



Central and Eastern Europe Civil Society Forum 2016 **Bucharest, 25 November 2016**

The Central and Eastern Europe Civil Society Forum aims to contribute to continuing and renewing a tradition of cooperation and joint action of civil society organizations in Central and Eastern Europe and to bring fresh ideas and energy from the region to the wider Europe, to mobilize civil society in the EU and the EEA towards common advocacy objectives. The ambition of the 2016 Forum is to help strengthen democracy and protect essential values on which European peace and prosperity have been built: respect for human dignity, for diversity and inclusion.

The previous edition of the Forum took place in November 2014 in Bucharest, Romania. Over 250 participants from 18 countries attended the sessions of the two- day event, including a high number of civil society leaders together with representatives of the EU institutions, the FRA and the Council of Europe..

The 2016 edition of the Central and Eastern Europe Civil Society Forum will focus on exploring the role of civil society in the new European political landscape dominated by the refugee crisis, the rise of populism, spreading democratic backsliding and erosion of the liberal democracy and support for the European project.

The Forum will discuss the various challenges, explore trends and seek how civil society can take greater responsibility and play a more significant role in the current context.

The main function of this year's Forum is to consult with like-minded civil society organisations on the ideas of coordinated actions to support democracy in Europe. Some representatives of government, international institutions and donors will also be invited to share views. Several possible ideas which will be discussed include joint civic mobilization campaigns, multi-stakeholder dialogues on democracy at local and national level in countries across Europe, advocacy for coordinated response by political decision makers to democracy fragilization and for an increased role for civil society in the existing institutional mechanisms on rule of law and Democracy at EU level.

Programme

9.30 – 11.00	Plenary session
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Setting the stage:

Is democracy in danger in Europe? What role for civil society?

Ionut Sibian, Executive Director of FDSC

Dacian Ciolos, Prime Minister of Romania (tbc)

Yves Leterme, Secretary-General of International IDEA

Luca Jahier, President of Various Interests' Group at EESC

Q&A

11.00 – 11.30	Coffee break and networking
11.30 – 13.30	Parallel workshops

1. Multi-stakeholder dialogues on democracy

The workshop will introduce and discuss citizen-led democracy dialogues inspired by the IDEA methodology, including concrete case studies and lessons learnt. The discussion will focus on the relevance and feasibility of this approach in the new political context in Europe.

2. Political participation and representation. What role for civil society?

The workshop will focus on the crisis of political participation and representation. The discussions will explore the capacity and role of civil society in rebuilding trust in political institutions, in assisting reform of political parties and in promoting participation of citizens in democratic decision making (including through new forms of collective deliberation and action).

3. Countering populism: lessons learnt

The workshop will introduce successful experiences in countering populism in Europe, including through NGO Fund supported initiatives to encourage citizen critical thinking and media literacy. The discussion will assess best ways to transfer and reinforce such experience across Europe, including through joint action.

4. What can the EU do to support democracy in Member states? What is the role of civil society?

The workshop will review current institutional attempts to support democracy and rule of law in Europe (e.g. the Rule of Law Framework of the European Commission, the Rule of Law Dialogue of the EU Council, the role of the Fundamental Rights Agency etc.) The discussions will focus on the place and role of civil society in relation to such institutional mechanisms.

13.30 – 14.30	Lunch and networking
14.30 – 16.00	Parallel workshops

5. How can citizen mobilisation work?

The workshop will introduce examples of citizen mobilisation at local and national level, with case studies from Iceland and Estonia. The discussions will examine the keys for success, the methods, the context, the lasting impact. They will look in particular at possible relevance for much larger countries and assess how they might be applicable elsewhere, more generally, to support democracy and counter disenchantment with mainstream politics.

6. What support for civil society initiatives on democracy in Europe?

The workshop will examine the possible sources of support - financial, political, organisational - for civil society initiatives, looking on the one hand at the role of donors and possible sources of grant aid and on the other hand at the role of EU level civil society platforms and pro-democracy organisations. The discussions will consider ways in which joint action can assist civil society in responding to the fragilisation of democracy at national level.

7. Campaigning together: what lessons learnt from countering hate speech in Europe?

The workshop will focus on the lessons learnt, from the point of view of cross-national campaigning, during the No Hate campaign. Successful initiatives in citizen mobilisation will be highlighted (especially those supported by EEA & Norway Grants). Discussions will explore effective forms of coordination among civil society organisations and on instruments for successful joint campaigning.

8. How can civil society use the opportunity of EU presidencies?

The workshop will bring together stakeholders from the countries which will hold the EU Presidency up until the end of 2019. Discussions will focus on the priorities of these presidencies, forms of coordination and cooperation. Special attention will be given to initiatives to support democracy.

16.00 – 16.30	Coffee break and networking
16.30 – 18.00	Plenary session

Reports from workshops and recommendations. Debate on next steps.

Closing address: A Norwegian perspective on democracy support across Europe.
H.E. Astrid E. Helle, Permanent Representative of Norway to the Council of Europe