



## International Roundtable Discussion *25 years of Development in the post-Soviet Space: Civil Society and Participatory Democracy*

Chisinau, May 25-28, 2016

The demise of the URSS and the processes following in the former Soviet republics, continue to attract the attention of social scientists for already two decades and a half. Post-Soviet political developments, regime dynamics, democratic or (in some cases) authoritarian transformations, civil society, conflicts, identity issue comprise among research issues. One of the problems mostly monitored and examined by both experts and practitioners seems to concern civil society, and citizens' activism and participation in the processes of different kind, but especially civic and political, that take place in the post-Soviet states.

The development of civil society in the post-Soviet countries has been the main subject discussed at the international roundtable *25 years of Development in the post-Soviet Space: Civil Society and Participatory Democracy*, held in Chisinau in May 26-27, 2016. The conference was organized by the Association of Young Historians of Moldova in cooperation the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe, and the Central European Initiative.

The roundtable *25 years of Development in the post-Soviet Space: Civil Society and Participatory Democracy*, was built as a follow-up initiative of the project implemented by The National Association of Young Historians of Moldova ANTIM in 2011, entitled *Gains and Failures of the Last Two Decades of Development in Post-Soviet Countries*. The mentioned project has been





materialized through organizing an International Roundtable Discussion focused on undertaking an expertise and evaluation of post-soviet states' experience and politics, with the participation of experts from various field, both from the post-Soviet states and some of the post-communist countries that managed becoming EU members. The 2016 event was also in a strong connection with the international seminar *Civil Society and Democratization Processes* taking place in December 2014. It had been organized in Kiev by the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe with the support of the Austrian presidency of the CEI. The seminar brought together members of civil society organizations (CSO's) working in media related sectors. The two panels of the seminar ("Civil society and the rule of law in the process of democratization" and the "Role of new media in the process of democratization") and the concluding discussions enabled the participants to outline their expertise and related problems, as well as to exchange their practical knowledge.

The 2016 round table took a step further in analyzing changes in the post-Soviet states, especially those concerning civil society and participatory democracy. The event was set up to assess the role of civil society in fostering and supporting democratic transformations, to allow experts to share their latest findings and good practices concerning civil society developments. The conference was attended by leading experts in the field of post-Soviet studies and politics, researchers and practitioners from academia, NGOs, social service organizations, and media from a group of CEI member states, most of them from the western post-Soviet area, such as Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, that are at the same time the EU's Eastern Partnership target countries.



The roundtable has focused on three major topics: *Civil Society Participation in Public Policy Processes*, *Youth and the Development Processes*, and *Civil Society's role in Foreign Policy Making*. Four panels have been dedicated to the first conference issue, *Civil Society Participation in Public Policy Processes*. The panels took a look at a few aspects of the civil society activism: post-protest democracies; civil society and battles on history; relationships between civil society and authorities/decision-makers; civil society and Ukraine's revolutions; and education and participation.

The other two panels have been devoted to *The Role of Civil Society in Foreign Policy Making*. Panelists have assessed Romanian-Moldavian relations; Russian



narrative and Russia's influence in Moldova and Georgia; public opinion and foreign policy priorities of the post-Soviet states; and civil society's position on visa free regime for Moldova and other Eastern partnership countries.

The third issue, *Mobilizing Youth in the Development Processes*, has been discussed in the framework of the other two sections. Panelists have evaluated youth engagement in the New Eastern Europe, and have had a particular emphasis on youth mobilization and participation in political processes in Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus.

The international roundtable *25 years of Development in the post-Soviet Space: Civil Society and Participatory Democracy* has had a positive resonance and impact on the researches in the field. It has facilitated the exchange of experiences and the promotion of dialogue between researchers, practitioners, experts and decision-makers on the issues of national, regional, and international importance. The conference participants have provided assessments on the post-Soviet experiences, achievements and failures, and have contributed with key findings and recommendations.

Among the outcomes of the conference could be mentioned the following statements:

- Intensifying discussions on the post-Soviet politics, transition, trends, and processes in order to understand barriers and challenges the post-Soviet civil societies face;
- Developing comparative analysis concerning the achievements and failures of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine's civil societies by







highlighting and promoting successful practices from the Eastern EU neighborhood;

- Sharing experiences between partners and participants of the project and disseminating knowledge and findings related to Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine's civil societies and democratic developments.
- Empowering the expert community and civil society from the former Soviet countries through getting access to new knowledge and experiences concerning the roots and consequences of the experienced past and projecting future actions by avoiding the historical misinterpretations and political misleading decisions;
- Disseminating to the larger public, locally and internationally, of the results of the discussions held and expertise provided by the roundtable participants through local media.

The roundtable *25 years of Development in the post-Soviet Space: Civil Society and Participatory Democracy* is expected to be followed up by other similar events that would assess civil society developments and democratic transformation processes in Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and other post-Soviet states; and thus to impulse further cooperation and an efficient long-term partnership between experts in the field of the post-Soviet studies and politics.

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