



International Conference of the Institute of European Democrats

EU, Democracy and Civil Society

18 May 2018

Pan-European University, Bratislava, Slovakia

BACKGROUND

The European Union has been subject to unprecedented crises and challenges in recent years. Financial crisis and unemployment rates have undermined the trust of people in the European idea and in the promises it holds, generating as well a great disappointment about national and European institutions.

The necessity to reform the European Union toward a more democratic construction has been a constant presence in the recent political agenda. As Jean-Claude Juncker declared in his State of the Union address “Our Union needs to take a democratic leap forward”.

A strong civil society is an essential pillar of any democracy and is an asset in itself. By giving citizens a voice and by bringing additional knowledge to the decision-making process, civil society will bring added value to EU since it presents the plurality of interests and values of the Europeans.

The European Union must set a plan for institutional change and increasingly involve citizens in its deliberations and take their views into account through more representative and therefore stronger institutions.

The time for the EU to reinvent itself is running out. A profound change with a deeper political integration is essential to give Europe back to its citizens and their active involvement into integration processes. European Union in its complexity should correspond to its definition as a community of democratic states and free citizens.

In Central European region after the collapse of non-democratic regime the civil society acted as the most passionate and strongest supporter of democratic changes and European integration. Experience of Central European countries, including Slovakia, confirmed that the level of civil society development is considered to be one of the crucial preconditions for successful transitions from authoritarianism to democracy.

Overall socio-economic development is usually more successful in those countries that are characterized by higher level of accumulation of social capital, civic participation, deeper roots of civic culture and civic activism, and more direct citizens' involvement in decision-making in public affairs. Greater success in the transition to democracy is recorded in those countries where civil society has a long-term tradition and where people are involved into various public initiatives, civic movements and NGOs. The growth of civil society and the higher involvement of citizens in the activities of civil society's organizations play a pivotal role in the process of the consolidation of democracy. Conversely, the lack or absence of advanced elements of civil society, a non-existent civic culture, weak civic participation and low level of trust in NGOs' activities cause significant difficulties in the process of democratic transitions.

Democracy, civil society and European integration are three mutually interlinked elements of social fabric in Central Europe, to weakening of one them means to weaken two others. Nowadays the crucial role of civil society in Central Europe, including Slovakia, is to strengthen liberal democracy, rule of law, human rights and constitutionalism and to cope with authoritarian tendencies, corruption, extremism, nationalism, xenophobia and radical rhetoric.

In cooperation with the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO), Slovakia

With the financial support of the European Parliament





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AGENDA

8.30 **Registration**

9.00 **Opening**

Welcome address

Juraj STERN (rector), Pan-European University

Introductory remarks

Luca BADER, Institute of European Democrats (IED)
Grigorij MESEŽNIKOV, Institute for Public Affairs (IVO)

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- Moderator: **Grigorij MESEŽNIKOV**, *President of IVO*

Session 1: Civil Society in Transition: Slovak and Central European Experience – Trends, Achievements, Challenges

- *Zora BÚTOROVÁ, Sociologist, Institute for Public Affairs*
- *Boris STREČANSKÝ, Scholar and civic activist, Center for Philanthropy*
- *Pavol DEMEŠ, Foreign-political analyst and civic activist, German Marshall Fund*

11.00 **CoffeeBreak**

Session 2: Building a stronger democratic and civic Europe: a plan for institutional change and citizens' involvement

- *Zsuzsanna SZELÉNYI, Former MP Hungary, member IED's Board of Directors*
- *Alina DOBREVA, Member of the National Council of the political party Da Bulgaria*

Discussion

12.45 **Conclusions**

13.00 **Buffet lunch**

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