, personal data protection, moderation of on-line communication, public promotion, monitoring techniques and evaluation methods.

Open-source Internet applications and user friendly web 2.0 applications enable NGOs to establish their own e-participation applications quickly and with minimum costs.

Most of this know-how is needed in order to establish a proper social, communication and political environment for e-participation applications. For example, when moderating an on-line policy forum or consultation, a specific set of rules usually applies to enable deliberate democratic communication and starting questions. Data is usually available to enable informed debate and messages from participants are summarized in a report at the end.

NGOs facilitating e-participation projects often need to have at their disposal expert and in-depth understanding of complex decision-making, policy-making and public opinion forming processes, especially at the level of EU institutions.

Furthermore, new skills are required when facilitating and building up social networks and communities as a part of e-participation projects. This includes using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr and providing messages through different formats and features on-line. As the most successful e-participation projects are the ones which are most sustainable, NGOs have to provide long-term, diverse human and technological input to keep up with rapidly evolving Internet technology.

It has been suggested that the democratic potential of the Internet is strengthening the political power of those who are already information-rich and empowered.

Coordinating off-line and on-line participation

The digital divide is often cited as a barrier to e-participation. Older generations are generally less likely to have the proper skills required to use new information and communication technologies. Marginalized groups within society often do not have proper Internet access, allowing it to be dominated by white, well-educated people.

It has been suggested that the democratic potential of the Internet is strengthening the political power of those who are already information-rich and empowered. The Internet therefore supports the existing balance of power in favor of political elites. For these reasons it is vital that e-participation projects implemented by NGOs play a part in real-time processes and are connected to live events and discussions in order to enable the participation of people who are unable to utilize the latest technology. For example, the on-line Citizens forum for the European elections 2009 enabled e-participation through a system of

e-points, positioned at live public events. Facilitated by a moderator, these e-points provided access to laptops. Paper questionnaires were also distributed with the results later published in an on-line debate.

Legitimizing participation

NGOs deliver both top-down and bottom-up e-participation projects and applications. The first are usually co-financed by government institutions on a local, national or EU level. The second are usually co-financed by the NGO foundations, networks or implemented by NGOs themselves.

As top-down e-participation projects such as e-consultations, e-panels, participatory budgeting and e-legislation are promoted and supported by government institutions, they have a higher degree of public visibility. They are also more likely to impact policy or legislation directly.

On the other hand, because these government institutions have a greater degree of ownership over the project, they can hijack the e-participation process and adapt it to their specific goals. These are often related to legitimizing governmental agendas, as was the case with the NGO e-Participation portal for the Slovene EU Council Presidency.

Bottom up e-participation projects such as e-activism and e-campaigning are used by NGOs to coordinate, organize, finance and engage the public. They aim to mobilize and gain support or deliver a political message as a part of political campaigns, as was the case with the Open source NGOs e-Participation platform.

Grass-roots activities like e-Facebook groups and sent part of a formal or insti-process and are therefore put from citizens in relation

Top down e-participation is more efficient but bottom up e-participation is more legitimate.

based on the principle of participatory democracy. This can, however, sometimes result in conflict with a government or a stalemate in the decision-making process. In order to overcome this kind of dichotomy, a new NGO participatory community multi-media project in Slovenia has been exploring new possibilities for video e-participation 2.0, such as Studio 12)⁷. Top down e-participation is more efficient but bottom up e-participation is more legitimate.

petitions, e-questionnaires, blogs do not usually representationalized policy-making providing much needed into government institutions,

Looking for success in eDemocracy

NGO eParticipation projects in Slovenia clearly demonstrate the democratic value of the Internet, especially when providing information and data related to decision-making process. This was the case with the Slovene Civil Society eParticipation web service which provided information and opportunities for citizens and NGOs to e-participate in different policy-making processes. Meanwhile, the NGO e-Participation portal for the EU Council Presidency enabled document provision, raising EU policy awareness, strengthening transparency and enhancing public visibility of the Slovene Presidency.

On the other hand the challenges of justifying such initiatives as forms of e-democracy and funding still remain. Firstly, meeting social expectations related

⁷ www.s12.si/content/view/95/104/

to the depth of on-line discussions and deliberation is demanding additional efforts in perceiving Internet technology as a truly interactive technology within decision-making processes.

Secondly, the political expectations behind providing concrete evidence of the inclusion of citizen and NGO contributions into final decisions, documents or policies are often not realized. For this purpose a proper evaluation framework or methodology for the effects of e-democracy should be created. The latter is especially important when reflecting on imaginary and fake top down e-participation projects conducted by governments and public relations agencies.

The future of NGO eParticipation

A number of challenges therefore remain for NGOs keen to get involved in eParticipation. They must develop effective ways of linking on-line and off-line participation, thereby tackling the digital divide. They must also reflect critically on institutional, top-down public relations and technocratic-oriented attempts at e-democracy introduced by political elites and governments.

Successful examples of NGO eParticipation need to be promoted to the general public through the media, thereby creating more public awareness. Transparency of eParticipation, inclusiveness and personal data protection must be secured in order to build confidence and the conditions necessary for e-participation need to be cultivated further. NGOs need to create focused and sustainable e-participation projects and cement their role as e-participation facilitators.

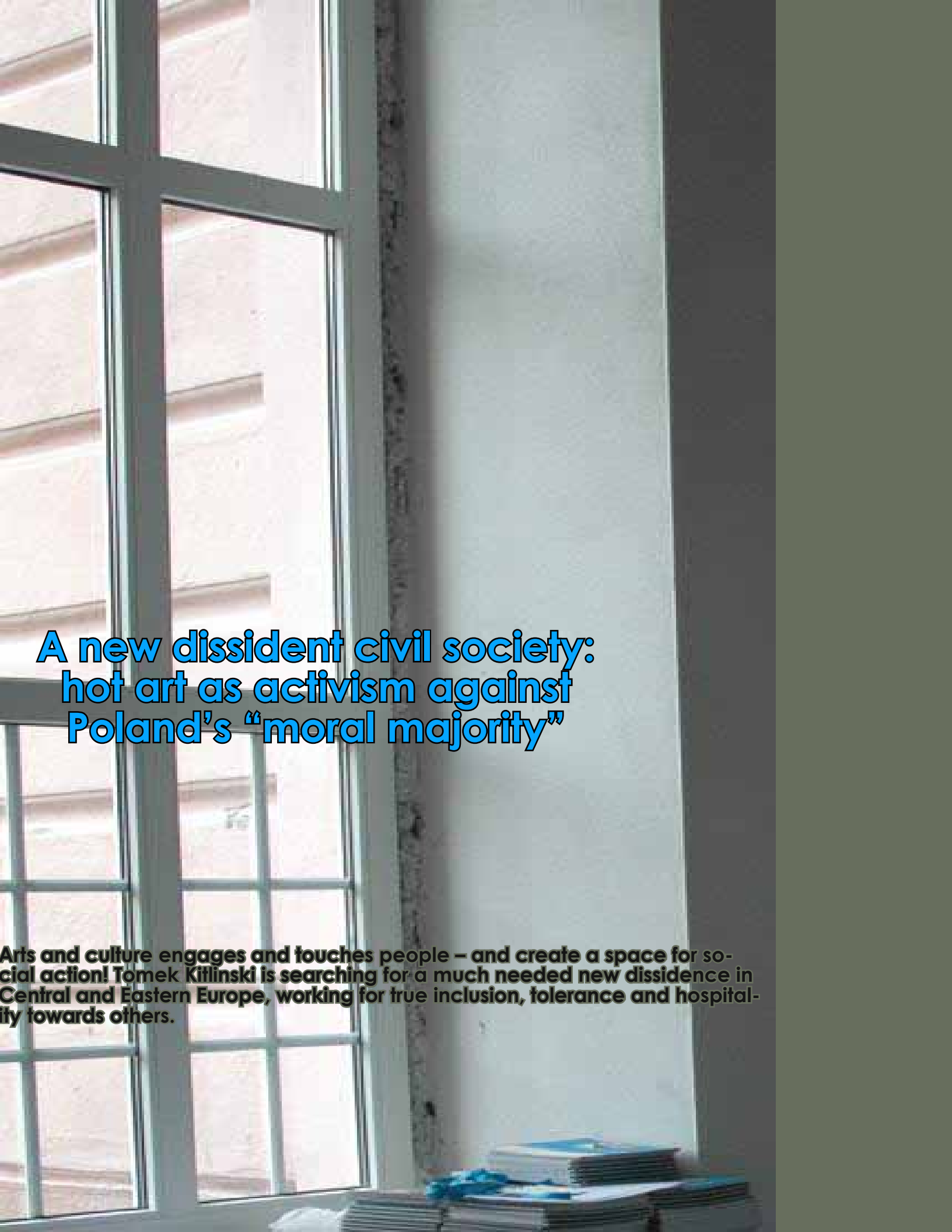
eParticipation needs to become personal. eParticipation initiatives clearly come with more political and social dilemmas than technological ones

Finally NGOs need to successfully manage their eParticipation resources. They need to build up a catalogue of professional skills in on-line engagement and participatory process management. They need to accept that e-participation needs to appeal to the general public as a means of improving quality of life. E-participation needs to become personal. e-participation initiatives clearly come with more political and social issues and dilemmas than technological ones. This gives debates on e-participation additional relevance, as they are framed and conceptualized by debates on the future development of political democracy.

Simon Delakorda *is a full time e-democracy/ e-participation practitioner & researcher and managing director of the Institute for Electronic Participation in Ljubljana. Starting in 2000, he has participated in most of the early internet democracy projects conducted within the university and NGO sectors in Slovenia. He is the author and co-author of a number of articles and case studies and is a conference speaker on democracy, political participation, active citizenship and on-line government. He received has a political science master including a thesis on e-participation.*

Matej Delakorda *is a project manager and IT expert. In 2007 he obtained his University Degree in Sociology at University of Ljubljana. He is a president of management board of Institute for Electronic Participation and a project manager in Studio 12 which is a Slovene multimedia Center and Internet TV station. Among his bigger IT projects were: non-governmental organizations portal for the period of Slovene EU Presidency, web portal for democratic e-participation of Slovenian citizens, NGO's video portals and multimedia production that covers issues of ecology, society and human relationships.*



A photograph of a window with a view of a brick building, overlaid with text. The window is on the left side of the image, and the brick building is visible through the panes. The text is in a blue, outlined font. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

A new dissident civil society: hot art as activism against Poland's "moral majority"

Arts and culture engages and touches people – and create a space for social action! Tomek Kitlinski is searching for a much needed new dissidence in Central and Eastern Europe, working for true inclusion, tolerance and hospitality towards others.

Civil society is sick. It could be saved by art with a cause. Activist art that cares for minorities, women, immigrants, the disabled and the poor. Aesthetics – if socially engaged and interactive with the audience – drives social change, fights fears and empowers the powerless. In Poland visual artists, in particular those who are female and/or queer, are the new dissidents, come to rescue the Tocquevillian 'art of associating' that is civil society. Theirs is an art which serves public interests, it is critical, disturbing and sensuous. One detects a blurring of the borders between culture and activism. Art is a formidable force in energizing people, setting us free, enabling us to create and act together.

Rights Movement in Eastern Europe's Civil Society

I would like to discuss and show you images of socially committed art – that is one type of socially committed art which I am personally most involved with, that related to equality, women rights and rights of sexual minorities. Examples include the lesbian and gay visibility campaign Let Us Be Seen authored by Karolina Bregula, and Dorota Nieznalska's photographs about sadomasochism in politics. Both, alongside many other feminist and queer works, featured in Pawel Leszkowicz's exhibition calling for Love and Democracy. I would like to demonstrate how transgender Rafalala's social performance at the parliamentary elections, testifies to transphobia at the very heart of our political system. There is also the leftist artistic milieu of Krytyka Polityczna with its 'Applied Social Arts' for the economically excluded, as well as initiatives set up by the youngest generation of Polish artists.

These include alternative NGOs, squat initiatives and street artists across Poland acting against injustice, among them is urban guerilla artist Szymon Pietrasiewicz, 26, who as a protest against consumerism, exposed himself in a shopping mall with a label reading 'Sale: human being - 9.99 zlotys.'



Szymon Pietrasiewicz's performance 'Sale: human being - 9.99 zlotys'. Photo by Dorota Awiorko, Dziennik Wschodni

Art to Counter Uncivil Society

Uncivil society is growing in Eastern Europe, the rise of casino capitalism (and

unconcern for its impending crisis), the far right, hatred of the supposed others, ultra-nationalism and prejudices. I'm an out gay in Poland and what distresses me is the hegemony of this uncivil society, the violence, misogyny and anti-Semitism as well as xenophobia and homophobia.¹ Excrement and acid are thrown at sexual minorities in Eastern Europe. On July 22, 2006, bags of faeces were pelted at gay pride in Riga, the capital of Latvia. In the old Polish capital of Cracow, caustic acid was tossed at the Parade of Equality, which champions the rights of queers on May 7, 2004 – one week after Poland joined the European Union. "Fags to the gas!," "We'll do to you what Hitler did to the Jews!" - far-right protestors shouted at feminist and gay marchers in Poland. Civil society doesn't do enough to counter prejudices and I for one am very disappointed in it. How can we regain civil society, rethink and recreate it? We need art. Art intervenes, criticizes and creates. Culture has a rebellious edge, it sublimates and runs counter to the dehumanization of minorities.

Art with Messages against Intolerance

The portraits of Let Us Be Seen were of thirty real same-sex couples standing in the street and holding hands and they were part of a social action organized by the non-governmental mental organization 'Campaign Against Homophobia'. The portraits were destroyed by far-right members of the cities, they were censored and authorities, but the touring exhibition was a popular success and enjoyed some significance both in the gallery and in the media and unleashed physical violence and public debate about same-sex love and queer rights. Art functioned



holding hands part of a social action organized by the mental organization 'Campaign Against Homophobia'. In the streets, the immediate members of the cities, they were banned by local authorities, but the touring exhibition was a popular success and enjoyed some significance both in the gallery and in the media and unleashed physical violence and public debate about same-sex love and queer rights. Art functioned

Karolina Bregula, Let Us Be Seen, Campaign against Homophobia

Also part of the Love and Democracy exhibition, was the photographic work of Dorota Nieznalska. Her work Passion is an exploration of masculinity, violence and suffering, and consists of a video close-up of an exercising body builder's face and a cross on which a photograph of a penis has been placed. Members of a far-right party, the League of Polish Families, physically attacked this young female artist and then they brought charges against her for "offending religious feelings" and Nieznalska was sentenced to community work and banned from leaving the country or, as the judge phrased it, sentenced to "half a year of the restriction of freedom. In Love and Democracy, art spoke the idiom of love and
¹ For an analysis of anti-Semitism and art events (exhibitions, performances) to oppose it in Poland see http://www.jewwcy.com/post/still_racist_after_all_these_years.



Maciej Osika's transgender self-portraits in the Love and Democracy exhibition

it spoke the idiom of protest, with style and sensuality. Dorota Nieznalska represents a new dissidence against the anti-modernism of today's Poland, against violent, claustrophobic and repressive fundamentalism, without religion as inner experience.

Films of Resistance to Repression

A documentation of the aggression against human rights and freedom of love in the Polish streets in 2005 and 2006 was provided by the films of Aleksandra Polisieicz, Ewa Majewska and Joanna Rajkowska. The women directors show the battle surrounding the marches for equality and the counter-culture club, Le Madame. The Reanimation of Democracy – the March for Equality Moves On² (2005) documents the demonstration in Warsaw supporting the banned equality march brutally suppressed in Poznan on 19 November 2005, where sixty people – feminist and gay marchers - were arrested. The march took place in accordance with the constitution and the ban issued by the city authorities turned out to be unlawful. Another documentary film, made by the Sirens TV group³ presented the march for equality banned by the authorities in Warsaw on 11 June 2005. Within the same trend of spontaneous social protest in the name of a free public, and at the same time alternative, space, there was the defense of the Le Madame club in April 2006. Le Madame was the centre of the culture of political and moral opposition in Warsaw propagating artistic freedom. It became the symbol of an alternative new and young left, in a city ruled by the far right and was, therefore, closed on an administrative pretext. The last dramatic phase of the defense of the subversive Le Madame club was demonstrated by the outstanding film of Joanna Rajkowska. These films

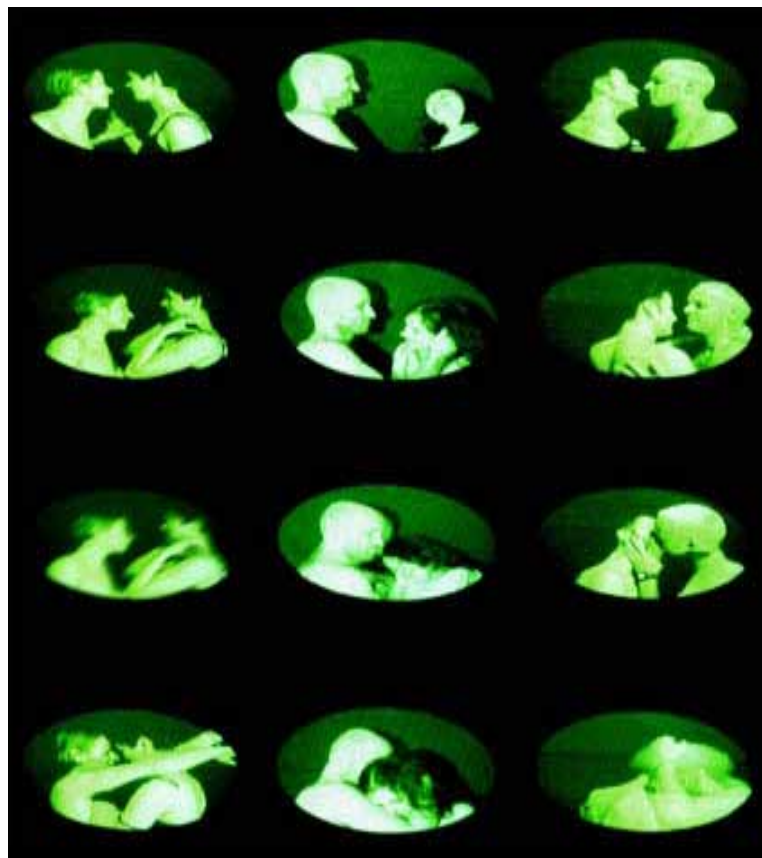
² Feminist theorist/activist Ewa Majewska and artist Aleksandra Polisieicz made the film *The Reanimation of Democracy – the March for Equality Moves On*.

³ The feminist art collective Sirens TV consists of Ewa Majewska, Aleksandra Polisieicz, and Ellyn Southern.

by women directors Rajkowska, Majewska and Polisieicz participating in Love and Democracy represented art as an alternative civil society of social document, opposing the false objectivity of the official media. As Jan Puhl of Der Spiegel writes:

"And so in the meantime, a little Polish gay movement changes peu à peu into a citizens' initiative against intolerance".

Intimate democracy begins in the psyche and ends in the reform of civil society. The art of intimate democracy, according to Pawel Leszkowicz, strives to integrate the private with the public, establish a space of communication. In this sense, this is an art that healingly touches upon Polish democracy's deepest ailment, goes beyond discrimination and this art of intimate democracy inspires the praxis of a self-governing and pluralistic civil society. Love and Democracy included hetero- and homoportraits by Izabela Gustowska and Katarzyna Korzeniecka, demonstrating the diversity of love. My own installation at the exhibition combined the photographs of the Jewish and queer places in Lublin, Prague, and Irkutsk. Together with Pawel Leszkowicz, I argue that because of the censorship imposed on sexuality-conscious art and women's and minority rights, a second revolution must happen in Poland. The first one in the 1980s, under the banner of Solidarity, was conducted in the name of a free nation and the collapse of communism. The group identity of Poles stands behind it. A second revolution, equally peaceful, should happen in the name of the freedom of the individual and minority rights, opposing the danger of fundamentalism.⁴



Izabela Gustowska, L'Amour Passion from the Love and Democracy exhibition

Minority for Minority

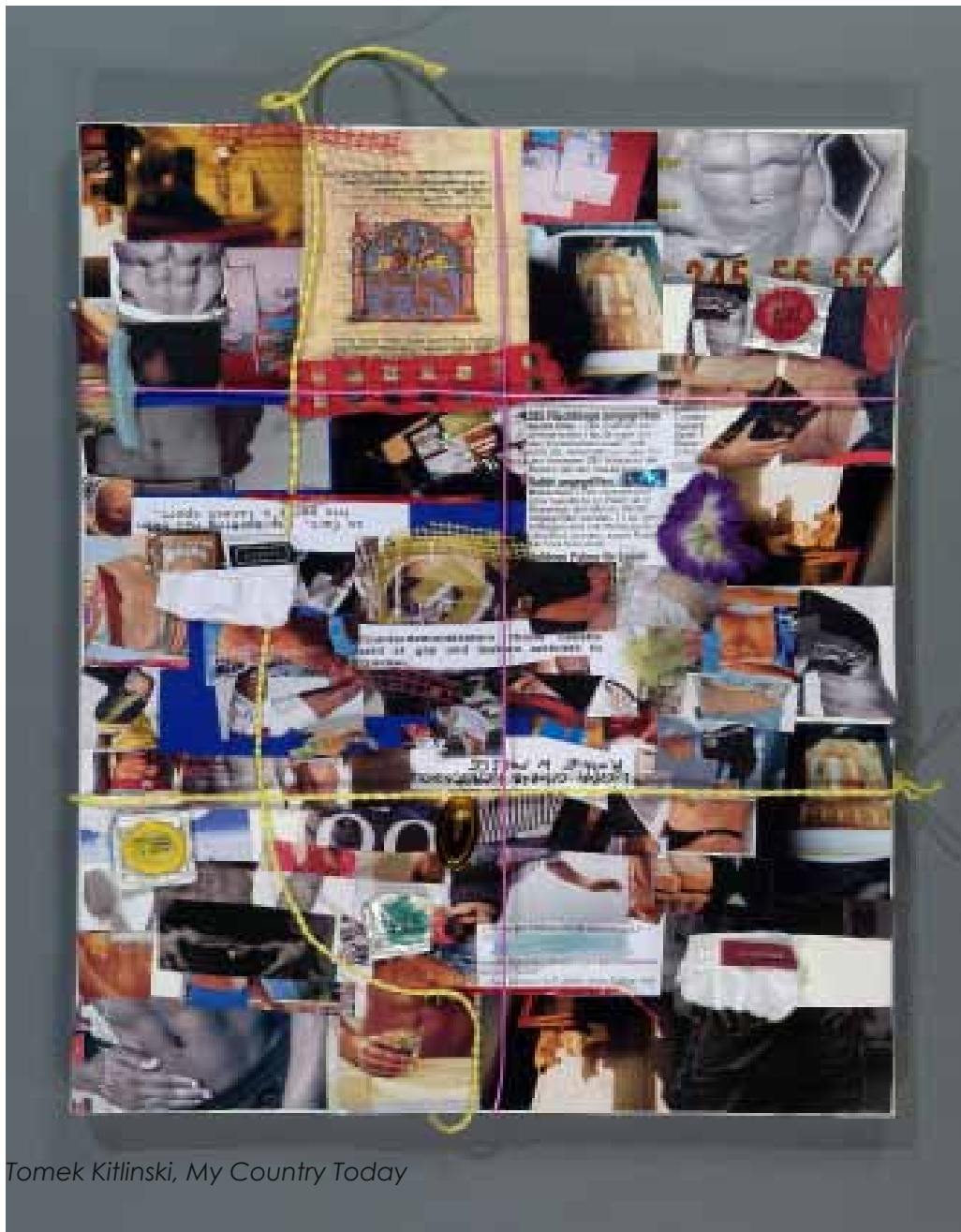
Poland and other Eastern European countries are in the grip of the ideology of the "pure" nation and the militant party, both exclude otherness instead of choosing democracy as a "heterogeneous way of life"⁵. Another cult is fundamentalism, religion-turned-ideology. A pressing issue is liberalizing religion here; if non-integrist, faith-based activism could contribute to civil society. Faith and Democracy is a necessity! An example of this is the collaboration of feminists, gays, and the reform Jewish community Beit in Poland, when Dota Szymborska-Dyrda of this liberal Jewish group supported the queer rights movement under the motto "minority for minority." It is imperative to remember here the still un-

⁴ For the tradition and the cutting edge of feminist/lgbtq art see "Feminist Revolt: Censorship of Women's Art in Poland" <http://bad.eserver.org/reviews/2005/leszkowicz.html>, and "The Queer Story of Polish Art and Subjectivity" <http://www.artmargins.com/content/feature/leszkowicz.htm>.

⁵ Claude Lefort's approach to the idea of democracy.

mourned annihilation of Poland's Jews in the Holocaust, and the mass expulsion of them in 1968. In popular perceptions, Jews, Roma and queers are still beyond the pale. That's why the younger generation of Polish Jews initiated Shterndlekh/Meryba. A Magazine of the Minorities about Culture to which I contribute. It warns against the anti-Semitism and homophobia in Poland⁶ presents feminist and queer ideas and goes back to the transgressive figure of a woman tzaddik⁷. Textually, but also visually, with its artwork by dissident artists, Shterndlekh/Meryba embody the spirit of revolt.

The idea of hospitality is of primary importance in Eastern Europe in the context of xenophobia. If not, civil society is in danger. We are in danger. To activate the popular base of civil society, we should work for an Eastern Europe of Hos-



Tomek Kitlinski, My Country Today

⁶ Texts by Darek Galecki, Dora Szyborska-Dyrda, Przemyslaw Pilarski, Ewa Majewska, and editor-in-chief, Anna Cialowicz.
⁷ Drama by Anna Cialowicz.

pitality. All citizens and immigrants are part of civil society, and should be accordingly involved, engaged, and committed. Our participation in civil society is the human value of hospitality to others.

Transgender and Feminist Activism

Democratic hospitality must extend to transgender persons. When transgender Rafalala came to vote in Poland's parliamentary elections on October 21, 2007, she was denied her ballot right. At a Warsaw polling station Rafalala presented her ID which showed a man Rafal, and didn't match her gender. For the election, she wore a blond wig and a black dress. The returning officer said,

'You're not the man on the ID photo', and didn't allow Rafalala to cast her ballot. 'I live in a country where I have to stop being myself in order to vote', Rafalala commented on her blog. The denial of Rafalala's right to vote was headline news across Poland and was an outstanding performance art piece for the rights of transgender persons in this country. A one-person example of artistic civil society in action!



Feminist author/activist Kazimiera Szczuka during her 2000 Manifa: "Human Rights are Women's Rights"

Together with Rafalala many of Poland's scholars, students, and even pupils are turning into civic activists. Women public intellectuals Maria Janion, Magdalena Sroda, Kazimiera Szczuka, and Agnieszka Graff, whose essay is posted on this discussion forum, spearhead dissent. Janion (b. 1926) has changed the Polish humanities, edited *Transgressions*, an influential series of anthologies of literature and art and published a

dozen of her own books. The recent ones analyze misogyny and anti-Semitism in Poland. Her collaborator, Kazimiera Szczuka, feminist activist and author of the book *Cinderella, Frankenstein and Other Women*, devised the women's Manifa demonstration which is an artistic celebration of femininity and a powerful call for women's rights in a country where abortion is illegal. These women provide a voice of freedom in contemporary Poland.

Feminoteka is a collective and website that works against misogyny in Poland. It provides a free forum of expression and action for women and their male supporters. Its projects include initiatives for reproductive rights and against domestic violence, The Virtual Museum of Women's History and publishing of art postcards with feminist messages.

New Spaces

Alongside feminists, *Krytyka Polityczna* is a journal, publishing house and environment for progressive younger sociologists, literary critics and activists. As a hub, *Krytyka Polityczna* plays a crucial role in fostering alternative thought, spark debate and nourish engagement in Polish society. Through poetry that breaks conventions and establish new language, through visual art, new artistic spaces and alternative theatre, artists devise ever new ways of organizing social gatherings to unleash the public power of art.

An urban guerilla artist in the city of Wroclaw called himself none other than Truth. His are interventions into the cityscape with statements of unconcealment, truth, aletheia. Be it in gentrified or run-down parts of Wroclaw, Truth introduces angry additions to annoy us out of our complacency. That is how art performs new dissidence in Poland.

Alternative theatre companies turned into educational centers when the former multiculturalism of Poland is recalled.⁸ To this tradition belong the Borderlands in Sejny and The Brama City Centre - NN Theatre in Lublin, from which young activists took the step to found a new NGO Homo Faber, through the use of films, performances and workshops which promote multiculturalism, sexual rights and speak out against domestic violence in the smallest towns of Eastern Poland

they spread their message. The squat movement often cultivates pacifism, artistic handicraft and what is all too rare in this country, sexual education and workshops promoting safer sex.

As Jean-Paul Sartre argued, engaged art reveals the images which society tries to conceal from itself. Let Us Be Seen, Love and Democracy, Rafalala, Krytyka Polityczna, and the squat movement unleash artistic images which the mainstream conceals, the diversity of gender identities, effective alternative identities, sex and warnings against exclusion. Alternative culture reveals truth about civil society and about society as a whole. In today's Poland, art stings those in power out of their self-righteousness.

Art Acts as Dissidence

The emerging civil society in the anti-totalitarian dissidence of Eastern Europe was also of cultural inspiration. Alternative theatre and art played a crucial part of the democratic opposition to Communism. In this context, the Committee against the Repressions toward Conscription Objectors, founded in 1981, developed into the Movement for Alternative Society. As one example of links to this movement Theatre of the Eighth Day from Poznan was in opposition and therefore expelled under Communism, and one of its members was arrested while participating in the feminist and gay March of Equality in 2005. An additional historic example, the rise of human rights culture in the eighteenth century was



Street artist Truth's interventions in the urban space of Wroclaw

⁸ For more on the theatre and art against xenophobia see "New Europe, Old Monsters" <http://bad.eserver.org/issues/2005/73/kitlinski.html>.

inspired by literature, in particular the novel⁹. The novel is an "emotional argument for democracy" because it "makes its readers more empathetic."¹⁰

The critical work of a Polish-American artist, Krzysztof Wodiczko, is important as it may be regarded as an element of transnational civil society to found a public sphere which would cherish subjectivity. In 1985 Wodiczko projected the image of a swastika on South Africa House in London as a protest to Apartheid, constructed a vehicle for the homeless in the United States and sculpted a cane The Alien's Spokesman by which a stranger, homeless or immigrant can communicate on the streets with passersby.

Today's Possibilities: Spaces for Art and Democracy

Jeffrey C. Goldfarb presents human interaction in the alternative theatre under Communism and on the Internet today: political autonomy can be generated here. In our 'dark times,' the 'power of the powerless' is created in small initiatives at the interface of art and activism. In comparison to radio or TV politics, Internet-mediated politics, that of bloggers, is, according to Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, "more egalitarian, much less hierarchical, more deliberative... Online, there is an expectation of differences of opinion, and people work on respecting the differences and finding common ground. This has been apparent in the antiwar mobilization and in electoral organizing (in the United States)."¹¹

I envisage participatory art and society workshops for a very wide audience, including the underprivileged. The society/art projects could be happening simultaneously in democracy hubs/art venues and over the internet. Taking place in both realities, this could energize the togetherness of being active, that is civil society, aiming at becoming free. Simone de Beauvoir would not consider us free if others are unfree. Those without freedom, without rights, without papers in the EU and globally, as well as Eastern Europe's Arendtian conscious pariahs: women, Jews, Roma and queers.

Art is altruism. Art involves a double movement, the self-expression of minorities and a de-egoization. Hélène Cixous demonstrates this in her interpretation of the work of Jewish/ Ukrainian/Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector: 'one can only attain this right distance through a relentless process of de-selfing, a relentless practice of de-egoization.' Art performs human rights, as activists/artists Lois Keidan and Lois Weaver put it. To borrow Elzbieta Matynia's term, performative democracy. Simon Critchley defines it as "processes of democratization", "providing constant critical pressure upon the state, a pressure of emancipatory intent." That is how philosophy and art challenges closed structures, discrimination, and the sufferings of minorities, as recalled by Richard J. Bernstein.

But for the time being, Poland is unjust, class-ridden, discriminatory, undemocratic, and, under the previous government anti-democratic. The transition confirmed the tyranny of the majority, which Tocqueville and Mill were already warning us against in the nineteenth century. Majoritarian communism gave way to majoritarian fundamentalism. In fact, pseudo-Communism gave way to pseudo-Christianity. The French psychoanalyst and philosopher with roots

⁹ Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights. A History* (New York and London: Norton, 2007).

¹⁰ Hermione Lee reports on the social power of the novel in *The New York Review of Books* of May 10, 2007.

¹¹ Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, *The Politics of Small Things. The Power of the Powerless in Dark Times* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).



Wojciech Gilewicz, Photography from the Love and Democracy exhibition

in Bulgaria, Julia Kristeva is right about the amorality of Eastern Europe: "the immobilization in painful narcissism; the hellish complacency outside of time; social amorality; and pauperization." The evil responses to artistic expressions mentioned in this text testify to this and misguided receptions of artists' work have led to extreme hatred, near riots and uncivil society.

Art Events as Civil Society Hubs

That's why we need – here and now – art events as democracy hubs. Though playful, art takes ideas seriously. And takes us, viewers/co-creators, seriously too. Art is something of ourselves. The activist art of Let Us Be Seen, Love and Democracy, Rafalala, Krytyka Polityczna, the street art and squat movement give life to civil society.

We urgently need a strong, ethically-committed, and inclusive civil society to initiate citizens into self-associations of generosity. Art finds the means to make a critique of the system, Art affords insights into the body politic. Where Eastern Europe painfully lacks community organizers, art establishes associations, teaches involvement, brings the form and force to be active. Art is at the very grassroots and at the same time truly cosmopolitan. Art doesn't take its eye off the ball of society. Thanks to art, civil society could be closer to society itself – not in the trap of the normalizing mainstream. It is up to the people to constitute civil society and to animate it. The alternative character ensures non-hierarchical organizations and engagement in the "other" social facts and aesthetic forms. Art adds a sensual and social dimension to civil society and changes reality, doesn't it?

Tomek Kitlinski is an author, academic, activist, and, occasionally, tries to be an artist. As a student in Communist Poland, he was involved in the opposition's alternative theatre movement. After 1989, he studied at Gutenberg University in Mainz, the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, and obtained his M. Phil. in the Studies of Text and Image at Denis Diderot University - Paris 7 where he worked with Julia Kristeva. Simultaneously, he developed his performance art, presenting it at galleries and festivals across Poland as well as publishing poetic prose *Parallel Lines* and *Love.Hate*. He was a Fulbright scholar at the Transregional Center for Democratic Studies, New School for Social Research in New York. Currently, Kitlinski is lecturer and researcher at the Department of Philosophy and Sociology, Maria Curie-Sklodowska University in Lublin, Poland. Kitlinski has published a number of academic, journalistic and literary texts.



Tomek Kitlinski (to the right) and his partner Pawel Leszkowicz Let Us Be Seen, Campaign against Homophobia

Give a Book for Christmas a short story by Georgi Gospodinov

December 2008

We enter December. At the far end of the month, Christmas shines hypnotically. The pre-holiday insanity will soon rush over. The citizens, calm until yesterday, will turn into mad buyers. The traders already calculate profits and rub their hands contentedly. Christmas looks more and more like a giant mall, like the Christmas bazaar at the National Palace of Culture in Sofia, like the crowded METRO, Billa... Christmas as a professional holiday of the people in trade and retail business. Christmas as a promotion day.

That is why I will hurry up to announce my small personal campaign. It is not sponsored by anybody, it is not backed up by any institution. It doesn't involve sending in text messages. Every tenth participant won't win an automobile or a trip for two to a Turkish resort. It is not part of a promotional package. Let's call it simply "Give a Book for Christmas".

Because giving a book as a present is a nice gesture. There is a certain taste and aesthetics in it. There is an ecology of the mind. I don't know how to explain it. It is not like presenting someone with a deodorant or a car.

Because the book is a very personal gift. Because you give words, you give a story. And, through the book, you say something to the person you give it to.

Because the book is a slow gift, a gift that lasts. You do not use it up, drink it up or spray it up and throw its empty packaging away. (This is also part of the ecology.) To give a book as a Christmas gift is something very special. There is style and retro in it. Because Christmas is made of the books we have read, of the stories we have been told. I remember very clearly "The Little Match Girl" that I received as a child and the hidden tear-drop when I reread it. How would Christmas look like without this story. Or without the "Gifts of the Magi" by O. Henry. Or without Dickens where you can get lost time after time. Or without "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story" by Paul Auster.

I give this small personal campaign as a gift to all those who already wonder how to avoid giving the same perfume, scarf, jewel as last year's.

I hope it will be read also by those who open mainly the financial pages, by the bank managers and company bosses. Surprise your employees for Christmas, give them a book as a present. Or add a book to all the office things that you will be giving around the holiday.

When a society is in a long and hard crisis, it first throws away what seems to be unnecessary and useless. Books and culture in general were easily recognized as the unnecessary expense. As something not among the essential commodities, not of vital necessity. It seems to me now that we slowly begin to realize the opposite. Books and culture are of vital necessity for every normal society. I believe that if more people give each other books for Christmas, it will lessen a bit the disenchantment of the holiday. It will reduce the total amount of kitsch and will tone down the hysteria. It will distinguish between those who have a holiday and those who have a shopping day. Because Christmas is not a promotion but a gift and a miracle. And we cannot live without miracles. Especially now, especially here.



Georgi Gospodinov (1968, Bulgaria) is author of books of poetry, fiction, literary and cultural researches. His novel, "Natural Novel," has been issued six times in Bulgaria and is published in 12 languages. The Times describes it as "humorous, melancholy and highly idiosyncratic", according to Guardian, it is "both earthy and intellectual": <http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/bulgaria/gospodg.htm>. Gospodinov's projects centered around memory and everyday life in the recent past include "I've Lived Socialism. 171 personal stories" (2006, editor) and "Inventory Book of Socialism" (2006, co-author). Georgi Gospodinov is Ph.D.

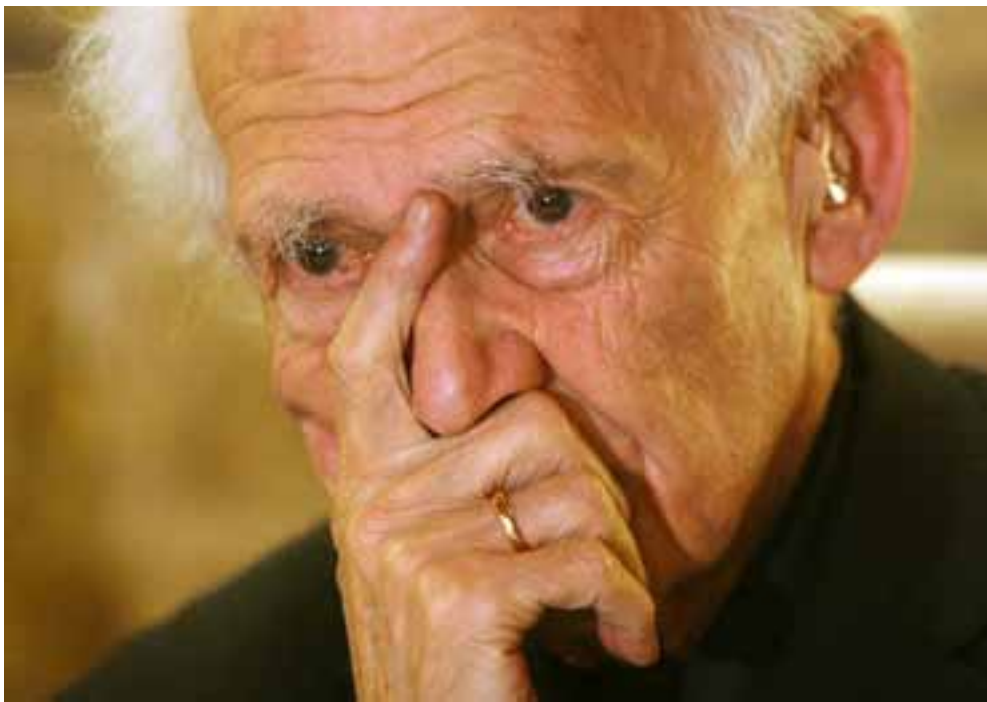
at the Institute for Literature; editor in Literaturnen vestnik weekly and columnist in Dnevnik daily.

Bauman – End of the Orgy

interview by Tomasz Kwasniewski published in Polish in *Gazeta Wyborcza*,
February 2009

The repayment of debt is the pressing issue of the day, momentarily, but after all the concern is how to live tomorrow. One way of life is ending and it's not obvious what the new one is. Interview with Professor Zygmunt Bauman, sociologist and philosopher.

Professor Zygmunt Bauman, born in 1925 in Poznan, is a sociologist, philosopher and essayist. One of the founders of the concept of postmodernism, he is the author of many books on the modern world and modern man. In March 1968 he was expelled from the University of Warsaw and emigrated from Poland. He lectured at the universities of Tel Aviv and Haifa before being made Professor Emeritus of the University of Leeds. He lives in Leeds and is married with three daughters and six grandchildren.



Do you have debts?

- I'm a terrible customer for banks, probably thanks to a solid pre-war upbringing in Poznan. This is because I regularly pay back what I have on my credit card and the only debt I've incurred in my life, 40 years ago, was a mortgage. I paid this off within 20 years. In those days they gave you a loan only until your retirement; only later everything turned upside down!

Are they still tempting you?

- It stopped recently, but before they used to send a fair amount of junk mail. Day in, day out.

Does your wife have debts?

- We manage our household finances jointly.

Has this crisis affected you personally?

- I've never bought stocks, but Jasia, my wife, did - and when the stock market crashed she lost half of her life savings.

Did this affect you badly?

- I told our children long ago: don't count on inheritance! Your parents won't burden you with debts, but will leave you nothing except the house and copyrights. And for us - how much longer do we have?

I meant personal consequences for you, since thankfully I don't feel this crisis at the moment.

- Because it's won't happen until it gathers momentum. The consequences of the 1929 stock-market crash which caused the depression lingering throughout the 1930s only became clear three or four years later. Then the mass unemployment and bankruptcies started. The crisis is spreading like a wave. Shops will close, which will bankrupt small companies, people will lose their jobs, their earnings, stop spending money

and stop being the consumers who drive the economy...

Do you have any recollection of the crisis in the 1930s?

- My father attempted suicide. He threw himself off a bridge into the Warta but they fished him out. This is my first childhood memory. The first and only, because you generally don't remember things that happened before you were six or seven. But I won't forget that: rushing to the door, my father on a stretcher covered in river weeds, dripping with water.

Why did he jump?

- Because he'd lost everything. Despite the fact that he was about as good at it as I would be, he was at that time a shopkeeper. He went bankrupt and his creditors took everything. I remember them taking the furniture from our flat. The bailiff was a frequent visitor. But when word got around Poznan that my father had attempted suicide he was given work as a bookkeeper out of mercy. The money was lousy, he was treated pretty poorly and humiliated, but somehow he managed to support us.

Did he ever explain his attempted suicide?

- Can you not understand suicidal people?

Perhaps, but I would like to know how your father explained it to his children.

- It was never spoken about, but I attempt to reconstruct it for myself. Back then there was the concept of the "man of the house", which is considered old fashioned these days. He had a wife and two children, he had to earn enough for their food, shoes, schooling. If he couldn't, he was a nobody, a good-for-nothing creature, and his life would have been worthless. If he was not in a position to protect his wife and children from hunger and humiliation, he was contemptible.

Do your children have debts?

- One daughter adheres to her father's principles and doesn't get into debt "for a better life". However her architectural company, until now awash with orders, is in debt, but these are investment debts and she can certainly repay them. My second daughter is an artist, and like all artists she lives from hand to mouth. I can say with some certainty that she doesn't live beyond her means. My third daughter is a normal academic, works at two universities and has just about enough money to get by from one monthly cheque to another.

Did you ever ask your children whether they were in debt?

- They've never been inclined towards getting into debt. It's different with my grandchildren – they're up to their ears in debt. This is because they're quick learners. Some time ago in England an obligatory subject was introduced into universities: living with debts. Who knows if it will be like this in Poland.

You're joking surely?

- I hope so. When I arrived, the state supported students. There were no tuition fees but there were study grants and student accommodation instead, you could even afford the books recommended by your teachers. Then all this was replaced by "cheap" student credit: study now and pay later. This is what I call the introduction of "living with debts" training into the obligatory curriculum. The idea of student loans is based on the same erroneous principle as was the mortgage loan policy. The latter assumed that house prices will constantly go up, and first assumes that anyone with a diploma will get a lucrative job. Now it's becoming apparent that it doesn't have to be this way at all. This year's British graduates, up to their ears in debt, may find themselves unemployed.

So let's talk about the crisis.

- In England they don't talk about a crisis, just about a depression. Do they talk about a crisis in Poland?

Definitely.

- This tends to be avoided here.

What is the difference?

- A depression is something which has its place in normal frame of things. Not that a train has derailed and overturned – it just speeded up at first, then it slowed down, but it still stays on the rails.

And what does crisis mean?

- In a crisis people stand helplessly by and expect the worst. This is how it was in 1929. Each day banks closed, they didn't pay deposits, people lost their fortunes and their savings in the space of a single day. This isn't the case today. The government gets hold of billions, I don't know where from, but it gets it and gives it to banks. So apart from Lehman, no large bank which has raised the alarm over bankruptcy has actually gone bankrupt. Admittedly there are more and more small bankruptcies, but these aren't reported in the press. With a few exceptions these are still bankruptcies of small workshops, shops, small factories with a couple of employees. It will take some time until, as the English say, many a pickle makes a mickle...

And do you think about what is happening, is it a crisis or a depression?

- I think that in some ways it's a bigger crisis than in 1929.

Why?

- Because – to quote Soros – an extraordinarily big bubble has burst and it's not easy to patch it up. The attempts to "return to normality" adopted by politicians are not of great use. There probably is no way back, whereas it's not clear what may replace the previous "normality". If you look closely at what has happened, there is no historical precedent. "Normality" itself has been struck down and even the fairy-tale trillions in government aid cannot get it back on its feet again.

What does this crisis consist of?

- In thought, just as in dancing, as the Polish proverb says, I know how to start only from the oven... So before I reach the dance floor I'm going to ask you two questions. The first: do you know the word "hypotrichosis"?

No.

- And there's nothing strange about that. That word appeared in vocabulary some three months ago and denotes a new, recently discovered medical complaint: what happens if your eyelashes become weak, stop growing, and then fall out. The "discovery" of hypotrichosis is connected with what we're talking about because news about this terrible disease, which every woman who cares about herself and her social position should declare war on, appeared at the same time as an advertisement for a large pharmaceutical company called Allergan. Does this name mean anything to you?

It seems they make Botox.

- Yes, so this company which has earned millions of dollars from Botox announced that it has discovered an amazing weapon in the war against hypotrichosis – an ointment to be applied daily. In other words they came across some substance in the laboratory and wondered how to make money from it. Maybe we manage to persuade women to smear it on their eyelids? To do this you need to scare them – with an insidious disease for example. Something which not too long ago was a 'part of life', something to live with – one person has weak eyelashes, someone else full-bodied – suddenly becomes an issue of choice between pathology and health. And if this is a disease and there is a medicine for it, then my duty is to treat myself, because if I don't treat myself I'm committing a crime against myself, my friends, my family and humanity. And now my second question. Do you know the old Polish joke about Czech and Polish shoe trade reps who travel to Africa?

No.

- So they're in Africa and they both send telegrams back to headquarters. The Polish one: no shoes needed, everyone walks around barefoot. The Czech: send 200 million pairs of shoes immediately, everyone walks around barefoot.

Not all that funny.

- Perhaps, but this joke shows two possible approaches to the problem. The alleged Polish rep could be called pre-modern and the alleged Czech modern. From borrowing the strategy of the Czech shoe industry representative, the boom and unprecedented success of the modern capitalist economy followed. And now to what we're really talking about. Rosa Luxemburg – the name has been disowned today in Poland, but not because of her insightful economic theories – she published at the beginning of the 20th century a study of

the accumulation of capital. In it she suggested that capitalism by its nature is doomed to commit suicide because it renders barren the fields which feed it. She was writing at the height of imperialist and colonialist tendencies, so naturally she considered this tendency towards suicide in the context of conquering lands with as yet pre-capitalist economies. With enormous simplification we may say that she reasoned as follows: in order to realize the labour-produced surplus value, capitalism needs non-capitalist economies. When the world is already conquered in full and capitalist economy becomes universal, capitalist accumulation will reach its limit. This is somewhat like the image of a snake eating its own tail: at the beginning food is plentiful, but the more the snake eats the more difficult it becomes to digest it. In the end there is nothing to eat and no-one to do the eating... This vision as such is still valid, though the colonialism with which Rosa identified it by and large over. Capitalism learnt since to postpone the type of catastrophe Rosa Luxemburg predicted.

How?

- Well, the fact that instead of seeking out virgin lands, capitalism invented something akin to a secondary virginity. It has learnt to manufacture virgin lands.

Like this company Allergan and this condition, hypotrichosis.

- Yes. The example with the barefoot Africans also aptly demonstrates what we're talking about.

Ok, but what does this have to do with the current crisis?

- When a new product is invented, something which didn't exist before, we start thinking: where are potential customers? Without them our discovery doesn't have any value. There aren't any customers? Well then, let's concoct something which will turn people into such customers.

Do you have an example?

- Bottled water. Until quite recently there were hardly any young persons walking the streets who wouldn't be carrying bottles of water. A few years before, they managed perfectly well without them. When she could still walk, Jasia and I were keen walkers, but it never entered our heads to take a bottle of water even on a ten kilometer walk – after all, we were not walking through Sahara. Not these days, though! Nowadays going out without a bottle of water, the same as without a mobile phone, is as if you've gone out without your trousers. Perhaps now, thanks to the shortage of cash, we are about seeing again young people walking without clutching to a water bottle. But to go back to today's crisis, this particular bubble; this time the 'virgin land' were people taking no loans.

Credit?

- I remember when I was a child – and that was about 80 years ago – my mother sometimes sent me shopping to Landberger Brothers, a German grocery. There was a wonderfully colorful print hanging there on the wall. It depicted two men. At the top a portly elder gentleman lounged in an armchair, his cheeks ruddy cheeks, attire elegant, the paunch large and the cigar in his mouth huge. The caption read "I never bought on credit". Underneath him, in front of an open safe with only rats inside, a haggard figure was falling from a broken stool, in unshaven and in rags. The caption read "I lived on credit". Max Weber thought that the driving force of the fantastic and bewildering economic growth under capitalism was initially the protestant ethic, warning against the pursuit of pleasure and luxury and insisting on delay of gratification. People saved instead of spending their income and thereby, like it or not, inadvertently accumulated capital, which they could use to build new factories, roads, railways and homes instead of wasting it on, still postponed bodily pleasures.

If you borrow for an investment promising a profit greater than the interest you need to pay on the loan, you were virtuous - and if the promise came true you were also a wise person. But heaven forbid if you get into debt to overindulge yourself!

Hence back then bankrupt people committing suicide?

- Exactly. But some 20 or 30 years ago neo-liberalism – with borrowing/lending as its new virgin lands – swept away what was left of the protestant ethic. Persistently touted credit cards were introduced with the slogan "take the waiting out of wanting". And the principle which motivated the birth of capitalism was turned on its head.

Where did this change come from?

- From deregulation. At one time banks had to keep an amount in the safe which would be enough to cover the loans they had granted. Barriers, prohibitions and protection abounded, and they all restricted the freedom of banks in seeking out and producing new virgin lands, including exploiting the revenue potential of credit and debt. In deregulating, neo-liberal governments did not realize what genie they were letting out of the bottle. But they let it loose and uncovered a new virgin land which no-one had cultivated before: "Let everyone be a debtor".

But why exactly then?

- First let me tell you something. There are two absolutely basic values without which a worthy and reasonable life, human life itself, is inconceivable. One of these is freedom, the other is security. Security without freedom is enslavement, and freedom without security is constant wandering through the unknown, unrelenting anxiety and fear. One value without the other is a nightmare and only together do they create a decent life. The snag is, Tomasz, that to reconcile them is extremely difficult. The more security we acquire, the more freedom we have to give up. And the more freedom we gain, the more we feel as juggling high close to the ceiling, but with no safety net underneath. If we analyze the history of modern times from this point of view, then it would appear that the forms of social coexistence which have been discovered, tested, condemned and praised in history differ in the proposed ways of balancing freedom and security. However it is my conviction that no society has found a golden mean. This is why at the end of the day we arrive at two conclusions. The first: that such golden mean does not exist. The second: we are never going to stop looking for it.

Thankfully.

- If it is as I say, then progress in the sense of making human life happier, cozier and fuller and at the same time exciting is a lot more reminiscent of a pendulum than a straight line. The first 30 years after the war were, so to speak, a period of yearning to be drawn close to each other, of people seeking refuge in a common embrace. People wanted to feel safe after the upheaval of the war. This is one factor, not the only, because memories of pre-war times, of unemployment, depression, crisis, humiliation and wasted chances also added to the appeal of security. One more factor was that which Jürgen Habermas expounded in his work "Legitimation Crisis". At this time everyone, regardless of whether right- or left-wing, wanted to introduce that which in Poland is called the protective state, in England the welfare state and in France the providence state, but which I prefer to call the social state. In a word almost everyone, regardless of their views, wanted to create a state in which people knew that if they lost their footing and fell then a helping hand would pick them up again.

So I understand that at this time the pendulum had swung towards security?

- Yes, but please don't forget that at this time it was a society of producers. Above all a person was a producer of goods, not a consumer of them. The importance and power of nations was measured by the number of efficient, healthy, literate and well-clothed workers housed in tolerable conditions and with access to medical care, because a large and fit labor force meant flourishing economy. And (please remember that in those days there were no professional armies) it meant also powerful armed forces. Ford's workers were dependent on Ford, without whom they would not have had the means to live. But just the same Ford was dependent on his workers, because without them he wouldn't have his wealth. He couldn't pack up his factory like today and unpack it, let's say, in China. Dependence was mutual and as it was meant to last forever, it was like most marriages: there was a good deal of arguments and infighting, but also mutual awareness that there was a need to reach agreement, to compromise, to find a passable way to live together. And so Ford had to reach an agreement with his employees and they with him. It was on these self-same conditions of mutual need that investment in local medical services, in pensions, schools and in cheap housing was seen by the capital owners as good investment. Because every spend penny pays for itself. A workforce treated this way grows in quality, produces better things than elsewhere, and beats the competition.

So what happened?

- The pendulum swung as far as it could. The majority felt secure, and if we feel secure we stop understanding what all those limitations and sacrifices are for. Why those strict regulations controlling health and safety at work? Why can't I sack workers at will? Why the hell do I have to pay for those nurseries, healthcare services or cheap housing? The same happened on the side of the workers. They felt so secure that they forgot

how at one time when they were taken ill they either recovered on their own or died, because there wasn't money for a doctor. They began to ask: why do I have to go to the doctor I'm told to go to? Many pricked up their ears when Margaret Thatcher thundered "I want to go to the doctor when I want, and to one I want".

Why did people not want guarantees of security?

- I was lecturing in Sweden just before the elections in which the Swedes dismissed empty handed the Social Democrats who had been in government for 40 years. I spoke to Swedish intellectuals and tried in every way possible to find out why they were unsympathetic towards the Social Democrat government. I heard in reply that they couldn't send their child to the school of their choosing, only to the one that had been prescribed, and that this limited them. So I asked: imagine that the regulations change and you can do this. Would you take your child away from the school at which it studies now? No, not at all, it's an excellent school. Then what are you talking about? You don't understand anything! I'm talking about freedom of choice! And this, Tomasz, is exactly how the pendulum suddenly began to swing the other way. Actually, this change in direction was to a significant extent an effect of the magnificent success of the welfare state. That state cared so well that people began to feel secure enough to kick away the ladder they had climbed up to reach this state of bliss.

Just like children!

- Today we're reaching the other extreme: the limit of dreams about freedom. People are beginning to think about someone taking a little of this freedom and in exchange giving a more reliable safety-net protecting against the darker effects of the tightrope-walking to which their freedom is condemned. Just as that opposite tendency years ago, today's tendency stands above the division into left and right. Even vehement followers of neo-conservatism or – as you wish – neo-liberalism, are suddenly becoming advocates of the welfare state.

Do you think they turn to the government for loans?

- These aren't loans. This is surreptitious nationalization. For billions of dollars governments are buying the right to intervene and to interfere with issues which at one time were closely guarded by the self-interest of capitalists.

So as I understand it the mood is more or less: we have debts, we can't manage, do something for us.

- What's more: on our own, without your - you who govern us - help, we are unable to fix what we've broken. But this expression isn't a result of the failure of neo-liberal economic or social policy. Completely the opposite, it's an effect of its triumph!

So we get back to the slogan: "Let everyone be a debtor"?

- Yes, because this time it was the people who up to now have not got into debt and were not inclined to spend money which they couldn't earn, who were recycled into a new 'virgin land' for capitalist exploitation. Because so many people are not used to take loans, print immediately a couple of million credit cards and ten million flyers offering tempting bank loans. In centuries gone by, money lenders wanted their money paid back, and on time. Gangs operating in the 30s had armies of hired thugs to beat up those who didn't pay back debts on time and murder those who didn't pay at all. However for the last 20 years banks have distanced themselves from debtors rushing to repay the money. What they want instead is that repayment of interest by people who are perpetually in debt be a constant source of rising revenues. A person who quickly and in full repays his loan is useless. Worse, he portends lost revenue chance. What has happened now is that this successive virgin land has been exhausted and rendered barren.

Which means?

- Do you know what a "sub-mortgage" is?

I've heard something or other but I'm sure you will explain it better.

- 'Sub-mortgage' is great American invention made 20 years ago. The point is that loans to buy flats and houses can be granted also to poor people without any credit credentials on the assumption that if new crowds of people seeking homes run onto the housing market, demand for houses will shot up, and so will house prices. The interest on loans which sub-mortgage clients are not able to repay will be covered by the increase in the value of housing.

How?

- You say that you can't repay your mortgage? We will increase then the mortgage loan! Your home is worth now more than it was when you took out the first loan. The increased debt will be even harder to repay? Don't worry. If the need arises, we'll give you yet another loan. A variant of the infamous 'pyramid selling'... But even a pyramid can also collapse if it's built on fragile foundations. And that's exactly what happened. At the beginning credit was pushed on everyone who qualified for it so only those who didn't qualify were left in the pool, and even they were turned into permanent debtors and the bubble burst with a great big bang.

And with the bang came fear. Fear which constantly accompanies the cultivation of this credit. Fear which until now had been held in check by ever-increasing credit opportunities.

- The problem lies in the fact that today's fear differs from the fears that beset our ancestors. Our forefathers knew that when children leave home wolves threaten them, that if there's no cloud in the sky then there will be a drought. They knew what to be afraid of. Today's fears are diffuse and scattered. They loom and linger outside the field of our vision – they fly from one place to another in a flash. The most fearsome of fears is the fear of the unknown. When I don't know where from catastrophe may fall, I feel not only afraid but in addition humiliated: I'm a fool, ignorant, naïve, I am vulnerable on all sides, I can't fence for myself, I can't make myself ready for the fray. Which we unconsciously desire the most is to know the reasons for our fear.

I understand that at the moment fear is focused on unemployment...

- ... in the UK it's being reported that within a year there are supposed to be 3 million jobless. This is also the first time in 40 or 50 years when there will be an army of young unemployed with higher education.

And what will happen then?

- Before the banking crisis there was a murmur around the world that the price of food is increasing. It was written and said that it could lead to hunger riots. What kind of riots are these young intelligent people without jobs going to cause?

Until now our value was, in a large part, based on our possessions. How will it be now?

- I don't know this yet, because Tomasz, as I've repeated many times, I'm not a prophet.

Do you not have an impression that it is already happening today? That something other than what we possess will become valued? People are increasingly beginning to talk about family, about health, about education as about something which has real value.

- There are still wider issues. For example the ecological situation. Very many people are seriously concerned about this, but drive to ecology conventions and conferences in their own cars. In fact the first victim of the credit slump was the demand for ecologically friendly, and therefore more expensive, goods. But yes, you're right, perhaps there will be a turning point in this sequence of routine thought and action. It won't be easy though. My grandson accumulated more than 40 thousand pounds worth of debt during his studies. It was instilled in him that he would repay the debt with high wages, and if needs be with more credit. Although he hasn't been affected by redundancies yet, both suggestions seem more and more nebulous to him. To put it another way, he's now in pretty dire straits.

What do these dire straits consist of?

- Of the fact that, like so many others, he's in a situation of psychological instability. You can't switch from one philosophy of life to another in the space of one night. It's not easy to give up believing in something that is so deeply instilled in us. And it's at exactly this moment that two philosophies of life collide.

Which two philosophies have collided?

- One is to attempt to seek further credit, the second is to escape from credit, that is to tighten one's belt. To put it another way, the culture of the savings book and the culture of the credit card have met head on. Two opposite cultures. In my youth you were taught to save for a flat, for a car. If you want a car, get a saving ac-

count at PKO¹! If you want a flat, get another saving account at PKO! Then came the era of the credit card, when young people were lured and forced into debt. If you love your country, do stimulate the economy! In other words, spend more money. If you don't have any, then borrow and spend. These days young people are indoctrinated with such ideas. And then suddenly they come up against realities which until this point had only been associated with a long bygone era.

What could the reaction be?

- Psychologists call this condition cognitive dissonance and say that as it occurs it increases the likelihood of irrational reactions. Evolution has created us as logically thinking creatures, so we feel helpless when confronting two injunctions which cannot be reconciled. The ethologist Konrad Lorenz once conducted experiments with a three-spined stickleback fish, a species in which the male builds a nest then leads a female into it, she lays eggs, he fertilizes them, chases the female away and stands guard until the young are hatched. If another male stickleback appears near the nest, the guard assumes an attacking posture and the intruder flees. If a stickleback guarding a nest strays into the territory of another stickleback, they exchange reactions. Out of this game of chasing and fleeing the boundary line between two territories around the nests is drawn. In Lorenz's experiment two pairs of sticklebacks were placed in an aquarium whose volume was too small to accommodate territorial needs of two nests.

So what happened?

- The two males went mad. Literally. As they saw each other they buried their heads in the sandy bottom of the aquarium like ostriches, with their tails in the air. Irrational behaviour it was, because in no way could it contribute to the solution of the dilemma. People are more clever, more inventive than stickleback, so they rather take the solution of Aesop's fox who could not reach the tasty grapes. Having determined that his legs were too short to climb up, he announced: oh well, never mind, they're surely sour. And then, contemptuously, strolled off...

The problem is that others must also agree that these grapes really are sour!

- Tendencies to opt out of this or that part of freedom are growing. The state is guaranteeing loans and investments. It demands that creditors do not hurry sending bailiffs with eviction orders. It encounters resistance, but at the moment all agree that without some curbs there's no way out.

Everybody is supposed to agree and really do everything so that things can be like they were. Governments pump billions into the system because they hope it's going to reboot, and that people also somehow don't throw away their credit cards.

- Because it's not easy to rid yourself of old habits. But that these old habits are also outdated and ineffective, will become more and more obvious and harder to ignore

In your books you say that modern people are so mobile and ready to change their way of life, but at the moment none of this is visible.

- We're attached to avoiding attachments... To turning backs to the past and starting anew. The snag at the moment is that there are no agencies able to initiate and see through another start, another beginning.

So perhaps it seems that it is worth growing attached to something, to have something constant.

- We're talking here about something more... In my opinion the novelty we will have to get accustomed to will be the rediscovery of the value of constancy. In recent years the imperative was to throw away the old in order to buy something new. Why should I be bound to something or someone when day in, day out better mobile phones, better computers, younger and more smartly dressed women appear? Why take a vow of faithfulness and tie my own hands? The main principle was: don't close any option. Keep all your options open, so that going back remains a possibility and nothing done has been done once and for all.

It will be necessary to "disaccustom" ourselves from this - from a life as a sequence of throwaways. It will be necessary to become accustomed, once more, to a life of collecting things and caring for what has been already collected.

¹ Editors note: PKO Bank Polski SA – a large Polish Bank, related to the national bank existing during communist times

Why did people not come to their own conclusions that they should cease with this incessant indebtedness?

- I wouldn't have asked that question, because it is an affront to the accused. After all the entire world was hammering into their heads that way of living was just fine, it was cool. Don't worry. When the GDP statistics fell, the Prime Minister or Chancellor of the Exchequer went public to call on people to buy more. The formula was that the country can get out of the depression if they manage to mobilize consumers. Patriotism manifested itself in buying more. And buying more meant borrowing, because after all wages weren't rising at the same rate as GDP. If all the economics experts, political experts, environmental experts, experts in the art of competition – well-nigh all authorities, were urging you to spend, spend, spend, there was no room for doubts...

But everyone knows at least one person who came a cropper and fell into a spiral of debt.

- You know an old saying that if a thousand people rebel this is a revolution, and if one does then he's a fool. It's the same with this. Someone always comes a cropper.

A loser.

- A fool, a bungler, a lay about, an idler, there are a thousand 'explanations', but what's interesting – all those explanations point to the character faults of the victims and the failures. No mentioning of social causes... In today's individualistic society we create problems together, but we are supposed to solve them individually, deploying individual ingenuity, perceptiveness, energy, diligence and our own privately held means. In short: if you're successful it's because you're a good person, and if you fail it's because you are bad. If you take a goof look of yourself then surely you'll find the fault and negligence which responsible for your defeat.

How has the language of politicians changed in relation to the crisis?

- At the moment they've stopped urging people to buy. They are promising help with repayments for the recent retail frenzy. They are promising that they won't let harm come to the victims of the credit orgy, although at the moment they're actually helping banks and not victims. Besides, it's not enough for Gordon Brown to promise the British that the politicians wouldn't let them be evicted. The repayment of debt is the pressing issue of the moment, but a matter of real concern is how to live tomorrow. An Englishman has a wallet full of credit cards and is used to the fact that if he wants something he can have it now. The snag is that in the future he won't be able to continue that habit. One way of life is now ending and it's not obvious what the new one might be.

Which means?

- Imagine if suddenly some global virus destroyed all television sets.

A tragedy!

- Well exactly. No one would know what to do in the evenings, a new means for filling free time would need to be worked out. Perhaps it would be necessary to re-learn how the family may stand around a harpsichord, one working hard on the fiddle, a second singing, a third blowing a flute? And perhaps – who knows – even return to the custom of sitting to dinner around the family table to jointly consumed jointly cooked food, instead of each one grabbing a beef burger from a wrapper brought in from a fast food outlet, locking himself in his room and disappearing on the internet.

A very optimistic prediction.

Not a prediction, just musing. All the time you push me in a direction I don't want to go in. I'm not a prophet, I don't make predictions.

Have you gone through any crisis?

- You ask me? I do not even mention Jasia, because at first I was shot at by Germans to shoot at them for a change afterwards, while she spent years a mere step away from gas chambers. But already together, we've survived two emigrations and each time it was necessary to learn from scratch how to live. The first ten years in England were terribly difficult for me. When a new head comes to a department there's always anxiety among the 'old hands': they don't know what to expect from the stranger. I however was not an ordinary stranger, but a stranger multiplied: I hadn't just come from another university, but from another culture, language, tradition. Many reasons to make my new colleagues suspicious. I had an impression that when I said spade, they suspected that I meant fork. And this suspicion was mutual. In addition to this I had

a break from writing. I did not expect ever again to be published in Poland, where for twenty or so years even mentioning my name in print was prohibited. And I did not see myself as yet fluent enough in English to dare to write. In many respects this was a crisis situation, and not just at work. At home there were as well matters aplenty to worry about – many reasons for sleepless nights.

For what reason for example did you not sleep?

- The Registrar of the Leeds University' took it upon himself to introduce me to the bolts and nuts of my new life in England. I asked him where I could rent a flat. He rolled his eyes and told me that firstly one doesn't rent here, but buys, and secondly not a flat but a house. I almost fainted. I'm supposed to buy a house? I don't have a penny to my name, a piece of furniture or a bed sheet, but instead I have two daughters with many years' education before them, I can't dream to manage without falling in debt... How and when am I supposed to repay it? We bought the cheapest house on the market.

Why did your crisis last as many as ten years?

- It took that long to adapt to a new way of life. Or rather to dissociate myself from the old one.

What price did you pay?

- I never thought about it.

How did you benefit from it?

- At the end I was able to cobble together a new identity.

Perhaps teaching people how to live in the new conditions is the new virgin land, the new Eldorado which is waiting to be discovered.

- For some time now there's been talk of a 'counseling boom'. We've never been better educated, but when it comes to the things a normal person used to organize on his own, now we need advisors. From cradle to grave.

And what now?

- Amongst contemporary sociologists there has been until recently an opinion that the current problem is not the dearth, but its opposite – the profusion of possible identities, ways of living and life-enriching goods; the flipside is that whatever you achieve you are not completely satisfied, there's always something better waiting out there. Hence a constant anguish. We never get to a point when we could say to ourselves: I've made it, now I can sit down, have a smoke and rest – there is nothing more that needs to be done. That anguish might now be over... Excess comes to an end.

Setting the project framework

Advisors

Darina Malova, SVK
Ioana Avadani, RO
Istvan Rev, HU
Milla Mineva, BG
Tomasz Kitlinski, PL

Program Committee

Heike MacKerron, Board Member, GER
Istvan Rev, HU
Jiri Pehe, Board Member, CZ
Michael Edwards, Board Member, US
Wawrzyniec Smoczynski, PL

Writing

Country Authors
Agnieszka Graff, PL
Anna Krasteva, BG
Codru Vrabie, RO
Ferenc Mislivetz, HU
Jiri Kopal, CZ
Juraj Mesik, SVK
Primož Sporar, SI

Thematic Authors

Christopher Worman, RO
Maria Rogaczewska, PL
Milena Leneva, BG
Milla Mineva, BG
Monika Balint, HU
Simon Delakorda, SI
Tomasz Kitlinski, PL

Additional reflections

Christmas piece, Georgi Gospodinov, BG
Interview of Zygmunt Bauman by Tomasz Kwasniewski,
Gazeta Wyborcza, PL
Speech to the CEE Trust board, Rafal Pankowski, PL
Text written by Andrzej Waskiewicz, PL

FocusGroup facilitators

Jan Jakub Wygnanski, PL
Krisztina Arato, HU
Marcel David Zajac, SVK
Mihaela-Beatrice Lambru, RO
Petia Kabakchieva, BG

Contest Jury

Iva Grobin, SI
Iva Roudnikova, BG,
Marta Bialek, PL,

Designing the program

Producers

Session 1 - Shipyard Foundation, PL
Session 2 - Ioana Avadani, RO
Breakout discussions - Mariana Milosheva, BG

SIC CEE

Transitions Online, CZ: Jeremy Druker, Kristy Ironside, Dan
Mcquillan, Dan Braghis, Gleb Kanunnikau

Additional assistance with program content

Warm-up discussion - Tomek Kitlinski, PL
Opening program - Open Society Foundation, SVK
After dinner discussion - Pavol Demes, SVK

Speakers and Moderators

Alena Panikova, SVK
Alexander Smolar, PL
Anna Daucova, SVK
Anna Giza-Poleczstak, PL
Assya Kavrukova, BG
Codru Vraibie
Dan McQuillan, UK, RO
Darius Groza, RO
Dusan Ondrusek, SVK
Eva Varga, HU
Giorgiu Ene, RO
Igor Janke, PL
Ioana Avadani, RO
Ivan Juras, SVK
Ivan Krastev, BG
Jiri Pehe, CZ
Julian Popov, BG
Kristina Rygman, RO
Krzysztof Czyzewski, PL
Martin Butora, SVK
Michael Edwards, UK/US
Milla Mineva, BG
Nilda Bullein, HU
Pavlina Kalouskova, CZ
Pavol Demes, SVK
Peter Golias, SVK
Petko Georgiev, BG
Rayna Gavrilova, BG
Simon Delakorda, SI
Slawomir Sierakowski, PL
Tomek Kitlinski, PL
Vida Organec-Wagner, SI
Wawrzyniec Smoczynski, PL

Technical and practical assistance

Additional visual clips

eFTe, PL
Ioana Avadani, RO
Pawel Leszkowicz
Slovak Film Institute
Studie Indie, RO
Voices, SVK

StreetPoll reporters

Plamena Foteva & Tzvetelina Stoyanova, BG
Jana Milojevicova, CZ
Peter Hoffmann & Zsofia Zsemlye, HU
Joanna Kozera, PL
Inre Studio, RO
Norber Maur, SVK
Studio 12, SI

Research:

Jan Herbst, PL

Design and editing of printed material

Agata Muszalska & Dominika Raczowska, PL
Ivan Hristov, BG
Rose Griffin, UK

Website/livestreaming:

Jordan Dimov, BG
Matej Delakorda, SI

Logistics

Fair-play alliance, SVK
Manna Catering, SVK
Matej Cervenka & Filip Gelacik, Avance event agency, SVK
Travelida travel agency, PL

e-Publication

Photos

Katarzyna Darkowska, PL, Irina Cretu, RO &
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Åza Swedin

Media partners contest and/or livestreaming



CEE Trust Team

Irina Lupu, Plamena Foteva, Djema Baruh, Åza Swedin, Lidia Kolucka-Zuk, Rayna Gavrilova, Dolores Neagoe, Jana Milojevicova, Ewa Blawdziewicz, Elzbieta Morawska and Katarzyna Darkowska.

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The Trust was created as a mechanism for helping the transition from donor assisted to independent, active and viable organizations and networks, working for the public good. It will distribute 75 million USD until the end of 2012 as financial support to initiatives and organizations.

The mission of the CEE Trust is to support the long term sustainable development of civil society and non-governmental organizations in seven countries in Central and Eastern Europe: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The definition of civil society of the CEE Trust is based on a broader understanding, including registered non-profit non-governmental organizations (NGOs), but also other formally and informally organized citizens, groups, coalitions, movements, representatives of the media and educational institutions, working for the advancement of the public good. The CEE Trust's task is to encourage them to become more efficient and sustainable, to expand their constituencies and consider the future of their work in times when global, European, and local concerns define the environment.



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