ACTIVIZENSHIP

VALUES/DEMOCRACY/CITIZENSHIP

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ACTIVIZENSHIP

Edito, by Alexandrina Najmowicz, European Civic Forum Director

We launched Activizenship magazine as an attempt to capture current trends and transformations affecting civil society's activities across Europe, to connect ideas and experiences about the role of civic movements and organizations in revitalising democratic and political space.

Even if civil society has played a major role in many circumstances where the issues of Equality, of Solidarity, of Democracy were at stake, we witnessed over the last decade worrying trends which, left unanswered, might put a serious threat on the future of open societies, on the future of Europe as a community of values and an area of freedom, security and justice for all.

The global crisis has revealed the fragility and, in some cases, the systemic disfunctioning of our societies. Democratic representation is being confronted to a crisis of legitimacy and a claim for accountability. The current EU framework failed to deliver on the promise of solidarity, social justice and democracy. Mounting racist prejudices are extremely worrying in some countries, fed by the pressure of regressive movements promoting ethnic or religious exclusion.

Civil liberties are systematically sacrificed in the age of mass surveillance for the sake of security. Governments' initiatives from Hungary to France, Spain or the UK put severe threat on democracy and fundamental freedoms of expression and assembly.

Have we entered a vicious circle where regressive policies in terms of democracy and social cohesion reinforce regressive forces, which deny the European values and the universality of Human rights? Restrictions in the equality of access to social rights for migrants have started more than a decade ago in Western Europe, precisely in Denmark.

Unfortunately, this trend goes hand in hand with the rise of authoritarian drifts in some of the Member States. Hungary is the most emblematic case, seemingly followed by Poland recently, in an attempt to build an "illiberal democracy", undermining fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, mainly by limiting the independence of the judiciary, reducing media freedoms and intimidating criticism by civil society.

Ironically, the EU has harshly sanctioned non-compliance with the economic rules by certain Member States, but is proving quite lenient when it comes to defending its founding fundamental rights and values.

Paradoxically, the EU has tools to encourage the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights in countries in accession but not efficient instruments to safeguard these standards when threatened by Member States.

What role for civil society in influencing the framing of public policies reflecting the European values enshrined in Treaties? Civic resilience and capacity to stand up against regressive trends is crucial to oppose the systematic erosion of our democracy. Alongside free and independent media, civic organizations and movements represent an essential actor for democratic checks and balances.

First and foremost, by their everyday actions with people, on the ground, they give meaningful substance to fundamental values, rights and liberties. They promote education to citizenship and Human rights, contributing to the development of a democratic culture. We saw recently how they massively mobilised for the welcome of refugees fleeing war and violence. In Spain, Greece, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, just to cite some, they took to the streets to claim solidarity in the crisis, to condemn attacks to rights, rule of law and liberties. But they cannot substitute to public action and policies.

Likewise, civil society organisations organise to advocate for values, rights and liberties to be properly safeguarded by institutions. In September 2014 for example, 1 000 NGOs from all across Europe stood in solidarity with Hungarian NGOs and signed an appeal to the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe to take the lead in implementing both diplomatic efforts and effective measures to prevent the undermining of democratic values in Hungary. European networks of NGOs successfully opposed the designation of the Commissioner in charge of "citizenship", given his disastrous track record in this area during his term of office in the Hungarian government.

In both their action-oriented and advocacy-oriented capacity, they contribute to keeping our societies inclusive and democratic. When their critical role is disregarded, denied or threatened, the whole democratic space is shrinking, both at EU and national levels. ∎

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RISE OF ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY
THE HUNGARIAN CASE

Political developments in Hungary over the last five years showed systematic crack down on European democratic values, the rule of law, Human rights and civil liberties such as the freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom of the press and wider media. Is this part of, as some observers say, Victor Orban's strategy to install an "illiberal state"? These smear-campaigns aimed at discrediting NGOs as "foreign agents" similar to Vladimir Putin's ones, echo the worries expressed in Hungarian civil society since 2010 already, and which remain today unheard as the lack of European responses testify for.

ORBÁN'S ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY

HOW TO DISMANTLE A DEMOCRATIC STATE

By Erik Uszkiewicz

The Orbán government began dismantling the institutions underlying the democratic rule of law and the system of checks and balances

Following the elections in spring 2010, the newly formed Orbán government attained a two-thirds supermajority in the Hungarian legislature. This majority – which also conferred a constitution-making power on Fidesz – enabled the governing party to engage in a full-scale and systematic transformation of the entire Hungarian legal and institutional framework. At the time, one could only suspect what soon become everyday reality and practice: The Orbán government began dismantling the institutions underlying the democratic rule of law and the system of checks and balances, discrediting and ignoring fundamental rights. The goal of this writing is to briefly present – by focussing its analysis on two particular issues – those anomalies and distortions in legislation and the application of the law which have resulted in institutionally entrenched

and systemic violations of principles, rights and freedoms guaranteed by the European Union.

INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS

One of the most characteristic features underlying the operations of constitutional democratic systems is that neither branch of government wields exclusive powers, and that the mutual responsibility of these branches to act as checks on each other guarantees that fundamental rights will prevail and prevents certain institutions from wielding excessive powers. In addition to the classic branches of government, there are further independent institutions which help ensure that all aspirations to control exclusive powers are held in check, and that the rights and freedoms of citizens continue to prevail. During the past five years under the Orbán government, these institutions have basically undergone two major changes:

▶ for one, legislation was used to "rein in" these institutions. In some cases, this resulted in the wholesale abolition of the entire organisation and their replacement by new institutions, while in other instances the statutory framework regulating the given institution was completely rewritten.

▶ new leaders and members were appointed to lead these organisations, and the new executives and board members are all government loyalists, which thus allows for direct and immediate control over these institutions.

Already early into the term of the Orbán government, the Constitutional Court had on several occasions declared certain new statutes unconstitutional on the basis of the previous Hungarian Constitution, which was effective before 1 January 2012. In response, Parliament amended the Constitution on 12 occasions, based on proposals submitted by the government or government party MPs, incorporating provisions that the Court had struck down as unconstitutional into the Constitution, thereby ensuring that the august body would not have another opportunity to review the norm. Subsequently, in 2011, Parliament adopted the new Fundamental Law of Hungary. Due to many controversial provisions, the Fundamental Law failed to achieve a full social consensus in terms of being regarded as the foundation of the legal system. In the meanwhile, Fidesz has selected the candidates to replace retiring Constitutional Court judges from among its own loyal clientele, ensuring that future legislation would be adopted smoothly. The term of office of the new

The prime minister's comments against immigrants or the suggestion to bring back the death penalty, have stirred up public opinion not only in Hungary but at the European level as well

judges was also expanded at the same time, thereby cementing their positions on the court.

Following regime transition, Hungary joined the ranks of those countries where the institution of independent ombudspersons was established, which functioned in an exemplary fashion. Thus, for example, an independent data protection commissioner ensured that information rights would continue to prevail. This institution was abolished by the government and replaced with a government agency/authority, whose executive was known to belong to pro-government circles. The previous data protection commissioner was let go even before his term expired. In light of the above, the European Court of Justice condemned the government in 2014, arguing that the independent protection of rights implies that the person in charge of this protection be allowed to finish his/her term of office. Though the ECJ made out a violation of EU law, it did not restore the previous data protection commissioner to his office, and it allowed the newly created institution to go on with its operations.

One of the last nails in the coffin of the constitutional state based on the rule of law is a breach of judicial impartiality and independent law enforcement. The president of the highest judicial body in the ordinary

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judicial system, previously known as the Supreme Court, was also removed from office before his term expired, and, in reference to archaic traditions, the institution was renamed Curia. In May 2014, the incumbent president of the Supreme Court at the time, András Baka, prevailed in his legal action against Hungary before the European Court of Human Rights. The ECHR held that the government's actions had violated rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. Another key problem was that the governing majority also changed the rules on the mandatory retirement age for judges, which lead to a European Court of Justice decision sanctioning the government. Despite these decisions, the new institutional structure ultimately prevailed in this area as well, and a majority of judges who were forced into retirement did not return to the bench.

One of the most prominent scandals this year is the so-called "brokergate", the criminal proceedings concerning which are still pending. This particular case, along with some previous criminal proceedings, allow for the conclusion that the prosecution authorities are also incapable of discharging their responsibilities independently and impartially. Prosecutor General Péter Polt, who is in charge of the strongly hierarchical Prosecutor's Office, is often seen together with the prime minister and other leading politicians at public events. The close friendship between the prosecutor general and the prime minister is common knowledge in large parts of the public.

ELECTIONS AND THE FAR-RIGHT BREAKTHROUGH

As the first four years of the second Orbán government drew to a close in 2014, once again elections were held in Hungary. In their analysis of this event, the OSCE's ODIHR office wrote that the Hungarian elections were "free but not fair". The playing field was tilted to favour the right: Several factors favoured Fidesz, including redrawn district boundaries, the rules concerning campaign financing, the occupation by the government of a large portion of media outlets, and the practically incomprehensible system of winner's compensation in elections, which pads the results of the strongest party. Of all the conditions that distort democratic electoral competition, the author would like to highlight one in particular. As part of the Fourth Amendment of the Fundamental Law, the governing party mandated that campaign advertising by political parties may only be disseminated in public service media, under equal conditions for all parties competing in the election. In response to domestic and international protests, the relevant provisions were changed by the Fifth Amendment of the Fundamental Law, which allowed for political advertisements to be disseminated by commercial media – with equal conditions for all competitors and only for free. Given that commercial media obtain a major portion of their revenues from selling their advertising time/space, there were obviously no commercial media that offered the parties that competed in the elections the opportunity to advertise with them. This is a good illustration of the Orbán government's political practice: It wishes to enact extremely restrictive measures, but once it faces intense protests it "relaxes" its original plans and chooses a "softer" solution. Yet as the example above shows, even though the regulatory solution chosen may be different, its actual impact is the same. The rules are still restrictive and suppress liberty. A fully accurate picture of the Hungarian elections also needs to point out, however, that the opposition parties – despite all difficulties or maybe exactly as a result thereof – proved incapable of offering a real alternative to

A growing number of people accurately realise the deep social, economic and moral crisis the country is in

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the masses of voters who were disillusioned with politics. The opposition parties, dragged down by lacking vitality and internal tensions, were caught up in a situation where they were compelled to enter into an alliance with one another before the election. On the whole, the combination of these factors led to another two-thirds victory for Fidesz. Yet the Orbán government did not get to hold on to this majority for long. In two by-elections held in rural towns, in February and April, respectively, Fidesz lost its supermajority in Parliament. At the same time, the surge of the Hungarian far-right is disconcerting. There is no space to go into detail about the reasons underlying the expansion of the right-wing radical party, Jobbik, but it needs to be emphasised that the success of this extremely racist, euro-sceptic and radical party is a frightening development. In all probability, Fidesz has also felt the heat from the surge in Jobbik's popularity, and the governing party seeks to forestall Jobbik's further expansion through a policy of "outrighting the far-right", for the time being primarily in the form of government communication. The prime minister's comments against immigrants, the banal and extremely discriminatory national consultation launched on the subject of immigration,

or the suggestion to bring back the death penalty, have stirred up public opinion not only in Hungary but at the European level as well. President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker and numerous other European politicians have expressed their concerns and called for these issues to be resolved as quickly as possible.

"EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE"

Situations and cases that involve a neglect of European values are often called everyday human rights violations. It would be near impossible to take stock of and classify all these violations in the areas of public education, the nationalisation of private pensions, the assault on autonomy in higher education, the criminalisation of homelessness and the growing vulnerability of other marginalised groups. In the meanwhile, the feeling of euphoria is increasingly waning. This sentiment was still vibrant after the 2010 elections, which followed on the heels of eight years of left-liberal malgovernance, but has now faded along with the hope that the conservative right-wing government will remedy the country's woes. Perceptions of corruption are also on the rise. Once the ill-placed sentiment that "I, too, could be among the beneficiaries" dissipated, it has lead to growing perceptions of corruption. There are no more lands, tobacco shops, exclusively state-owned assets and concessions to be

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reallocated; these sources have gone dry, and in an act which marks a serious interference with the autonomy of higher education, the last sanctuary remaining, the chancellery positions at universities, are now being awarded to persons close to the governing party. As perceptions of corruption are on the rise, satisfaction with the government and political support for Fidesz are gradually declining. A growing number of people accurately realise the deep social, economic and moral crisis the country is in.

It is worth emphasising briefly that the process of explaining to wide swathes of society why the mass of complex economic/social/legal/political changes that rapidly followed regime transition were necessary, or to help render the importance of these changes intelligible to them, has failed comprehensively. The democratic institutions made many mistakes in the two decades prior to the Orbán government's entry into office, which is an important factor in itself. An even greater

Those who take a critical stance towards the government are often labelled "traitors", "Soros lackeys" or "foreign agents"

one is the lack of self-reflection and the ability to learn, as is the absence of accountability. It would only be a slight exaggeration to say that Hungary is a country where misdeeds have no consequences. There is no social justice, poverty is rampant, and no government has taken any effective measures to ensure the equality of minority groups. Little wonder, then, that in the affected milieus market economy, democracy/the rule of law and the European Union have become enemies rather than things to aspire to. They have practically become curse words. The responsibilities of the parties that refer to themselves as democratic parties for these developments is that they failed to properly debate these issues in public, did not offer proper

alternatives and practically considered these problems as isolated phenomena. In the meanwhile Jobbik, with its own radical, extreme, exclusionary and demagogic communication has proved capable of luring many – especially youths – into its own camp.

NGO SECTOR

In the decade after regime transition, the NGO sector in Hungary began to develop significantly, including volunteer groups organising village festivities, various associations that offer miscellaneous leisure activities, all the way to a panoply of organisations fighting for social welfare and justice, as well as professional NGOs.

It took the scandal surrounding the consortium of NGOs entrusted with managing the Norway NGO Fund for the Hungarian civil sector – or rather some emblematic organisations engaged in standing up for human rights, the rule of law, minority rights, or anti-corruption – to rethink their activities and turn towards a more activist approach also involving other types of activities. In the meanwhile, the government's campaign to discredit NGOs that are not aligned with the ruling parties is in full swing. This campaign has two objectives: to undermine the credibility of the affected NGOs and to destroy their financial viability, which is already tenuous due to their lack of

AUGUST 2014
First criminal procedure is launched against the operator of the Norway Grants.

SEPTEMBER 8 2014
squads of police officers raided the offices of Ökotárs and Demnet, two foundations that were charged with the distribution of Norwegian grants for civil society.

1 OCTOBER 2014
Tibor Navracsics, former Hungarian Minister of Administration and Justice, is designated as European Commissioner for citizenship. Following strong reaction of European NGOs, Citizenship is removed from his portfolio.

21 OCTOBER 2014
A law proposal for the taxation of internet usage is made public by Minister of National Economy Mihály Varga.

26 OCTOBER 2014
After an online mobilisation campaign, the first mass protests against the law are organised in Budapest.

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resources. Those who take a critical stance towards the government are often labelled "traitors", "Soros lackeys" or "foreign agents", with the goal of suggesting that they only serve alien interests.

The funding of Hungarian NGOs is in a tragic state. One of the striking aspects of institutionalised corruption under Orbán is that faux civil organisations – generally regarded as government friendly –, as well as other organisations that have somehow managed to cultivate friendly ties with the government, can count on budget subsidies. In the meanwhile, critical voices are engaged in a bitter struggle – often against one another – for every diminishing funding. An odd aspect of this situation is that international donor organisations engaged in the realm of promoting democracy, the rule of law or the protection of human rights classify Hungary as a developed democracy – also because of its EU membership – therefore automatically excluding it from the range of countries that may receive funding. It would be necessary to review such funding policies. What is needed is not for Hungary to enjoy a privileged position when such grant programmes are published or applications are reviewed; but Hungarian civil organisations and

projects should have the opportunity to compete for such funds. It is probably not even necessary to go into detail about how NGOs seek to turn their basic activities into "projects" to attain funding for them.

In the interest of securing alternative sources of funding, their dependence on individual donor organisations, or to simply diversify their income, a major proportion of Hungarian NGOs has launched a variety of programmes. Starting with the 1% of income taxes that citizens can allocate to support NGOs, and the organisation of miscellaneous crowdfunding events and campaigns, NGOs engage in a variety of methods to increase their funding. However, these imply a risk that citizens offering support will increasingly see themselves as "clients" – as has been

reported by some NGOs – and that they will expect these organisations to confirm and support their opinions, and to correspondingly exclude potentially conflicting viewpoints from the work of the affected organisations. This could serve to increasingly push the way these organisations operate towards the extremes, and to further consolidate the vast polarisation of Hungarian social life, the mentality of staunchly opposed camps and the inability to communicate across the political divide.

MEDIA

It was obvious to many that Viktor Orbán held the media responsible for the failure of his re-election bid after his first term in government ended in 2002. His party almost immediately began to build a pro-Fidesz media empire. One of the iconic figures of pro-Fidesz circles (even though he almost never appeared in public), the entrepreneur Lajos Simicska, was a loyal ally in this process. It is thus hardly surprising that following the election of the new Orbán government in 2010, the majority immediately began working on new media laws; two new laws were adopted and became effective with stunning speed. The 2010 media laws and the institutional framework they establish are

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31 OCTOBER 2014
The Internet taxation law proposal is withdrawn.

12 JUNE 2015
A communication campaign against refugees is launched by the Orban's Government.

22 JUIN 2015
Orban announces his intention to build a fence along the border to prevent refugees from reaching Hungary.

1 JULY 2015
A public consultation is launched by the Government, introducing a parallel between terrorism and migration.

21 SEPTEMBER 2015
ALDE European Parliament Group calls for the European Parliament to activate article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty to take sanctions against Hungary. LIBE Committee fails to adopt this proposal.

WHO IS VIKTOR ORBAN

Viktor Mihály Orbán , born 31 May 1963, is the Prime Minister of Hungary and the president of the national conservative ruling party Fidesz. He was a vice chairman in the Liberal International from 1992 to 2000, a Vice President in the European People's Party from 2002 to 2012 and the Prime Minister of Hungary from 1998 to 2002. Since 2010, Orbán has been the Prime Minister of Hungary with a two-thirds majority of the seats in the Parliament of Hungary, which his party received in both the 2010 and the 2014 elections. After a 2015 by-election, the party lost its two-thirds supermajority needed for changing the Constitution, while still retaining a simple majority.

At the age of 14 and 15, he was a secretary of the communist youth organisation (KISZ) of his secondary grammar school. In 1988, Orbán was one of the founding members of Fidesz (an acronym for Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége, the Alliance of Young Democrats).

In his first term in office as Hungarian Prime minister, he made himself known for highly controversial measures prefiguring more worrying changes to come: he replaced numbers of civil servants in various institutions and public offices, he reduced the frequency of sessions of the unicameral parliament, and replaced heads of many institutions by government-friendly individuals.

In 2001, the first European concerns over freedom of press were expressed by the International Federation of Journalists for "improper political influence in the media."

On the internal stage, Viktor Orban led the opposition from 2002 until 2010, while Fidesz achieved European success in 2004 European elections. In the 2009 European Parliament elections, Fidesz won again by a large margin, garnering 56.36% of votes and 14 of Hungary's 22 seats

During the 2010 parliamentary elections, Orbán's party won 52.73% of the popular vote, with two-thirds majority of seats, which gave Orbán enough authority and power to change the Constitution.

After the 2014 parliamentary elections, Fidesz won a majority of 133 seats out of the 199 available in the National Assembly. Although, he won a large majority, he garnered only 44.54% of the national vote, down from 52.73% in 2010.

Since 2010, Viktor Orban took a flight of measures limiting civil rights, freedom of press, and threatening the work and independence of NGOs. (see details here: http://goo.gl/zHDCtK)

Most recently, Orbán ordered the erection of the Hungary-Serbia fence to block entry of illegal immigrants during the 2015 European migrant crisis so that Hungary would be able to register all the migrants arriving from Serbia, which is the country's responsibility under the Dublin Regulation, a European Union law. ∎

symbols of an era and also key instruments – though obviously not the only instruments – in the political consolidation of this era. The new media authority, for example, goes to significant lengths to serve Fidesz's media policy objectives. Today we can state: As a result of the distorted public sphere, the media cannot perform its functions in terms of shaping public opinion, and it bears no minor measure of responsibility for the emergence of a society that is unable to communicate.

An interesting aspect of this development is that almost all legislative work with an impact on media freedom was followed by intense protests. One of the largest civil movements of this period, the initially independent Milla, which today is mostly moribund, was also created to protest the media laws

and other government action aimed at curtailing free speech.

The most important reasons underlying the distorted structure of the public sphere:

▶ a state media rather than a public service media: in a uniquely Hungarian situation, public media are excessively financed, their organisation and decision-making mechanisms lack transparency, and their operations are propagandistic; they are practically turned into government mouthpieces

▶ the media has become the playground of oligarchs (in the radio market, for example, tender practices were used to turn a major portion of frequencies over to pro-government oligarchs, and numerous previously popular radio were compelled to cease operations);

▶ political and economic pressure (a particularly striking examples was the removal of the editor-in-chief of a major Hungarian newsportal, origo.hu – which is owned by a company that is a subsidiary of a German corporation – after he published an investigative piece on the prices of official foreign trips of an influential cabinet member;

▶ the comprehensive structural politicisation of the media system

▶ concentrated state advertising spending and the manipulation of the advertising market

▶ the placement of government loyalists into all relevant positions involving media oversight, and the distribution of scopes of competencies and authorities in a way which ensures that they are all filled by reliable party soldiers.

The government's modus operandi is also illustrated by the series of events involving RTL Klub in 2014. Already during the election period in spring 2014, the largest commercial television channel began to strike a critical tone towards the government. A growing slice of its work was devoted to investigative reporting and took on an edge that was unfavourable from the government's perspective. In response, the government introduced an unequivocally discriminative media tax which mostly hurt RLK Klub (it was the only media outlet required to pay the highest tax rate and it also had to pay a major portion of the entire tax revenue). Finally, in the war of pull and tug that broke out between RTL and the government, the latter finally had to relent, a major factor in which was fear of the outcome of proceedings that the European Commission was expected to launch.

Viktor Orbán has repeatedly talked about a policy of "eastern opening", about his "freedom struggle" against Brussels, the end of the West and deepening economic, political and cultural ties with Russia. The idea of the internet tax, which is unprecedented in Europe, also meshes with this rhetoric. The goal was to introduce a completely unviable, gigabyte-based tax that would have deepened the digital divide and would have caused competitive disadvantage for the Hungarian economy, cutting off many from the possibility of using the internet. An unprecedented wave of protests was launched in response, tens of thousands of people took to the streets

As a result of the distorted public sphere, the media cannot perform its functions in terms of shaping public opinion

in Budapest. Photos of protesters holding up mobile phone were shown throughout the world, and the protests were covered by all relevant international media outlets. Youths were energised to previously unseen degrees and they uniformly said no to distancing Hungary from the West, to disregarding EU values and to pro-Russian and pro-Putin policies. The protests soon took up other issues as well, with the organisers and speakers highlighting the desire for a just, diverse and inclusive society based on solidarity.

THE FUTURE OF ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Lest anyone have doubts that there is a deliberate political strategy at work to establish an illiberal democracy in Hungary, Viktor Orbán himself made this clear for everyone at his notorious speech in Tusnádfürdő. The speech carried an unequivocal message: Orbán wants to leave everything behind that embodies the West in Hungary, and seeks to bring the country closer to states such as Turkey, Russia and Singapore. In Hungary today the divide is not between right-wingers and left-wingers, not between Fidesz supporters and MSZP supporters, but rather between democrats and anti-democrats. For the country as a whole, the question whether the democrats will be able to continue their activities and achieve results in this worrying situation is a key issue. The fate of a country rests on their shoulders. ◼

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SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

HOW NGOS TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE

How NGOs face a series of unprecedented governmental attacks and harassment of independent civic groups, especially those engaged in human rights, anti-corruption, women's and LBGT rights

EUROPEAN CIVIC FORUM: **Can you tell us more about the attacks of Orban's government on Civil society and how it has affected your work and the work of NGOs in general in Hungary?**

VERONIKA MORA: In April 2014, just two days after the general election which brought the repeated victory of the right-conservative government of Fidesz, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, Mr János Lázár announced that he would initiate the re-negotiation of how funding is provided by EEA countries – Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein – to Hungarian NGOs, within the framework of development assistance provided by these countries to less developed EU member states. This signalled the start of a series of unprecedented governmental attacks and harassment of independent civic groups, especially those engaged in

human rights, anti-corruption, women's and LBGT rights.

My foundation, Ökotárs as the head of the grantmaking consortium which managed the EEA/Norwegian NGO Programme in Hungary found itself in the centre of the conflict, which at first started as a media smear campaign orchestrated by the government. High ranking officials, e.g. deputy state secretaries accused us as being politically biased, oppositional "cheating nobodies". However, this was soon followed by official inspections: in late May last year the PMO has announced publicly that the so-called Governmental Control Office will audit the use of the EEA/Norwegian funding – over which in our and our lawyers' opinion they had no jurisdiction. It was also quite characteristic to the whole process that we always learnt everything from government-friendly media first - official notifications came only afterwards. Although our repeated requests to clarify the legal basis of the audit were never answered, we were forced to cooperate with the GCO, due to its wide ranging sanctioning powers. The 'audit' lasted throughout the summer – we also noticed that documents not previously in the public domain, but handed over to GCO by us during the course of the procedures somehow quickly found their way into government-friendly media – always in a damning context.

By August, the administrative processes turned into criminal accusations – made first in the media again. They ranged from fraud through mismanagement to unlicensed financial activity, and we soon learned that a criminal investigation has indeed been launched. This then escalated quickly: on the morning of the 8th of September, the National Bureau of Investigation invaded our office with 20-odd police officers. They searched for documents related to the management and the grantees of the EEA/Norwegian NGO Programme, and also visited the office of our accountant, our IT provider and partners, and also the homes of some staff members (where we kept archived documents). The raid lasted the whole day, and in the meantime our colleagues were forbidden to communicate with the outside world by any means. The police confiscated written documents and laptops during the action. We filed a complaint against the search, and the court eventually ruled it to be unlawful in January 2015, saying that there was no suspicion upon which such a search could be funded.

The GCO published its "report" in late October. This 40-pages document repeated all earlier accusations, however without any factual data supporting them – there were no names, amounts described or any other tangible information included. At the same time, government-friendly media leaked internal e-mail exchanges and other private matters of the foundations. Thus the media campaign continued – and while it decreased in intensity a lot it has not stopped up today, and its focus shifted away from the EEA grants to other NGO issues.

What is important that throughout this series of harassments we have been able to continue or operation as normal – e.g. two calls for proposals within the EEA/Norwegian NGO Programme have been closed, providing support to app. 300 NGO's projects. Many of these are being completed just now, while others will finish in the first months of 2016.

The attacks have highlighted some long-standing weaknesses of the Hungarian NGO sector

ECF: **From what we understood Hungarian civil society was caught unprepared by these attacks, can you explain why? Is it the result of a lack of cooperation or coordination among NGOs in the country?**

VERONIKA MORA: The attacks have highlighted some long-standing weaknesses of the Hungarian NGO sector, which experts have warned about for years without much impact. In the decade between the early 2000's and 2010-11 Hungarian NGOs have enjoyed a relatively stable working environment, in which their income structures were dominated by state, and especially EU Structural Fund grants. While this allowed NGOs to carry on with their basic activity and services, in turn it also discouraged innovation and the search for alternatives, leading to a "business-as-usual" mode of operation, and – in retrospect – stagnation. We as grant-makers have already observed this during the first EEA/Norwegian NGO Fund during 2008-9. In the relative abundance of funding, and more importantly, the perception of future perspectives, most NGOs did not feel the need to build their constituencies and circle of supporters, to really reach out to the broader public. For similar reasons, there was little cooperation within the sector (aside some issue-based networks such as that of environmental NGOs). As a result, broad segments of the general public had (and still have) no real grasp of what civil society is about, what are its roles and functions and why NGOs are important for democracy. Also, many NGOs do not realize they are part of something bigger, a 'sector' that there are thing that bind them together.

THE NGO FUND

The NGO Fund of the European Economic Area (EEA)/Norway Grants forms a small part of the overall EEA/Norway grants to Hungary. The EEA/Norway grants are grants from Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland to 16 EU countries, mostly in the South and East of Europe. In Hungary, as in other recipient countries, the vast majority of funding goes to state projects. In Hungary, this amount is about €150 million for the current budgeting period 2009-2014. The NGO Fund in Hungary, which is independent of the Hungarian state, amounts to about €13.5 million for the period 2009-2014. The overall objective of the EEA/Norway NGO programmes is to "strengthen civil society development and enhance contribution to social justice, democracy and sustainable development".

The NGO fund is operated by four Hungarian civil society organisations, each responsible for the management and distribution of grants in a specific thematic area. These four organisations – often referred to as "the consortium" – are Ökotárs Foundation, Autonómia Foundation, DemNet and Kárpátok Foundation. Funds for organisations awarded grants are supervised directly by the Financial Mechanism Office (FMO) – a secretariat of donor countries based in Brussels - to recipient organisations following an open tender. Evaluators of the consortium select grant recipients according to a range of criteria set out in an agreement between the FMO and the consortium. Representatives of Hungarian government ministries participate in sessions to select grant recipients as observers, but do not have voting rights in these decisions.

Since 2013, the fund, its management and its beneficiaries have suffered repeated attacks and threats from Viktor Orban's government, seriously jeopardising the whole scheme and the success of the funded projects. One of the most striking example of these attacks is the police raid on Ökotárs and Demnet, two foundations that were charged with the distribution of Norwegian money for civic purposes. ∎

THE AUTHOR

Veronika Móra has been working with the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation (Ökotárs) since 1997 and holds the position of the director since 2007. Besides her full time occupation she also has voluntary positions in a number of NGOs, among them the chairmanship of the Hungarian Donors Forum, which works on developing the (corporate) philanthropic culture in the country.

Then, starting with 2011 sudden and profound changes shook the sector, and NGOs were unable to handle these – there was a general feeling of apathy and "now what?" in the past few years. On the one hand, a new NGO law entered into force at the beginning of 2012, which while did not restrict the freedom to associate and operate, brought new administrative demands, and many NGOs found it hard to interpret and adapt to the new regulations. On the other hand, the funding environment has also changed drastically: state sources were cut back significantly, their distribution mechanisms were completely overwritten while the Structural Fund sources have effectively dried up. This lead to a situation, that NGOs live day-by-day, unable to plan or to retain professional staff.

It was under these circumstances that the series of attacks have come which caught NGOs unawares, but has finally drew acute attention to the need for renewal, most importantly for pro-actively communicating NGOs' causes and the work they do for the public good. For many people NGOs are still some alien creatures, with unclear mandates and motivations – this was clearly shown by the weak public response: while there were demonstrations organized after the police raid, they did not manage to draw more that 1-2000

broad segments of the general public had no real grasp of what civil society is about, what are its roles and functions and why NGOs are important for democracy

people to the case. It clearly showed that NGOs have a long way to go to promote active citizenship and to mobilize people to take issues in their own hands, starting really from the basics, from the grassroots level – and this in a society characterized by apathy and passivity.

The attacks also highlighted the need for coalition-building and self-defence: NGOs realized they need to speak up on their behalf with a unified voice – because no one else will do it in their stead.

ECF: **What lessons have you drawn since then? What are the 'positive effects' of these attacks in terms of structuration of Civil Society Organisations in Hungary? What are your hopes and expectations for the near future?**

VERONIKA MORA: The events of the past one-and-half year brought both positive and negative effects, but unfortunately also a widening gap within the sector. One the one hand large, well-established, mainly capital-based advocacy NGOs – those attacked directly and the ones in solidarity with them – were able to 'fight back': as mentioned above, they

THE DIRTY THIRTEEN

On May 30th 2014, The Hungarian Prime Minister's Office published a blacklist of 13 organisations labelled as the "dirty thirteen" regarded by the government as "leftist" after having received grants from the EEA/Norway fund.

▶ Krétakör – foundation supporting independent art and theater projects and education

▶ K-Monitor – organisation focused on bringing transparency to spending public funds

▶ NANE – abbreviated from "women for women against violence," is a foundation meant to promote action against domestic violence and to provide aid to victimized women

▶ DIA – foundation spreading democratic values among young people

▶ Transparency International – the Hungarian branch of the internationally renowned transparency and anti-corruption advocate

▶ Hungarian Women's Lobby – Group advocating more active participation of women in politics

▶ Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ) – possibly the best-known Hungarian civil liberties group that regularly criticizes legal infringements and also provides free legal representation to underprivileged victims

▶ Asimov Foundation – affiliated with Atlatszo.hu, the foundation's goal is to create and establish an online portal that provides access to all information that is of social importance

▶ Roma Press Center – focused on instances of racial discrimination targeted at the Roma minority

▶ Labrisz – association for the recognition and acceptance of lesbians

▶ Patent – An "anti-patriarchal" organisation founded to raise awareness of gender-based discrimination and physical abuse towards women

▶ LiFE – organisation for young people with liberal political views

▶ Budapest Pride – organisation founded to represent and promote the interests of the Hungarian LMBTQ community ∎

started building a self-defence coalition and were able to start adapting their communication and work on building their constituencies. This is of course a long-term process, but the first, crucial steps – simply the awareness and the will to tackle the problem – have been taken. Also, the increased media attention (especially online) resulting from the attacks provided a welcome side effect and 'free advertisement'.

On the other hand, smaller NGOs working on the countryside were indirectly hit harder. In these settlements, local interdependencies make it much more difficult for local NGOs to speak up or to voice criticism e.g. against the major. Municipal sources and contacts play an important role in the survival of these organizations, and the 'Norwegian support' could (and did) have a stigmatizing effect on these relations. Also, it will take longer for the new ideas and approaches to trickle down – significant gaps between different NGOs can be seen e.g. in the use of social media as a tool for both internal and external communication.

The existing gaps are further exacerbated by the governmental communication which strongly differentiates among the 'good' and 'bad' NGOs – the former being those that limit themselves to purely charitable activities (often with a religious background), while those that move beyond this, advocate or voice concern automatically

It seems that a future coalition of cross-sector Civil Society Organisations in Hungary would be created soon. Are you aware of it and if so, can you tell us more about it?

VERONIKA MORA: Yes, although as a grant making organization we are not taking active part in it. All the same we follow the developments - we see that this coalition is still at its first phases of development, struggling to find its identity, role and voice. This understandably is a difficult process, especially as organizations that had not have much contact earlier came now together – which is a value in itself, but they have a long way to go. It is practically impossible at this stage to predict how fast or in what direction this cooperation will move, but I do hope it can contribute to the renewal of civil society in Hungary.

fall in the latter category (with some exceptions in very specific policy fields). 'Foreign-funded" and "Soros-funded" remain almost curse words – most recently even informal groups like Migration Aid supporting refugees during the height of crisis were tagged as such. NGOs must be aware of this and not to let themselves to be 'divided and conquered' in the hope to become better positioned with the powers that be.

All in all, I'm cautiously optimistic – I believe that it is Hungarian NGOs themselves who must primarily deal with the new situation, working together closely and resisting intimidation. While the attention and support of international organizations or the EU is important, mostly so that NGOs do not feel abandoned, this problem cannot be solved from abroad. NGOs must make up for the 'lost decade' I mentioned above – develop constituency, cultivate domestic donors and step up their advocacy in a relatively short time, which is of course not an easy task. I do hope that civil society will come out stronger in the end, albeit maybe changed: it is possible that some long-existing formalized NGOs will close down and informal, online organizing will become more dominant – there are signs pointing in this direction already.

> While the attention and support of international organizations or the EU is important, mostly so that NGOs do not feel abandoned, this problem cannot be solved from abroad

CIVIL SOCIETY RESISTANCE IN THE SPOTLIGHT
100 000 AGAINST THE INTERNET TAX

By Gulyas Balazs

This civic mobilisation has been awarded Campaign of the year within ECF's European Democratic Citizenship Awards 2015.

The "100 thousand against the internet tax" was a campaign launched to prevent the government of Hungary to implement the proposed internet-tax. This campaign, innovative in many ways, has shown that despite Viktor Orban's attacks, civil society is still ready to act and fight for civil liberties and fundamental rights in Hungary.

The tax proposal has been another try by Viktor Orban's almighty government to limit the freedom of expression and the freedom of information by limiting internet access, in particular for the poorest categories of the population. Even though the governing party of Hungary won three elections in 2014, the campaign forced them to withdraw their senseless internet tax proposal. The campaign managed to achieve this via creating a primarily online community and ensuring an extremely strong street presence, leading to the biggest

EPA

demonstration in the modern history of Hungary.

It took a mere ten days between the public announcement of the law proposal on the taxation of internet usage and its withdrawal. Ten days during which Balazs Gulyas and his colleagues mobilised hundreds of thousands of Hungarian. The mobilisation went first through social media before turning into the largest street protests ever seen in Hungary for the past 25 years not only in Budapest but also in smaller cities which hadn't seen any protests since the 1956 revolution.

The Facebook page gathering the support for the cause rallied more people than any political party's page

in Hungary. This online mobilisation epitomises the rise of new forms of civic expression: more than ever, the internet allows individuals to organise civic and political action with limited resources compared to political party resources. It is even more striking as the movement against the Internet tax was triggered by individuals and remains a popular movement. Support from political parties was never sought nor desired. Hopes are shared that it augurs a wider awakening of Hungarian population and civil society around other issues such as the refugee crisis.

The communication style through social media, using internet memes* and digital culture references has been particularly important and relevant in sharing the message, in reaching out to a wide audience and mobilising the crowd. It has served the campaign even more as it created a gap with political parties' communication largely unable to play with the communication codes of the younger generations in Hungary.

While the voices of Hungarian citizens were heard in their country thanks to their online mobilisation and thanks to their shouts in the streets, they still remain unheard in Europe. The Internet tax is one among many initiatives taken by Orban's government to try to silence the voices of individual citizens and civil society organisations. Many of these breaches to civil liberties and fundamental rights have been widely criticised but so far, to Balazs sadness, no answer were given by European Institutions to Hungarian people's concerns. ■

* An Internet meme is a cultural phenomenon that spreads from one person to another online.

THE AUTHOR

Balázs Gulyás is the leader of the protest against the planned Hungarian Internet tax in October 2014. This civic mobilisation has been awarded Campaign of the year within ECF's European Democratic Citizenship Awards 2015.

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THE HUNGARIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

Since its founding in 1989, the HHC has acquired a strong reputation of professionalism and credibility. The HHC's main areas of activities are centred on protecting the rights of asylum-seekers and other foreigners in need of international protection, as well as monitoring the human rights performance of law enforcement agencies and the judicial system. It particularly focuses on the conditions of detention, the effective enforcement of the right to defence and equality before the law. Beyond its long-standing experience in detention monitoring, advocacy as well as legal counselling and representation for detainees and asylum-seekers (e.g. over 12 000 asylum-seekers assisted since 1998), the HHC has unique expertise among European NGOs in human rights and asylum-related training. They delivered over 200 training sessions and courses in recent years in dozens of European and Latin-American countries. As a member of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, the HCC shares and learns with other like-minded organisations.

The HHC has been particularly effective in representing the cause of detainees, refugees and other victims of human rights violation in recent years. Both the EU Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights decided favourably in several cases of asylum-seekers represented by the HHC. In 2013, the HCC reached a favourable judgment in 82% of the asylum appeal cases they represented before national courts. The HHC submitted formal complaints against Hungary to the European Commission for non-compliance with EU law, which resulted in a pilot infringement procedure against the country and the rectification of several shortcomings in legislation and practice. International human rights bodies (United Nations, Council of Europe), rapporteurs, national courts and the US State Department regularly quote the HHC as a reliable source of information about human rights, rule of law and asylum in Hungary.

Hungarian elections remained free but became unfair

The HHC is the only refugee-assisting civil society organisation regularly invited to train state authorities and judges in various countries. Since 2004, the HCC has been managing the world's only online university curriculum for the teaching of refugee law, the Refugee Law Reader in 4 languages, gathering over 100 000 visits per year. The HHC has gained specific reputation for leading some of the most innovative and powerful training initiatives in the field of asylum internationally, such as the CREDO initiative (increasingly used and referred to in different parts of the world). The HHC has applied innovative solutions in other areas of its activity as well: in an effort to reform the Hungarian criminal legal aid system, it has in cooperation with the police and bar associations developed and tested in three pilot sites a computerised system for selecting lawyers in order to exclude the possibility of the police choosing non-independent lawyers for the suspects.

In 2014, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee along with three other well-established Hungarian NGOs published a comprehensive assessment of the disrespect for European values in Hungary. The report cast terribly worrying light on four dimensions: the rule of law, democracy, pluralism and fundamental rights.

As an example of the breaches to the rule of law, the report stresses the fact that the "government has systematically undermined the role of independent institutions as checks on and balances to political power by means of restructuring as well as re-staffing these institutions. The governing majority, in order to appoint loyal office-holders, removed the previous incumbents from office before their terms expired."

Core principles of democracy are also jeopardised, the report highlights that "Hungarian elections remained free but became unfair". Due to highly restrictive campaign regulations, and pro-government public media, Fidesz enjoyed an undue advantage over the other political parties. And this is only one among many other significant cracks in the democratic structure: limited parliamentary debates, biased new constituency map, threat on Members of Parliament, pressure and constraints on freedom of press and media.

These attacks on democracy trickled down to pluralism of Hungarian society. Not only the necessary work of NGO has been severely threatened and attack but the Hungarian state has adopted a not neutral ideological point of view which poses serious problems to education. Local government schools are taken over by churches, religious education is funded from state budget and schools no longer have to strive to be ideologically neutral. Not only institutions are affected by restriction on a pluralist society. Very strong stance against same-sex marriage and a restrictive understanding of the concept of family have been enshrined in the Fundamental Law and Civil Code.

> Orban declared "We have one message for refugees: Don't come!" during a press conference in Brussels on September 3rd 2015

> In 2014, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee along with three other well-established Hungarian NGOs published a comprehensive assessment of the disrespect for European values in Hungary

Finally, outrageous breaches to fundamental rights through measures severely violating human dignity, and afflicting the most defenceless has been taken since 2010. Confinement of juveniles for petty offences, criminalisation of homelessness, and limitation of the freedom of speech, degraded right to access social security services can be quoted as most striking examples among many more.

In the light of this stark disrespect for European values and Human rights, it barely came as a surprise when Orban declared "We have one message for refugees: Don't come!" during a press conference in Brussels on September 3rd 2015. Since then, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee has restlessly fought more than ever to safeguard the rights of refugees in Hungary and to raise awareness about unprecedented human rights violations in Hungary. ∎

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee has been awarded special mention by the Jury within ECF's European Democratic Citizenship Awards 2015.

WHEN I ARRIVED IN LISBON I SAW A LOT OF POSTERS AGAINST ETHNIC AND SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION.
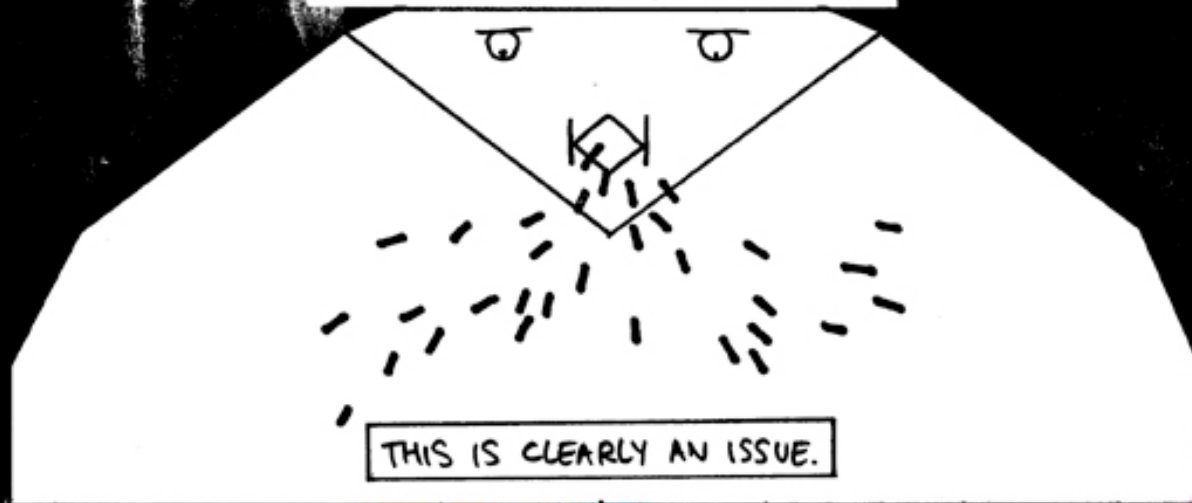
THIS IS CLEARLY AN ISSUE.

LOOK AT HER SKIN! SHE'S A GYPSY AND ALL GYPSIES ARE ROBBERS!

I'M SURE HER PARENTS ARE CRIMINALS FLEEING FROM JUSTICE

③
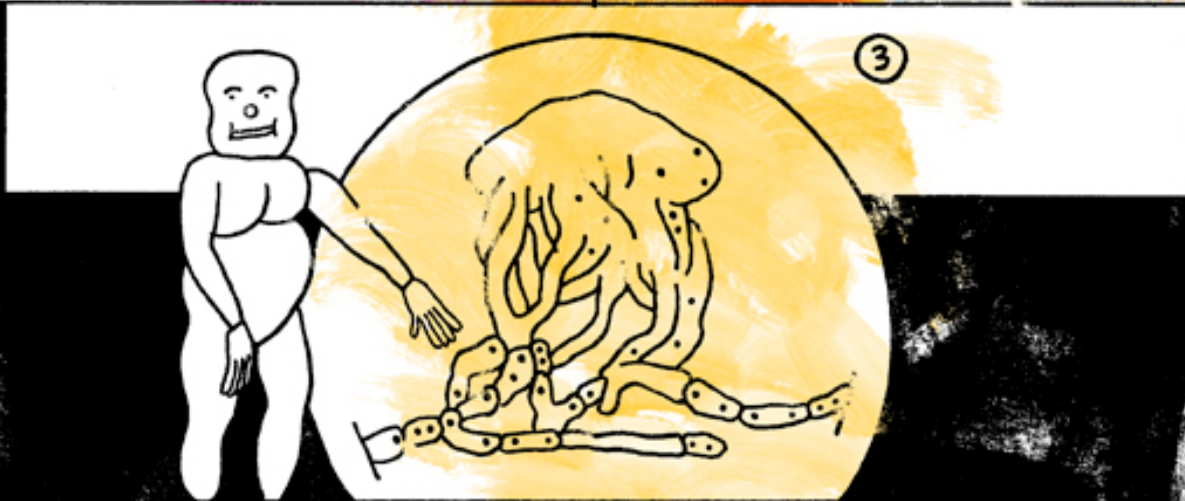
GROWTH OF THE MYCELIUM PRODUCES A YOUNG, VERY SMALL MUSHROOM COVERED BY A STRUCTURE CALLED THE UNIVERSAL VEIL.

Mari Ahokoivu "Is it wrong to use sterotypes of your own country to your advantage?"

2

ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY

A EUROPEAN DILEMMA?

Is the "illiberal State" a European tendency, growing in the respective Member States? Is democratic disenchantment a phenomena Europe itself is confronted to, namely in light of the 100 Euro-sceptics who recently entered Parliament? What European responses to systematic attacks by a Member State against common democratic values and standards?

ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY

A EUROPEAN ISSUE

By Dr. Vedran Dzihic

The global economic crisis has revealed the fragility of the political and socio-economic systems and jeopardized a democratic consensus.

It seemed to be a wonderful dream of a world and particularly Europe reaching the end of history (Francis Fukuyama) and entering an era of everlasting liberal democratic peace. In some parts of Europe it worked out quite well, at least for a period of time. Today, the situation in (some parts of) Europe is rather dramatic, with some major challenges and conflicting trends portraying a picture of a rather divided than continent united in peace. There is even a risk of European parts drifting apart, having one part of Europe dedicated to liberalism, democracy and openness and another one embracing authoritarian values and illiberalism. As Michael Ignatieff put it in New York Review thinking of global developments but portraying besides China mainly Russia and Turkey: "A new political competitor to liberal democracy began to take shape: authoritarian in

political form, capitalist in economics, and nationalists in ideology."[1]

The global economic crisis has revealed the fragility of the political and socio-economic systems and jeopardized a democratic consensus. As Jan Werner-Müller has put it "democracy is struggling: nearly all the countries that joined the EU during the last decade are experiencing profound political crisis."[2] 25 years after the end of the Cold War, initial euphoria about democratic change in many countries of the East and Southeast has given way to growing mistrust in political institutions and political representatives, and an increasing disaffection with democracy itself. What we face in the West is a rather broad discussion about crisis of democracy, while at the same time in some Eastern and Southeastern European countries regression from democracy and authoritarian trends are on the agenda.

With the general crisis of democracy in the inner circle of democracies we face an emergence of grey-zones between democracy and authoritarianism and new forms of authoritarianism in some parts of Eastern and Southeastern Europe, and even within the EU. Classical authoritarianism seeks for an absolute obedience, is directed against individual freedoms and liberties and always ready to use repression against opponents. New grey-zone regimes are chameleon-like – they are able to adjust to new circumstances, they have institutionalized representation of a variety of actors and they even incorporate some democratic procedures like elections and thus create a structure resistant to change. It is precisely this type of grey-zone chameleon-like regime that is setting an example for something we could describe as "illiberal democracy". Sounds like a paradox, and it is a paradox from the standpoint of political theory, but it is a new reality emerging before our eyes.

LOOKING AT THE PERIPHERIES OF EUROPE

In order to understand more about the direction Europe is heading to or about the challenges Europe is facing it is equally important to look at the peripheries of Europe as at the center.

Looking at the peripheries of Europe might help us illustrate this assumption. The peripheries are zones of anger (as Sloterdijk has put it), where the perceptions of liberalism and open societies and thus also Europe are in a constant flux with no finality in sight. It is precisely in the peripheries that we see competing and conflicting narratives about liberalism and democracies and more generally conflicting narratives about the regimes best suited to rule. The one is basically oriented towards liberal and democratic values and another one heading towards authoritarian values. In between lies an explosive mix of uncertainty. And it is precisely in this zone "in-between" where fear is taking over, be it a tool for ruling parties and politicians to fortify their power or as a paralyzing momentum for whole societies, where citizens eyes wide shut because of fear start relaying on dubious leaders to provide guidance in difficult times.

The best prove that there is something serious going on in Europe is to just quote usual opinion-leadings media outlets, here "The Economist", which in its December edition puts it this way: "Mr Trump and Ms Le Pen are not alone. Support for the populist right in America and parts of Europe are unparalleled since the Second World War. Against the backdrop of terrorism, these fear mongers pose a serious threat to the openness and tolerance that Western societies take for granted."[3] And here is The Guardian telling us the same story: "A long malaise in continental liberal democracy is beginning to feel more like decline. Illiberal democracy is already

1 Michael Ignatieff, New World Disorder, New York Review of Books, September 25 issue, 2014:
2 Jan Werner-Müller, Eastern Europe Goes South. Disappearing democracy in the EU's Newest Members, in: Foreign Affairs, March/April 2014, see: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/eastern-europe-caucasus/2014-02-12/eastern-europe-goes-south
3 The Economist,12.12.2015

thriving in the east of the continent. It is the explicit creed of the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, who has tried to proscribe press criticism of the government in the name of protecting "public morality", and who treats non-Christian religions and non-governmental organisations as fifth columnists contaminating the vigour of a national project. (...) In October, the ultra-conservative Law and Justice party swept aside a centrist government in Poland, raising fears among the country's liberals of a lurch towards Orbán."[4]

There are many examples to illustrate this rift, be it Ukraine, Hungary, countries of the Western Balkans or even Bulgaria, recently Poland. As we have seen in the Ukrainian case, the drifting apart of parts of the country in terms of narratives about Europa and further integration into the EU quickly translated into violent division of the country creating facts on the ground that are – most probably – here to stay (see Crimea). Parts of Southeastern Europe are also an interesting place to look at.

We face an emergence of grey-zones between democracy and authoritarianism and new forms of authoritarianism in some parts of Eastern and Southeastern Europe

Here we have fragile states with no solution for internal ethnic conflicts and disputes while at the same time regimes with strong (male) rule are emerging, pairing populism and nationalism with quite of the empty rhetoric of reforms and Europeanization. Hungary that is, at least according to its Prime Minister Orban, embracing "illiberal democracy" and limiting some fundamental freedoms, or Bulgaria with constant parallelism between protests, elections and new governments not able to deliver what population seems to want, are further examples of fundamental changes going on in Europe nowadays. Or the latest addition to the debate of illiberalism, Poland, is in the midst of turbulent reshaping the state according to a rather questionable role-model, Hungary.

To make my point – in Eastern-und Southeastern part of Europe, not to speak about Russia or Turkey, in a region that went through more than two decades of democratization, we are witnessing new challenges to democracy and emergence of grey zone semi-authoritarian regimes, which – under the guise of democracy – limit individual freedom and reduce liberties.

RE-THINKING GREY-ZONE REGIMES AND ZONES "IN-BETWEEN"

The development of new grey-zone regimes between democracy and authoritarianism in Eastern- and South-eastern part of Europe certainly goes hand in hand with weaknesses of democracy, particularly in transitional societies that

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left authoritarianism at the beginning of the 1990s and embarked on a challenging way towards the end goal, the liberal Western type democracy as embodied in the EU. Let us look briefly on major dilemmas of this "transition-to-democracy" dilemma.

The "classical" assumptions of transformation research holds onto a picture a linear and normatively given direction of democratic transformation. It is supposed to progress in clearly distinguished phases from democratic opening to gradual consolidation up until the final goal of Western oriented liberal democracy. This model has been repeatedly

criticized and revised over the last decades. The functional weakness of democracies in East and Southeast Europe is a convincing case for the revised insight that there is no linear pathway to democracy. But rather that transition to democracy is also always a transition from democracy, or even a regression of democracy. The significant problems of democracies and worrying authoritarian trends in the countries of Eastern and South-eastern Europe can thus be seen as a clear proof to the assumption that there is no linear path to democracy and that democratization efforts in some cases can even lead to non-democratic effects including democratic roll-backs and also regression from democracy. As Charley Tilly put it in the early 2000s, "de-democratization" seems to be immanent to any kind of democratization.[5] It became increasingly clear that liberal democracy is only one possible final outcome of democratization processes. I argue that there is no automatism in democratic transition, yet an inherent contingency of transformation processes as well as an enormous divergence of political system that have developed in

East and Southeast Europe since 1990. It means that assumption of an automatic, inevitable consolidation of democracy is misguided, especially since some states with a rather linear and stable process of consolidation of democracy started facing processes of de-democratization or regression from democracy. And here obviously Hungary and recently Poland are major examples for such a kind of development. So Andras Bozoki:

"From the happy story of the transition from dictatorship to democracy, there is a looming potential tragedy, a transition from democracy. The last twenty years were far from being unproblematic, prime examples: a widening gap between the winners and losers of the regime change, between the living standards of the capital city, Budapest, and the rest of the country, and between the life chances of educated classes and the Roma population. But still, what we all experienced was a genuine liberal democracy. Governing parties lost elections. The media aggressively criticized politicians. Democracy was consolidated, and the country successfully joined the European Union. Is it possible to take the oxygen of democracy away within a few weeks and months? Moreover: Is it possible to make a reverse transition?"[6]

Consequently, having these new trends in mind several common assumptions of the democratization theory have been revised. A core assumption of Western liberal democracies being a normative role model for countries in Eastern and South-eastern Europe has lost a lot of its original credibility. The latest debates about post-democracy and crises of democracy (see authors like Crouch, Fukuyama, Rosanvallon, etc.) underline the fact that the crisis of democracy in the West, and particularly within the EU, has changed the perception of democracy in the periphery of the West. Another important assumption related to the importance of free and multiparty elections for democratic consolidation was challenged by scholars arguing that free and fair conducted elections are a necessary but not sufficient condition of liberal democracies. The reduction of the concept of democracy to a pure

The crisis of democracy in the West, and particularly within the EU, has changed the perception of democracy in the periphery of the West

4 The Guardian, Rafael Behr, As Le Pen rises Europe's liberal dream is disappearing in front of our eyes, 9.12.2015
5 Charles Tilly, Democracy, Cambridge University Press 2007
6 Bozoki, Andras, The Hungarian Shock: Transition from Democracy, in: Transit 2011, accesses under http://www.iwm.at/read-listen-watch/transit-online/the-hungarian-shock

electoralism has certainly led to significant problems. By putting a strong focus on the importance of elections, the importance of other elements of democracy as for example the active participation of citizens, the functioning of the state, or the redistributive ability of the welfare state was largely underestimated.

Based on these deficiencies, the debate obviously shifted towards the debate on regression from democracy and towards concepts like "grey-zone"-regimes between democratic and authoritarian rule. Just to briefly recall major arguments in the debate. The early debate on de-democratization was dominated by the concepts of "defective democracies" and on "hybrid regimes". Then Thomas Carothers sparked an important debate by developing a concept of feckless pluralism, best described as pluralistic grey zone regime types outside of the "democracy vs. autocracy"-logic that can be politically quite stable and produce an output valuable for the citizens without necessarily following the logic of democratic rule.

"Countries whose political life is marked by feckless pluralism tend to have significant amounts of political freedom, regular elections, and alternation of power between genuinely different political groupings. Despite these positive features, however, democracy remains shallow and troubled. Political participation, though broad at election time, extends little beyond voting. (...) Political elites from all the major parties are widely perceived as corrupt, self-interested, dishonest, and not serious about working for their country. The public is seriously disaffected from politics, and while it may still cling to a belief in the ideal of democracy, it is extremely unhappy about the political life of the country. Overall, politics is widely seen as a stale, corrupt, elite-dominated domain that delivers little good to the country and commands equally little respect. And the state remains persistently weak."[7]

The concept of Thomas Carothers seems to offer an appropriate framework for looking at today's grey zones between democracy and authoritarianism in Eastern and South-eastern Europe but also much broader, be it for example in Turkey and to a certain extent in Russia too. Here is what can be identified as major characteristics of this newly emerging "in-between" regime type. Grey zone regimes are generally characterized by a partial incorporation or imitation of liberal democratic procedures and formal institutions, which are however simultaneously undermined by an overall logic of limited pluralism. That means that we find here new forms of regimes that do reconcile competitive elections, multi-party systems, parliaments, constitutions and other elements of rule usually associated with liberal democracies on the one hand side with the functional

Civil society is fundamentally contributing to develop and sustainably embed a democratic political culture, thus preventing countries from lapsing back into authoritarian rule

logic of authoritarianism and with mechanisms and techniques of rule (including open or subtle repression) characteristic for authoritarian regimes. These regimes are also having a high degree of adaptability and strategic changeability and flexibility: they for example refer to themselves not as authoritarian but thoroughly democratic. They also have long ago adjusted to the rules of global capitalism in which they fully participate. Such a high grade of flexibility is even "better at picking up tips from their democratic rivals than the other way around."[8] Russia in the context of the current context of Ukraine and Western sanctions might stand as an example here.

But let us take a closer look at the internal logic of rule of grey zone regimes and thus summarize major features of these regimes. First of all, those regimes create a façade of formal democratic elements and even rule of law. They seek to underline their democratic character by a strong declarative and rhetorical commitment to democracy, which is however undermined by nearly every aspect of the day-to-day functioning of the regime. There are several areas where the authoritarian character of the regime can be detected: it starts at the level of

participation, where elections are either slightly or strongly manipulated by the regime, and where media are shamelessly used for political exploitation and election advertising. Secondly, courts, which are de jure independent, are de facto politically controlled or dominated by the executive branch of government. Judiciary is usually the first segment to be "attacked" by new authoritarian leaders, as seen in Hungary and as we are witnessing right now in Poland. Thirdly, although government has all rights to exercise the power, several informal and democratically non-legitimate actors such as economic oligarchs and businesses, religious leaders and other clientelistic groups claim the control over certain policies for themselves. Quite frequently ethnic or national issues or questions of territory and national sovereignty are used by the regime as a "scapegoat" to mobilize voters or divert attention from their own particular interests and non-democratic and non-transparent practices. A final and very important element for analysing grey zone regimes is the mutual relationship between political elites and

The reduction of the concept of democracy to a pure electoralism has certainly led to significant problems

citizens. In order to keep the democratic façade alive and continue operating in the grey zone between democracy and direct authoritarian rule the grey zones regime need to keep a certain level of popular support. How and with which means a necessary level of popular support is achieved by grey zone regimes seems to be one of the crucial questions.

As a result, at the time of general economic and social crisis and widespread crisis of democracy, the above described new authoritarian forms of rule start to be perceived as attractive, rather flexible and adaptable and finally functional system alternatives. It is precisely this new attractiveness, even a legitimacy and in any case flexibility paired with certain services provided to the population (such as security and welfare for certain parts of the population) that is endangering the liberal consensus and leading towards capitalist (or globalist) illiberalism as a new flexible and pragmatic ideology of 21st century.

7 Carothers, Thomas (2002): The End of the Transition Paradigm, in: Journal of Democracy, Volume 13, Number 1 January 2002
8 Runciman, David (2013): The Confidence Trap. A History of Democracy in Crisis from World I to Present, Princeton and Oxford 2013, p. 322)

protesting the country's oligarchs sang Western Europe's cultural anthem: Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." In 1989, ordinary people and political dissidents managed to (in most cases) peacefully overthrow the oppressive governments of Eastern Europe in a series of "velvet revolutions." Twenty-five years later, the people of the region must safeguard the legacy of their revolutions by once more showing such resolve - and blocking attempts by Orban-style populists to now steal them."

"People", usually framed collectively as civil society, play a key role as a democratic corrective force in all societies, and even more in those that undergo a transition from an authoritarian regime to a liberal democracy. The idea is basically that civil society is fundamentally contributing to develop and sustainably embed a democratic political culture, thus preventing countries from lapsing back into authoritarian rule. Against this background, it is easier to understand why so much – and generally too much – is expected of civil society as a cure-all, even more in times of illiberal challenges. In order to get a realistic picture of civil society and citizens' movements, its role and potential as well as its limitations, it is first of all essential to move away from over-simplified images of the civil society and hopes of salvation. Civil society is not always and automatically a cure for illiberalism and a guarantee for sustainable democratic development. But it times of new clashes within societies, in times where the front-lines between those defending values of liberalism and democracy and those negating and fighting them, are more and more visible and surrounded by conflicts, the "people" – be it assembled in the form of civil society or protest movements – becomes once again an agent of change or liberal resistance. This goes both for Eastern and South-eastern European countries but also for all Western countries facing crisis of democracy, extremist movements and ideologies, etc.

One of major moments of challenging illiberalism, and we saw it from Hungary, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Bosnia, to Turkey or Ukraine, are the social and protest movements. Here in the past few years we have seen a new dimension and a new quality. The social protests, most of which we witnessed recently, are the most important development of democratic politics in the regimes

BRINGING CITIZENS BACK – CIVIL SOCIETY AS A CURE FOR ILLIBERALISM?

In his above quoted article in Foreign Affairs Jan Werner-Müller, following a rather pessimistic overview about worrying trends in Eastern Europe, went on to search for possible alternatives to growing illiberal trends. And he found them in the "people":

"In the end, the people of eastern Europe may prove better than their political establishments. So far, not one of the profound constitutional changes in the region has been popularly ratified. The Fidesz constitution was never put to the people, and a referendum initiated by Romania's Ponta to unseat the president failed in 2012. Meanwhile, popular protests prevented the appointment of oligarchs to the Bulgarian government in 2013. On the streets of Sofia, students

The social protests are the most important development of democratic politics in the regimes "in-between" in the past two decades

"in-between" in the past two decades. Let take the example of the Balkan's countries. Part of the process of growing up and emancipation of civil societies in the Balkans is the action taken by the citizens of many states in the region, who are vociferously telling irresponsible politicians that they will no longer tolerate political injustices, taking to the streets to protest against elite-dominated and corrupt, yet seemingly democratic regimes, exposing problems and those responsible for them and trying to combat them. Just few examples: We saw massive protests in Bosnia, where despite of the often-criticised inter-ethnic friction (especially within the power elites) a large and cross-ethnic movement emerged in the early summer of 2013. Starting from a concrete case, the protests widened to bring about a comprehensive critique of the regime's incompetency to solve problems. Another huge wave of protests arose in February 2014, followed by the formation of peoples' assemblies. Similarly in Macedonia, where the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015 saw five protests taking place in the country, accompanied

by the rise of plenums. The recent protests (spring and summer 2015) directed against the government led by Gruevski represented different civil society actors and interests, showing a congruence of oppositional attitudes accompanied with a strong quest for deeper democratization of the society. And we could go on with Kosovo, recently Montenegro, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Moldavia, Turkey, previously Ukraine, Croatia, Slovenia, etc.

The political establishment, however, is fighting back against these new social movements with all its might. There are plenty of role models for authoritarian rulers, such as Putin or Erdogan, who only know the force of repression, the police and the deeply symbolic water cannons. When Gruevski allowed the police to use force against the protesters in Macedonia, this was nothing less than an authoritarian reaction to a movement whose criticism had attacked the heart of the regime. The

"Democracies exist and survive only because people want and are willing to fight for them; leadership, organizational ability, and oftentimes sheer good luck are needed for them to prevail"

process of critically questioning and challenging bad politics in Eastern and South-eastern Europe can ultimately lead to more freedom and a better life in the region. This is hopefully also the process of bringing citizens back on a larger scale. What is needed is to put the picture upside down and instead of loocking at institutional arrangements and techniques to retain power ask about relationship citizens have to the regime and consider them as a dynamic part of the game able to handle despite and besides the regime.

Finally, it might be labelled as naïve to believe that citizens can change the course of developments and lead us back to the (re)establishment of broad democratic and liberal consensus. There are no guarantees that social movements will help us at all. Fukuyama in his recently published "Political order and political decay" argued: "Democracies exist and

ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY

The term "Illiberal Democracy", coined in 1997 by Fareed Zakaria in the journal Foreign Affairs, surprisingly came into fashion again in 2014 when used by one of the EU Member States leaders. After his re-election for a second four-year term, and now almighty in Hungary, Viktor Orban confidently proclaimed: "I don't think that our European Union membership precludes us from building an illiberal new state". As Zakaria noticed in 1997, in most Western countries, democracy has meant liberal democracy, a system marked by free and fair elections, the rule of law, separation of powers, the safeguarding of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion and property.

However, as Zakaria continues, "illiberal democracies gain legitimacy, and thus strength from the fact that they are reasonably democratic. Conversely, the greatest danger that illiberal democracy poses -- other than to its own people -- is that it will discredit liberal democracy itself, casting a shadow on democratic governance." The Hungarian case, a country with a democratically elected government, is a striking example of the concept described in Zakaria's paper, imposing restriction on civic space, threatening basic rights, limiting the independence of justice and jeopardising the functioning of NGOs. ∎

survive only because people want and are willing to fight for them; leadership, organizational ability, and oftentimes sheer good luck are needed for them to prevail." But in any case social and protest movements, citizens' action taken against "untouchable" political elites, against injustice, corruption, malfunctioning of state and economy, and generally against illiberal trends spreading across the region under the guise of formal democracy, are creating a momentum of resistance against illiberalism and a new coalition assembled around values of open societies.

ROLE OF ACTIVE CITIZENS – TOWARDS AN ACTIVE UTOPIA

Recently, one of most important thinkers of our time, Zygmunt Bauman, published a short piece entitled „Quo Vadis, Europe".[9] Here he sees a set of challenges for Europe, one of the most prominent being the „neo-nationalist" (we might call them authoritarian leaders of new era, far-right populist, new autocrats or despots, etc.) offering the phantom of national sovereignty as a cure for all ills. This is precisely where we can place Orbans, Erdogans, Le Pens or Kaczyński, all those opponents of liberalism, hiding declaratory behind democracy and undermining it fundamentally by the way they understand and perform politics.

Back once again to Orban and Hungary. Following his victory in 2014 elections and observing his behavior in the course of the recent refugee crisis, there is a worrying self-confidence he displays. Looking at Poland it seems that Orban's thinking about democracy and liberalism is becoming influential

even globally paving way to the conceptualization and the justification of various forms of illiberalism and competitive authoritarianism. In his infamous speech (26th of July 2014) at the 25th Balvanyos Summer Free University and Student Camp in Romania[10], where he openly challenged the very principles of liberal democracy, he explicitly mentioned Singapore, China, India, Russia and Turkey as examples to make his point. By preaching illiberalism Orban seems to follow the thesis about illiberalism formulated by Fareed Zakaria back in 1997 in Foreign Affairs. Yet, there is something that makes the argument different from Zakaria's general point and at the same time politically dangerous. Promoting illiberalism by elected leaders from one of the member states of the EU in times of crisis of democracy in the

West and new rise of authoritarianism in Russia, Turkey, Hungary etc. paves the way for anti-democratic thinking and grey zone political practices even within EU and puts democracy under attack. Such a new discourse and political practice might further damage the role model function of the EU und put democracy and liberalism not only in Europe but on a global scale under constant attack.

One of very important question in this context is whether the new social forms of protest, and resistance against new authoritarian-type of politics and political leadership spreading across Europe, will be able to persist and to transform into new emancipatory political force able to shape European societies more fundamentally. The new social movements are fought by the political establishment for a simple reason – they

dare to questions the new authoritarian obvious and to offer alternatives. Active citizens, be it in the social movements or other formations of civil society, are struggling to be actors of an active utopia. And here I borrow again words from Bauman:

"Perhaps the idea of Europe was and remains a utopia… But it has been and remains an active utopia, struggling to coalesce and consolidate the otherwise disconnected, multidirectional actions. How active that utopia turns out to be will depend ultimately on its actors"[11] ■

9   Zygmunt Bauman: Quo Vadis, Europe?, in: IEMED, Quaderns de la Mediterraniar 22/2015, p.77-81
10 www.kormany.hu/en/ the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/ prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp).
11 Zygmunt Bauman: Quo Vadis, Europe?, in: IEMED, Quaderns de la Mediterraniar 22/2015, p. 81

THE GREAT EUROPEAN TIMIDITY

ORBAN'S EUROPE LEFT UNCHECKED

By Lorenzo Marsili and Niccolo Milanese

The growing paradox of the European Union is we have tools to encourage fundamental rights and values in candidate states, but very few tools to safeguard them in member countries.

Orban has become the figurehead of a vision of Europe which is white, Christian, defensive, authoritarian and in which fundamental rights and liberties are at high risk. Whilst currently amongst European countries only Orban's Fidesz party enjoys the supermajority that has allowed it to take decisions and make constitutional changes which tend towards making this vision a political reality, leaving this power insufficiently checked over the past 5 years has led to a situation where the international appeal of this model has grown substantially.

In reality, Orban's vision for Europe was never an isolated case: the strategy of the Hungarian government to justify to the European Union changes to the constitution, to the judiciary, to the independence of the media, and in closing the civic space for free association and free speech, has consistently been

to point to other examples of similar reforms or practices which have gone unchallenged in other European countries. Whether it is the intimidation of the media and build-up of media monopolies in Italy, the expulsion of the Roma from France, educational separation of Roma in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, or challenges to the independence of the judiciary in Romania, Orban's government has been adept at searching for European precedents for its actions.

Analysts have nicknamed this a "Frankenstein state", or a state constructed by piecing together the worst practices found in different EU member states. Beyond individual infringements, crucially, the overall picture of reforms and changes, along with the intimidating rhetoric and at times forceful intimidation and raids of civil society organisations and journalists, adds up to a systemic attempt to create an illiberal, intolerant regime.

The Hungarian government has also been adept at changing its legislation in 'negotiation' with the Council of Europe and the European Commission to meet minimum standards and maintain the semblance of respecting European rules. An example is given by the EU intervention on the sudden reduction of the mandatory retirement age of constitutional court judges in Hungary. The EU has judged the policy to be in violation of the acquired rights of the judges who had been forced to retire, and ordered Hungary to pay due compensation to the fired judges. And Hungary paid gladly. The point, in fact, was not about the technicality of retirement age, but about freeing the constitutional court from judges nominated by previous governments and unfaithful to the ruling party - which the Orban government succeeded in doing, all the while appearing to respect and give in to the demands of the EU.

This is why any process to rein in breaches of fundamental rights of a systemic nature in member states requires a political as well as a technical sensibility. Beyond individual infringements and technical amendments, monitoring the respect of fundamental values, democracy, and the rule of law in member states requires the capacity to assess when the whole is more than the sum of its parts - and act accordingly.

The last few years have seen a significant increase of the formal and informal powers of EU-level bodies in monitoring and enforcing fiscal and financial policy in member states. Much less attention, however, has been paid to monitoring and enforcing the respect of citizenship and fundamental rights. This has led to a situation where the EU is increasingly perceived as the place where democratic governance and rights are undone, rather than safeguarded. How can the EU now transition from a space where only budget deficits are sanctioned to a space where equal weight is placed on sanctioning liberties and rights?

We cannot be hopeful that the change will come just by itself, or through the goodwill of the European institutions. Even the timid framework for the assessment of rights compliance

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proposed by the European Commission has been rebuffed by the Council.

In a nutshell, this was composed of a three-steps approach:

1. The Commission would first have to assess whether there are clear, preliminary indications of a systemic threat to the rule of law in a particular Member State and send a 'rule of law opinion' to the government of this Member State should it be of the opinion that there are;

2. Commission's recommendation: In a situation where no appropriate actions are taken, a 'rule of law recommendation' may be addressed to the authorities of this country, with the option of including specific indications on ways and measures to resolve the situation within a prescribed deadline;

3. Finally, the Commission would be supposed to monitor how the relevant Member State is implementing the recommendation mentioned above. Should there be no satisfactory implementation, the Commission would then have the possibility to trigger the application of Article 7 TEU, which would suspend the voting rights of the country in the European Council.

The 'article 7' procedure has been at the heart of discussions about how the European Union should deal with fundamental rights breaches. Sometimes called the 'nuclear option', it has frequently been argued that suspending the voting rights of a country is too big a step, and risks alienating a country entirely. The sole time the procedure has been used, when Jorg Haider's Freedom Party looked set to join the ruling coalition in Austria in 2000, gave the European institutions a 'hangover' that seems to make them strongly reluctant to use the power again. There is a strong fear of pitting national executives against one another, and undoing the delicate balancing acts required for national sovereignty to be shared.

Other procedures and forms of penalties have been proposed. The scholar Kim lane Schepple has proposed that the Commission should be able to launch infringement proceedings under article 2 of the treaties, which guarantees the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

THE AUTHORS

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Lorenzo Marsili is co-founder and Director. He is the initiator and spokesperson of the European Media Initiative. He initiated the multi-year arts exchange programme between cultural innovators in China, Brazil and Europe, Transnational Dialogues. He was the founding editor of Naked Punch magazine.

ARTICLE 7 OF THE LISBON TREATY – AND OTHER INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO THE HUNGARIAN CASE

Encart: Article 7 of the Lisbon treaty – and other institutional responses to the Hungarian case
As early as 2013, the situation in Hungary has been pointed out by European Institutions. The European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs "report on the situation of fundamental rights: standards and practices in Hungary" published by MEP Rui Tavares in June 2013 called on clear actions to be taken in order to protect the rule of law and fundamental rights in Hungary.
Additionally, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, a consultative body in the field of constitutional law, has expressed its concerns in several occasions. Notably regarding the media legislation and freedom of press.
To all observers, it has become clear that Hungary's recent laws breach EU Treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Most recently, the handling of the refugees' crisis by the Hungarian government triggered criticisms from different sides of the political spectrum in Europe. Many activists and politicians called for sanctions against Orban's government. However, European Institutions are at best slow to act, and more likely very reluctant to make use for the first time of article 7 of the Treaty of Lisbon. Article 7 allows sanctions against Member States who would present a "clear risk of a serious breach of the values referred in Article 2" of the Lisbon Treaty. Its activation would stripe off Hungary of its voting rights, one of the core EU membership rights. This unprecedented case has been referred as a "nuclear option" in the media. Article 2 lays the foundations of the democratic principles of the EU: "The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail."
On October 14 2015, the European Parliament's Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (LIBE) has rejected an initiative by the legislative body's Liberal group to start an Article 7 procedure against Hungary, leaving Orban unchallenged both on his national soil and at the European level.
As recently as December 2015, the European Commission, through the voice of Commissioner for Justice Vera Jourova, reasserted its very cautious position regarding Hungary: "As these concerns are being addressed by a range of infringement procedures, and as the Hungarian judiciary also has its role to play, the Commission found that conditions to start a rule of law framework procedure are not fulfilled". ∎

By bundling together a group of individual infringement actions under a procedure under article 2, the Commission would be drawing attention to a systemic risk to democracy and fundamental rights in a country, which small action on each individual complaint may not be enough to address. Furthermore, by placing the action on a legal and procedural footing through infringement proceedings, the problematic 'political' dimension of the article 7 procedure may be partly mitigated. Finally, Schepple has proposed that there are several actions the Commission could take which do not involve suspending voting rights, but focus on financial penalties for the country, whether through fines, or through withholding of funding.

A more minor innovation would be to give the European Commission the power to freeze proposed legislation initiated by member state governments where it suspects these might be in contravention of the treaties or charter of fundamental rights. A consistent problem

THE EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE ON MEDIA PLURALISM

European Alternatives and Alliance Internationale de Journalistes have been working since 2010 towards the establishment of a European Initiative for Media Pluralism, a coalition promoting the idea that European institutions should safeguard the right to free, independent and pluralistic information. The European Initiative for Media Pluralism (EIMP) brings together organisations, media, and professional bodies from throughout Europe with the immediate purpose of running a European Citizens Initiative (ECI) demanding the implementation of an EU Directive on media pluralism. The ECI is a new tool of participatory democracy introduced from April 2012 by the Lisbon Treaty, which allows civil society coalitions to collect online and offline one million signatures in at least 7 EU member states to present directly to the European Commission a proposal forming the base of an EU Directive, initiating a legislative process.

This ECI demanded a EU Directive indicating clearly:

▶ An effective legislation to prevent the concentration of media ownership and control of advertising;

▶ A guarantee of independence of supervisory bodies independent from political power;

▶ The definition of conflict of interest in order to avoid media moguls occupying high political office;

▶ A clear European monitoring systems to regularly check the health and independence of the media in the member States.

▶ Guidelines and best practice of new models of publishers sustainability to guarantee the quality of journalism and in support of those who work within the sector.

The ECI gathered 200 000 signatures throughout Europe. While this has been considered as a success, it shows the limitation of such a tool for citizens that requires at least a million signatures to be considered by European Institutions. ■

in dealing with the slide towards authoritarianism in Hungary is that the European processes are very long: by the time the European Commission or courts rule whether a proposed law is unacceptable or not, it has already been voted and started to be implemented. Even if the law is then amended or changed several years afterwards at European insistence, the society has already been moved further to the authoritarian right by the law. The power of the European institutions to freeze suspect laws before they are voted or implemented, whilst investigations are made, would allow timely intervention.

Whatever one thinks of this timidity of the Commission in not following up on any of these possibilities, the debate highlights the growing paradox of the European Union having tools to encourage fundamental rights and values in its neighbourhood through the Copenhagen Criteria that candidate states need to fulfil to join the Union, but very few tools to safeguard fundamental rights in countries once they are inside the Union.

The Tavares report on the situation of the rule of law in Hungary adopted by the European Parliament in 2011 suggested the creation of a Copenhagen Committee to monitor EU countries permanently on the basis of agreed criteria when it comes to adherence to the rule of law. Such a Committee may have an advantageous position if it is to some degree independent of other European institutions and outside of suspicions of political manoeuvres. Furthermore, by continually monitoring all European countries, it could avoid accusations of targeting only smaller or weaker countries (of course, it would have to show it is not doing this by highlighting issues also in larger countries).

The relative lack of political will to advance on a Copenhagen Commission,

CIVIL SOCIETY'S REACTION TO THE HUNGARIAN SITUATION

Civil society itself couldn't remain silent in front of the current threats to fundamental rights and freedom in Hungary.

In 2014, the European Civic Forum along with other civil society platforms firmly campaigned during the parliamentary hearings against Tibor Navracsics designation as Commissioner for Citizenship portfolio. Mr. Navracsics has been a key proponent of policies implemented by the Hungarian government led by Viktor Orban that acted against European values.

Thanks to a handful of MEPs in the European Parliament Education and Culture Committee who took up ECF's call and stood against Tibor Navracsics' nomination, citizenship has finally been removed from his portfolio.

Very recently, a new European Citizenship Initiative has been launched in the hope of gathering one million signatures before November 2016. A group of individual citizens from several EU countries decided to start the campaign claiming that "the response of the European Union has proven ineffective in stopping this drift toward authoritarianism and the situation clearly puts European democratic values at risk." Their ambition is "to urge the European Commission to hold the Hungarian government to account for its violations of human rights and democratic values." They call for European Institutions to activate the famous Article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty, paving the way for sanctions against Hungary.

The Wake up Europe! Citizens' initiative can be found here: http://act4democracy.eu

To date, it has already been endorsed by several national and European individual NGOs and network. ∎

or give more powers to the already existing Fundamental Rights Agency to fulfil a similar role, are testament above all to the low priority placed on this issue by the dominant political forces at European level at the moment, but also perhaps to the fear amongst European leaders and decision-makers of provoking a populist or far right-wing backlash if the European institutions are seen to dictate to countries what rights have to be respected. Where the European leaders are willing to take this risk when it comes to fiscal policy, surely because they feel in a position of strength with financial institutions alongside them, they are unwilling to take it when it comes to fundamental rights.

The only ways to improve this situation in addition to changing the balance of forces dominating the European institutions, is for citizens to show decisively that they will stand up for their rights. We have known for a long time that citizens' rights very quickly fall into irrelevance if they are not consistently defended and advanced. We have seen over the past years how quickly a deterioration in democracy in one country spreads to other European countries: this should remind us of our common task to defend and advance fundamental rights throughout the Union consistently, to claim and enact our common European citizenship. ▪

Angela Njoroge "Burocrazy"

3
REBUILDING TRUST IN DEMOCRACY:
ACTIVISTS' VOICES

The picture drawn in the first two chapters is not an optimistic one to say the least. But when looking around, a myriad of initiatives to revive democracy can be found all across Europe. This final chapter gives a voice to these initiatives bearer. They are all enthusiastic about sharing their actions, their point of view, their daily work for a more democratic Europe. Let's hear about digital democracy, the commons, citizenship education, youth engagement and even...comics!

DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVES

WILL THE CIVIC TECH MEET THE DESIRE?

By Valentin Chaput

Citizens who do not find what they are looking for in the current political offer represent an undisputable majority.

Let's imagine for a second that 80% of the French voters cast a blank vote during the next presidential election. Unthinkable? Let's remain cautious: adding up the non-registered voters, abstainers and all blank and invalid votes of the recent regional elections in France, it becomes clear that citizens who do not find what they are looking for in the current political offer represent an undisputable majority.

Without voters "playing the game", what is left of a democratic system that bases its legitimacy upon election processes? Who can still govern and how? These questions are the starting point of Seeing (2004), one of the last novels of Nobel prize-winning author José Saramago (1922-2010). The plot starts with a political earthquake: 83% of the capital city voters cast a blank vote during a local election. In this fiction work, the expected democratic lucidity

within the ruling political class is missing, immediately chased by an authoritarian reaction. The Prime Minister decrees state of siege and flies the capital to seat the Government in a city where the blank vote wave didn't happen. Police forces begin spying on citizens showing suspicious pride after the elections. Politicians attempt to trigger a slow anarchist deterioration of this pacifist citizens' revolution, betting on the resurgence of a demand for authority. "People have to understand that they are not trustworthy anymore" summarises the Defence Minister.

Election after election, voters across the world are sending the message to their representatives that they are less and less worth of their constituents' trust. Condemning both the growing elites' concentration and their inability to govern a world made of imbalance and inequalities, an ever growing number of citizens notes the simultaneous loss of legitimacy and efficiency of their political leaders, from all parts of the ideological spectrum. This movement is not limited to France. All Western democracies are subject to this evolution, which combines a slow erosion of participation in elections and the rapid rise and growth of social and protest movements. The present

article doesn't aim at analysing the very diverse and deep-rooted causes of the confidence loss that led to the current democratic exhaustion. It rather aims at exploring the wide field of opportunities opened by the frenetic diversity of connected citizens' initiatives. Under an optimistic and positive light, these phenomena open the possibility of a future "citizens' coup" – which political line still remains unclear.

CIVIC-TECH WANTS TO INVENT INTERNET-ERA DEMOCRACY

Surrounded by technologies allowing us to constantly share information without intermediaries, enabling us to publicly express our choices on all dimensions of our lives and offering opportunities to support projects that make sense to us, we cannot satisfy ourselves anymore with political decisions made without prior consultation and dialogue, implemented without transparency, and for which no one is held accountable for long years between two elections.

During the Global TED Conference in 2014, Argentinian political specialist, Pia Mancini summarized how anachronistic our political practices are through a striking catchphrase: "We are 21st-century citizens, doing our very, very best to interact with 19th century-designed institutions that are based on an information technology of the 15th century. If Internet is the new printing press, then what is democracy for the Internet era?"
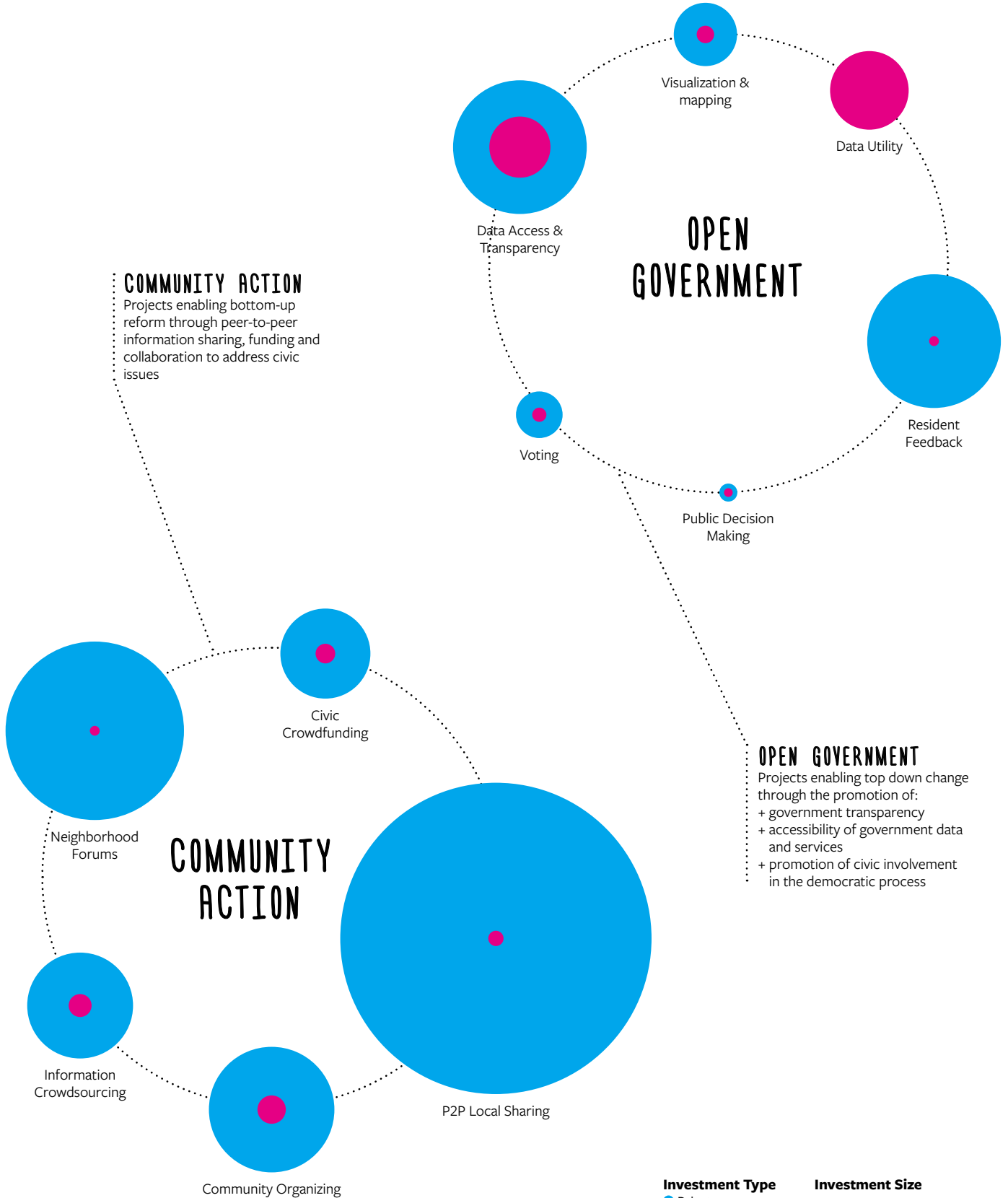
While digital technology has transformed almost all activities within our societies in less than a quarter of a century, it is very surprising that the political world hasn't been "disrupted" that much by these technological evolutions. Yet, politics are well present on-line since the very beginning of mass Internet. The very first steps are summed up in the article How Technology Changed American Politics in the Internet Age by Steven Davy (@sdavy) on MediaShift (@MediaShiftOrg) [http://mediashift.org/2010/04/how-technology-changed-american-politics-in-the-internet-age096/].

THE AUTHOR

Valentin Chaput.
By vtrying to generate a website with real-time evolution of legislation in the Parliament, he met major civic-tech actors in France. Following his conviction that these initiatives need to gather together and exchange, he co-founded the Open Source Politics meetup. He is also a Board member of Démocratie Ouverte. These two organisations are partners and they regularly organise events which promote open governance and civic-tech in France.

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OPEN
GOVERNMENT

Visualization &
mapping

Data Utility

Data Access &
Transparency

Resident
Feedback

Voting

Public Decision
Making

COMMUNITY ACTION
Projects enabling bottom-up
reform through peer-to-peer
information sharing, funding and
collaboration to address civic
issues

OPEN GOVERNMENT
Projects enabling top down change
through the promotion of:
+ government transparency
+ accessibility of government data
  and services
+ promotion of civic involvement
  in the democratic process

Civic
Crowdfunding

Neighborhood
Forums

**COMMUNITY
ACTION**

Information
Crowdsourcing

P2P Local Sharing

Community Organizing

Investment Type
● Private
● Grant

Investment Size
● ● ●
large   small

The popular forum **FreeRepublic.**com [http://www.freerepublic.com/] was opened as early as 1997. A year later, Joan Blades and Wes Boyd, a couple of tech entrepreneurs from San Francisco Bay were creating the information sharing platform **MoveOn.org** to mobilise progressive citizens as a response to the impeachment procedure targeting Bill Clinton amidst the Lewinsky case. Still active today, the platform MoveOn.org [http://front.moveon.org/], working under the motto "Democracy in Action", has been a pioneer in terms of petitions and political campaign funding for the democrats. Essential in the US political scene, fundraising has been taken to the next level thanks to the web. A 2000 New-York Times article summarises the situation perfectly [http://www.nytimes.com/2000/02/03/us/2000-campaign-money-race-his-success-new-hampshire-brings-mc-cain-overnight.html] by telling the story of John McCain's fundraising success story. After winning the republican primary in New Hampshire in February 2000, the Senator of Arizona collected more than half a million dollars in less than 24 hours. A new breakthrough

These new civic-tech allowed change-makers to achieve a multiplying effect and to further experiment on-line politics

emerged in 2003 thanks to the innovative campaign of democrat candidate Howard Dean. Among his innovations: A web TV, an embryonic social network, mass SMS-sending, and most importantly, a smart use of the newly created **Meetup** platform [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meetup_(website)] allowing its supporters to organise events all across the US. The very same year, the State of Arizona becomes the first state ever to allow online voters registration. Facebook (2004), Youtube (2004), and Twitter (2007) were yet to be invented. What happened next is well-known and well-documented: harnessing the power of big data at the service of gigantic and targeted door-to-door campaign, the social network **my.barackobama.com** instigates a new era of militants' organisation and contributes to a great extent to Barack Obama's successful run for the White House in 2008.

Voters' mobilisation has been the central engine of the first decade of on-line political innovation. The next decade, which saw mass democratic mobilisations in many countries against authoritarian regimes or against the consequences of the economic crisis, also saw the rise of a new

arsenal of "civic technologies". These new civic-tech allowed change-makers to achieve a multiplying effect and to further experiment on-line politics. Defining precisely the limits of these new civic technologies is a challenge. During fall 2014, while Hong-Kong mobile networks were jammed and under surveillance, the "Umbrella Movement" protesters used the French messaging application FireChat to communicate from phone to phone without an internet connexion.

[http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/firechat-messaging-app-powering-hong-kong-protests]. Without FireChat, the "Umbrella Movement" wouldn't have lasted so long. The same observations have been made after the Arab Springs, sometimes nicknamed the "Facebook or Twitter revolutions". Is this enough to change our social networks into efficient "civic-tech" tools? Certainly not.

Developing the common good is the ultimate achievement for civic-tech platforms. Yet, it is because of its inclusiveness that the notion of civic-tech is used, instead of "eGovernance" of Gov 2.0", a term supported by Tim O'Reilly in 2009. The Knight Foundation [@knightfdn] promotes innovations in media, arts and civic engagement in the US. The foundation mapped the US civic-tech ecosystems in 2013

This mapping distinguishes civic-tech platforms in two broad categories

– open government and community action. The two categories are then divided into several clusters.

In this classification, open government gathers platforms aiming to:

Promote transparency and access to public data such as the **Open Data Institute**, the **Open Knowledge Foundation** and the **Sunlight Foundation**;

Facilitate voters' registration and call to vote such as **Turbovote** and **Votizen**;

Allow data visualisation and mapping through public accounts and institutions' performance data analysing tools such as the tools offered by **OpenGov.com**;

Inform the general public and modernise public policies through data as offered by the **Code for America** and **mySociety.org** projects;

Allow citizens' feedback and consultation. A field where **Accela**, a private company, is the leader on the US soil;

▶ Facilitate public decision-making on consultative and participatory platforms.

Many more initiatives could be added to this list, developed and implemented by institutions themselves. Be they open data portals at the local levels or **18F** modernisation agency, which is part of the US government, or even the **U.S. Digital Service**, these super teams reinvent the way the White House is governing . The other branch identified by the Knight Foundation, "community action", is even broader. It includes all community organising platforms, from the petition website **Change.org** to the campaign organiser **Nation Builder**, which are at the heart of today's political mobilisation campaigns.

Surprisingly, sharing services are also included, from the collaborative GPS **Waze**, the neighbourhood community network **NextDoor** to the so-called "collaborative economy" giants such as **AirBnB** or **Lyft** and **Uber**. According to the Knight Foundation classification, AirBnB and Uber would be the largest civic-tech businesses in the world. This definition is not satisfactory.

As a reference to the three-part motto "transparency, accountability, participation" that gives ground to the open gov approach, a more restrictive definition of civic-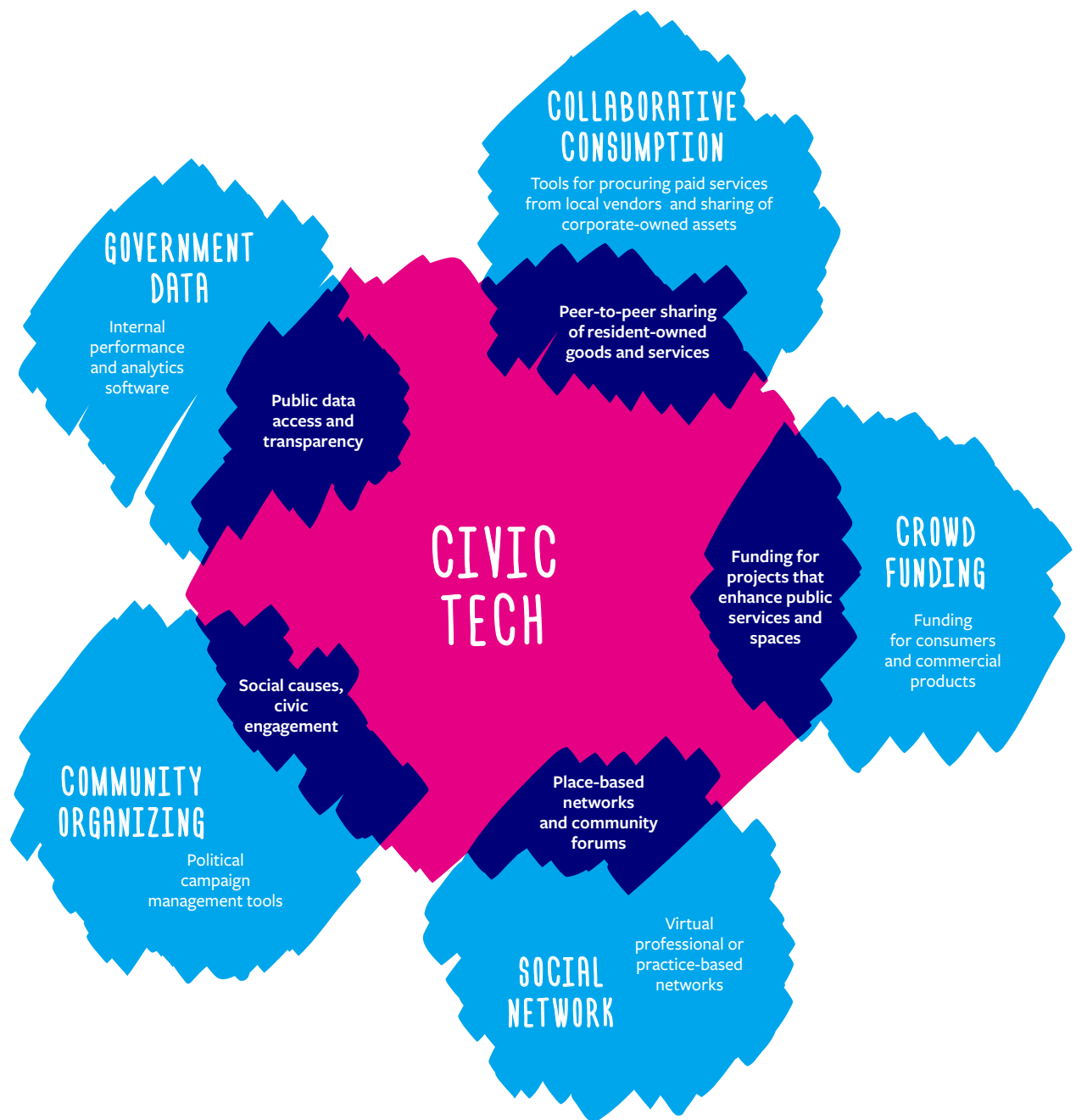tech encompasses all public, private or third sector initiatives designed at reinforcing citizens' engagement, democratic participation and government transparency. This approach allows uniting all projects using digital tools to individuals' empowerment, campaigns' organisation and collective decision-making as soon as they include a political dimension. Thus, online media, crowdfunding platforms, non-political communication platforms, or tools such as Doodle (which allows a democratic choice for meeting time), are not to be considered as civic-tech tools. This clarification being done, a new typology emerges around what civic-tech can bring to democracy: solutions to understand, mobilise, select, decide and assess.

APPS ARE ALREADY CHANGING OUR POLITICAL EXPERIENCES

Among the variety of associative or start-ups' projects emerging over the last years, the five selected French projects here illustrate the diversity of their stakeholders and the models chosen by civic-tech.

Better understanding the political programmes by comparing them on Voxe.org

There is a feeling that politics made either by left or right-wing parties are quite the same, and this is a valuable and essential argument among non-voters. Voxe.org team does not think so. Thus, they found out that, when

CIVIC TECH

COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION
Tools for procuring paid services from local vendors and sharing of corporate-owned assets

Peer-to-peer sharing of resident-owned goods and services

GOVERNMENT DATA
Internal performance and analytics software

Public data access and transparency

CROWD FUNDING
Funding for consumers and commercial products

Funding for projects that enhance public services and spaces

Social causes, civic engagement

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
Political campaign management tools

Place-based networks and community forums

SOCIAL NETWORK
Virtual professional or practice-based networks

thoroughly analysing the different programmes, there are many distinctions to be done between the candidates and to vote for or against one of them. The problem is: the complete programmes are pages long and you only receive a short summary some days before the election. This analysis urged Voxe.org founders to create an open source comparison programme for the 2012 presidential campaign. In only a few clicks, the elector chooses the candidates and

policy areas he would like to compare and he then gets access to the programmes. Three years later, Voxe.org is used to cover elections in 15 countries and claims to have generated more than 3 million comparisons. Lately, major French media used the comparator for the regional elections and the platform was visited more than 700 000 times. Their ambition is clear – becoming the first decision-making tool for the 2017 presidential election by adding

new tools to the comparator in order to transform a consultation into a vote.

Mobilising the citizens through online petitions with Change.org
Even though it is often denigrated as the most basic form of activism, petition remains the first online political tool. Petitions do have a real impact: Change.org, world number one with 120 million users, boasts that its platform "produces one successful campaign per hour

worldwide". It is however regrettable that all the institutions do not respond with the same goodwill to citizens' voices expressed through this mean. While referenda make Switzerland so popular when speaking about Democracy, the 2008 revision of the Constitution in France imposed so many burdens to shared initiative referendum that it did not produce any concrete result yet. Since 2011 in the USA, the White House answered two hundred petitions which were signed by more than 100 000 signatories. On the other hand, only three European Citizens' Initiatives reached the million mark since 2012 and the the European Commission has no obligation at all to take any further commitments related to successful ones. What is at stake is the capacity for civic-tech to enable citizens to initiate a true power balance against the political establishment. MeuRio's success in Brazil proves it: sixty local public policies were modified thanks to citizens' active lobbying which literally flooded elected representatives, with more than 200 000 registered participants on nossascidades.org, a mobilisation platform.

Reshape representativeness with "enhanced representatives": #MaVoix

The gap between politicians and voters seems too wide to be fixed. While voters lost the appetite for electing their representatives, who lock out parties and monopolise terms for decades, they still feel proud when voting for legislative acts that concern them. Rather than founding a new political party, members from **#MaVoix** launched a hacking of 2017 legislative elections. Instead of the classical ego wars created by extreme personalisation, #MaVoix aims at taking ordinary citizens to the National Assembly, previously training them through MOOCs and then selecting them by random draw. The selected representatives will then relay for five years the decisions made by their constituents on an online platform. Even if the Constitution bans the use of binding mandates, the #MaVoix experience dares at least raising the issue of alternatives to a representative democracy. Expectations are high: the video uploaded on Facebook was seen more than 250 000 times.

Making better decisions together with DemocracyOS

Originally born in Argentina in 2012, Democracy OS - an online space for deliberation and voting on political proposals – is present in France and Europe since 2015. Beyond the app's easy display, its distinguishing factor lies into the choice of open source for running it. Opening the code guarantees the transparency of the tool and of the data to communities and users. Democracy OS was used by the end of 2015 to bring together citizens from across 20 countries, who debated about Climate Change, in parallel with the COP21. The platform was also adopted by Nanterre municipality for the management of the upcoming public consultations. There are endless possibilities to use it, given that it is an open source code, which enables anyone to set his own Democracy OS application and so organise debates within a selected community.

Assessing the parliamentarians' action with websites developed by Regards Citoyens

Founded in 2009, the organisation Regards Citoyens is a pioneer in open governance and open data in France. Its most famous platforms – nosdeputes.fr and nossenateurs.fr – are measuring the presence and activity of each parliamentarian, both in committees and in plenaries. Also

Developing the common good is the ultimate achievement for civic-tech platforms. Yet, it is because of its inclusiveness that the notion of civic-tech is used, instead of "eGovernance" of Gov 2.0"

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motivated by the ambition of delivering a higher transparency, Regards Citoyens teamed up with Transparency International in 2010, in order to map all the lobbyists heard or met by parliamentarians prior to passing legislation. Recently, la Fabrique de la Loi – created in partnership with Medialab from Sciences Po – offers an a posteriori tracking of the latest legislative acts through each parliamentary step, from its introduction by the Government to its enactment, but also the reviews by the committees and the votes in each Chamber.

THE STAKES OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION THROUGH THE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

All civic-tech initiatives are not worth the same, whenever they come from institutional stakeholders, associations, private companies or political movements. Those who expected that the Internet would revolutionise politics as quickly as it transformed the business sector and social relations may be disappointed. Democracy can nevertheless have a significant future online if some conditions are fulfilled. The first one is about social: these tools will in fine succeed if they meet and strengthen on their way to digital innovation and experiences renewal. Initiatives such as **Démocratie Ouverte** and **Open Source Politics** are precisely aiming at bringing closer project holders. The second condition is more of an economic nature: all the models are currently tested, from the local organisation publishing its code in open source to the private business selling the platform without any guarantee on what will happen with the collected database. Though, none of them gives a credible guarantee that it can survive economically. Whereas

Forbes is convinced that civic-tech is the next big thing, notably given the $25 billion invested in the sector in the U.S. this year, French and European actors need at least the same resources for their development. Finally, the third condition is political: project holders must keep in mind that a digital platform will never be neutral and self-sufficient. In order to make a real difference, civic-tech must absolutely be used as a service for reengaging politics in all abandoned or not integrated fields. These take the forms of local youth councils, parents, seniors or small communities, but organisations, businesses, public services and institutions created to rule together the public sphere must also be taken into account. ◼

EUROPE IN CRISIS AND IN TRANSITION

HOW CAN ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP BE ENABLED AND SUPPORTED?

By Kevin Flanagan

**It seems that there is little today that inspires confidence in European democracy.
In this Debt-tatorship, Democracy is only tolerated as long as it doesn't interfere with hegemony of the markets.**

Europe is in crisis. It is a crisis of identity. Earlier this year the Eurogroup of finance ministers threatened the Greek people with economic collapse. They refused to negotiate with Syriza on debt and forced the Greek people to accept further austerity. This mockery of democracy and national sovereignty revealed the emptiness of any rhetoric of European solidarity and the true allegiance of Europe's political elite.

In their action and inaction, again and again politicians tell us that these faceless 'markets' are our masters now. They invoke 'markets' as if calling on some mystical force, they tell us to 'tighten our belts' that we must offer sacrifice to inspire 'confidence' in the hope that we might receive blessings in the form of improved credit ratings.

You know that you are dealing with ideology when its logics (free markets = free people) are blindly assumed

as norms. The markets cannot fail. This belief that there are no market failures, only human failures, and that the only solution to human failures are market solutions is the dead end of the Neo-Liberal imaginary.

It was neo-liberal ideology of deregulation that led to the economic crisis but for Europe's political elite to accept responsibility for their role in the crisis would mean admitting they were wrong. Those in power cannot accept they were wrong for to do so could be perceived as a sign of weakness. So they reject this interpretation of events and work twice as hard to convince themselves and their peers that they were right all along by forcing more and more of their neoliberal fantasies on the rest of us.

Debt, debt and more debt. In this Debt-tatorship, Democracy is only tolerated as long as it doesn't interfere with hegemony of the markets.

When ideology failed to produce results, as it has, the so called 'centrist' parties sought to distract people from the economy by blaming

As long as traditional establishment parties stay in power and continue to serve up more of the same zombie ideology, Europeans will continue to live with uncertainty.

social ills on those least able to defend themselves. Politicians talk tough and play a dangerous game of divide and rule. Pitching struggling unemployed and working class people against minorities, migrants and refugees, ruling parties pandered to the sentiments of far right nationalists in turn giving legitimacy to their hateful narrative. The far right thrive on fear and uncertainty and depend on this to secure their path to power. As long as traditional establishment parties stay in power and continue to serve up more of the same zombie ideology, Europeans will continue to live with uncertainty.

It seems that there is little today that inspires confidence in European democracy.

Given the scale of the crisis it is understandable that many feel a deep cynicism about the capacity of government to contribute anything more than tokenistic gestures of support for greater democratic participation, social justice or care for the environment.

The lack of political imagination on the part of the establishment has contributed to a weakening of democracy. However, flawed as it may be, if representative democracy is rejected by social movements the seats of power will continue to be occupied by the forces of tedium. There is one simple solution to a democratic deficit and that is more democracy, not less.

I admit I too have been cynical but I have probably paid too much attention to mainstream news media. If there is anything that the past year tells us it is that for better or worse political culture can change. We may not hear about it in the national and international news but at local, municipal and regional levels things are changing, citizens are organising and taking action, building inspiring alternatives, putting radical participatory democracy into practice and making politics and economy work for their communities. There are many examples but I share here just a few that I have found personally inspiring in 2015.

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see the results in their communities. This is why participatory democracy is so important.

One of the most well-known mechanisms is participatory budgeting and it is being adopted in many places from small rural municipalities to major cities.

In 2014 the Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo committed 5% of the city's budget an estimated €426 million over 5 years to participatory budgeting. This is the largest amount that any government has committed to participatory budgeting in history. Citizens' initiatives that received support include community gardens, coworking space, composting and recycling initiatives, and more.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

To our collective detriment the electoral cycle keeps politicians minds focused on short term gains and quick wins. One size fits all government schemes almost inevitably run into conflicts. To overcome this it makes sense that the people most affected by decisions should have a say in the decision making process. Participatory Democracy aims to give citizens a greater say in decision making, it recognises the importance of the principle subsidiarity that nothing should be done by a large organization that can be done as well or better by a smaller and simpler organization.

Putting legal mechanisms and structures in place that bridge this knowledge gap between citizens and government enables and empowers citizens to take a more active role in civic life. These efforts foster a culture of participation where citizens feel they have an impact and

In learning and sharing in each other's experience we can translate inspiration into action wherever we live

HOW CAN ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP BE ENABLED AND SUPPORTED?

'The Bologna Regulation for the Urban Commons' is an inspiring document.

Its full title is the "Regulation on Collaboration between Citizens and the City for the Care and Regeneration of the Urban Commons". Re-imagining the city as a Commons the document outlines how the city of Bologna provides a platform that enables and supports active citizenship, citizen driven social innovation and vibrant creative cultural life.

THE AUTHOR

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FURTHER READING
www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/bolognaregulation.pdf
roarmag.org/essays/barcelona-en-comu-guanyem
commonstransition.org

What is it that citizens need for an active civic life? First of all the regulation provides a framework enabling local government, civic and cultural institutions and citizens to collaborate and work together. Through these partnerships structural support is provided to citizens initiatives this includes access to work spaces, covering the costs of insurance, technical and administrative support, training and more. Neighbourhoods and citizens develop proposals for community and cultural initiatives or respond to tenders from local government to co-govern and co-manage community assets, such as public spaces and amenities. Citizens are not solely consumers of public services, when they participate in the decision making and management they inform the

It is vital to recognise and show solidarity with all those that dare to challenge the cynicism of our times

provision of those services in way that responds much more effectively to local needs. In this vision Citizens are co-creators. The Civic space is a Commons.

MUNICIPAL MOVEMENTS

Few could have predicted that a housing activist could become the Mayor of Barcelona and yet this is what Ada Calou and Barcelona en Comun have done. Barcelona En Comun are deeply committed to radical democracy this is most evident in their non-traditional party structure which includes a federation of neighbourhood assemblies. It was through participation in these assemblies that activist won the respect and confidence of citizens and it was this popular support that enabled them to win the election. During their short time in government Barcelona En Comun have made big changes in the provision of social housing and introduced protections for residents threatened with eviction by the banks. They also introduced legislation that makes unused properties in the city available to citizens' initiatives.

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Their achievements expand the horizons of the political imaginary and open the possibility for a transformative participatory politics in Catalunya. Politics that places the welfare of all citizens above narrow interests that serve only private profit and rent seeking. Barcelona En Comun is joined across Spain by parties such as Podemos that share a vision for a new kind of politics. With national elections these parties aim to transform politics in Spain for the better.

It is vital to recognise and show solidarity with all those that dare to challenge the cynicism of our times. Each of these examples offers a different approach, but all represent important steps towards a more inclusive politics and offer a glimpse of what democracy in Europe can be. In learning and sharing in each other's experience we can translate inspiration into action wherever we live. ◾

CROATIAN YOUTH

ABOUT DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

By Martina Horvat with the contribution of Saša Šegrt

Only a quarter of students in vocational programs and about one-third of all high school students in Croatia know the difference between the government and the opposition,

Severe recession, followed by the Eurozone crisis and introduction of austerity measures have stimulated reactions across Europe, including the rise of the right-wing populism, ethnic and religious exclusiveness and hate speech rhetoric. This situation poses a threat for the existing level of liberal democratic standards and for the political stability throughout Europe, as well as for the position and social inclusion of different minority groups. The article brings out the questions about the liberal democratic values and civil engagement in Croatia, especially concerning youth. It provides an overview of different researches about civic competences of youth in Croatia, including values, attitudes and knowledge. Also, it provides information about the role and the importance of the education system in developing civic competence and civil engagement of youth as

one of resources for prevention of violence, extremism, poverty and social exclusion.

SOCIAL AND CIVIC COMPETENCES OF YOUTH IN CROATIA

Social and civic competences are described, in **European reference framework on key competences for lifelong learning** (Recommendation 2006/962/EC, 18/12/2006), as one of the eight most important competences that should be developed through education and lifelong learning. Competence is defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context that are particularly necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment. Social competence refers to personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and all forms of behaviour that equips individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life. It is linked to personal and social wellbeing. Civic competence, and particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights), equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation (Europa.eu, 2006).

Researches1 indicate a serious lack of political knowledge, including knowledge about democracy, human rights and basic political concepts such as definition of democracy or citizenship and division of power. Some of the results show that:

▶ only 14% of the students at the end of the elementary schooling (Spajić Vrkaš, 2014) understand the role of citizens;

▶ half of the students at the end of the elementary schooling (Spajić Vrkaš, 2014) and 18% after high school (GOOD Initiative, 2015) do not understand the division of power;

▶ around 63% of high school graduates recognized the definition of civil society organization but 20% of the high school graduates recognized that centres for social work are not non-governmental organizations (GOOD Initiative, 2015);

▶ the main elements of the state are correctly identified by approximately 43% of high school graduates (GONG, 2011), while the main elements of democracy are correctly identified by approximately 49% (GONG, 2011);

▶ about 31% of high school graduates (GONG, 2011) can recognize the meaning of the concept of legitimacy, while others do not know or they confuse legitimacy with legality;

▶ about 46% in 2011 (GONG, 2011) and 53% in 2015 (GOOD Initiative, 2015) of high school graduates recognize the meaning of the term "political opposition", but a considerable percentage of students confuse definitions of government

and the opposition, which is especially characteristic of the three-year vocational school students, who in their program have the smallest amount of content that could be classified as political education.

The fact that only a quarter of students in vocational programs and about one-third of all high school students in Croatia know the difference between the government and the opposition, can be regarded as a troubling indicator of the success of the education system in this cognitive dimension.

The results of the two rounds of research from 2011 and 2015 (GONG, 2011, GOOD Initiative 2015) confirmed the connection between undemocratic attitudes and less knowledge about democratic institutions and processes and emphasised the importance of the cognitive component of democratic competence. Also, attitudes of youth tend to be more autocratic: one third of high school graduates believe that the main feature of a democratic order is not the right of the media and citizens to freely criticize the work of the Government (GONG, 2011); 21% of high

school students think that opposition shouldn`t criticize the government.

Regarding values and attitudes, research results (Radin, 1988; Radin, 2002; Ilišin, 2013; GONG, 2011; GOOD Initiative, 2015) show noticeable tendencies towards higher individualistic success and fulfilment of materialistic needs. On the other hand, tendencies towards traditional values, especially concerning religion, authority and national and religious belonging are also noticeable. Around 40% high school graduates that participated in the research think that Croatian tradition is richer than traditions of other nations and around 40% think that Croatian veterans should not be prosecuted for war crimes (GONG, 2015). Almost 60% of respondents believe that Croatia needs a strong and not necessarily democratic leader, and almost 15% agrees with the statement that in certain circumstances a dictatorship is better form of government (2011). At the same time an extremely high percentage expresses ambivalence or inadequate information about specific historical events that included suffering of people, such as the rise of fascism, Shoah/Holocaust or other 2nd World War crimes (GOOD Initiative, 2015).

Only gender equality does not completely follow that pattern of re-tradicionalization considering the social role of the woman, although around 44% of high school graduates who participated in the research agree that women are biologically predisposed to be better in activities with people (GOOD Initiative, 2015).

Research showed that youth expresses some social distance or a lack of acceptance towards minority groups (LGBTIQ, Roma and religious minorities). Around 48% of participants think that homosexuality is sickness. Around 65% of students declaratively agree that it is necessary to protect the rights of national minorities, but when it comes to the protection of specific rights such as the right to minority language in public institutions the level of support decreases to 22% (GOOD Initiative, 2015).

The results of the research, together with a number of other social problems, such as participation of youth in violent incidents and hate speech against members of minority groups, additionally indicate the presence of certain antidemocratic attitudes, values and behaviour patterns among the young. The majority of young people in Croatia express the highest levels of confidence only in their family and friends and they have very little confidence in social institutions. The level of confidence is also low towards people that are religiously and politically different. In accordance with that, the level of participation in social and political life is low. Although, the majority of youth are ready to participate from time to time in humanitarian actions that include

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Saša Šegrt has worked on civil society support programmes since 2002, and she is familiar with all stages of the project management cycle. From 2008 to 2013 she held the position of the executive director of Transparency International Croatia, and is well-informed about the work of anti-corruption civil society organisations and institutions in the wider region.

providing financial and material help for people in need.

General attitudes towards EU are mostly positive or neutral (Eurobarometar, 2014) but ambivalent in the sense that the majority of youth that participated in the researches express opinion that EU membership did not bring any changes for the ordinary citizens in Croatia (around 57%, GOOD Initiative, 2015).

CIVIC EDUCATION IN CROATIA

In formal education, subjects that contribute to developing civic and political competences of the students in Croatia are: **Politics and Economy** in high schools (for one year), **Sociology** (some high schools have it for one year). Also in first four grades of elementary school students have the subject called Nature and Society where they learn basic information about society and environment.

Civic, citizenship, human rights, political or global education are different names for educational approaches that contribute to social and civic competences of youth. Authors Safaric and Knezevic (2010:11) define education for human rights as "the process of acquiring knowledge, attitudes, values and skills necessary for life in a democratic, pluralistic society, based on respect for human rights and the continuous efforts of the individual and the community that this rights protection". They emphasise that it is important to encourage the development of the individual as an active participant of change, rather than as a passive victim of events that are happening around him. The right to education is one of the general, indivisible and inalienable human rights, and as such represents an important instrument for enjoyment of all other rights and freedoms. Consequently, the full realization of the right to education necessarily implies learning for Human Rights (Safaric, Knezevic, 2010:11). Šalaj (2005) emphasizes important role of civic and political education for the future of democratic political system that depends on the knowledge, skills and abilities of citizens to responsibly engage in social life.

The topics related to human rights and democracy started to be implemented in Croatian educational system in 1999, and civic education in 2012. Croatian membership in the Council of Europe (from 6/11/1996) had a stimulating effect on the status of human rights and democracy education in the education system. Croatian Government established the National Committee that developed the National Programme of Education for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship. The National Programme consisted of: human rights education, education for democratic citizenship, identity and intercultural education, education for peace and non-violent conflict resolution, education for sustainable development, education to prevent prejudice and discrimination and human rights law research. It was implemented in 1999 as a non-obligatory topic with different choices for implementation. Together with the process of implementation, development of teaching materials started. As pointed out by Berto Šalaj (2005) the need to develop quality manuals for teachers was particularly important in this model were all teachers have the option to teach human rights and democracy education and do not have competences to do so. The main sources of information about how the National Programme was implemented were the gathering called Smotra organized once each year where specific

The notion of what is politically correct has changed dramatically due acceptance of right-wing populism and extreme-conservative rhetoric

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projects were presented. Besides that, it is only civil society organizations and researchers who monitored and conducted research of the implementation and the influence of the program. The implementation of The National Programme was not systematic enough and all students did not have the possibility to participate. Research of the Centre for Human Rights, "Democracy and Human Rights in Primary Schools Theory and Practice" (2012:19) conducted with the aim of evaluating the effects of the implementation of human rights and democracy education in elementary schools in Croatia and creating the recommendations for improvements, indicated insufficient, non-systematic and unequal implementation of the National program. Research has shown that implementation depends on the individual engagement and competences of teachers. The implementation of the National Programme was not systematic and inadequately contributed to the building of democratic citizenship competences, although the majority of teachers, principals, students and parents consider topics from democracy and human rights as the most important parts of education. The teachers and principals did not feel sufficiently trained to successfully implement the education and had problems in finding the spaces for organizing this kind of education. Analytical and normative study by the Centre for Peace Studies (Bužinkić, 2011) indicate the necessity of more systematic inclusion of education for peace and non-violence in the education system, and evaluation of that process and emphasizes the importance of democratization of educational institutions.

Because of unsystematic implementation of the National Program, researchers, university professors and civil society organizations organized **Initiative for quality and systematic introduction of human rights, democracy and civic education in Croatian schools in 2008,** that is still active today and is known as **GOOD initiative.**

Through advocacy and educational work, the Initiative encouraged the change in the approach to civic education. The new Curriculum of civic education, that included human rights, social, (inter)cultural, political, ecological and economical dimensions, was developed and started with experimental implementation in school year 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 in 12 Croatian schools. The implementation of the Curriculum was predominantly cross-curricular, but for some age groups Curriculum proposed the subject civic education. Experimental implementation was monitored and researched and support for the schools was organized. Research of experimental implementation of Curriculum for civic education (Croatian Youth Network and Centre for human rights of the Faculty for humanities, 2014) showed the low level of competences of students as well as problems with the motivation and competences of one part of the teachers. But it started to be noticeable through the experimental implementations that civic education contributes to better social relationships between students and between students and teachers. After experimental implementation experts

from University, schools and civil society agreed that the Curriculum of civic education needs to be implemented in all schools. Experts from the Ministry of science, education and sport together with the Agency for teachers training developed different program for civic education and introduce it in school year 2014/15 and civil society together from GOOD initiative together with civic education experts criticise this program because it doesn`t bring necessary changes considering topics and methods that will develop civic and social competences.

FUTURE TENDENCIES

Croatian youth follow the same pattern as the rest of the Croatian society. They faced quick changes with political and economic insecurity so majority of them, frightened by the changes and diversity, turn to traditional values, religion and national identity, and have trouble in accepting the public manifestations of diversities, especially political rights of minority groups (national, ethnic, religious, sexual) and other differences that are inevitable in democratic societies. The youth show higher levels of social exclusives to religious and ethnic differences, especially to Serbian and Roma minority even in comparison to adults. The notion of what is politically correct has changed dramatically due to emergence, relativisation and, finally, acceptance of right-wing populism and extreme-conservative rhetoric that includes exclusive and sometimes even hate speech.

CIVIC EDUCATION
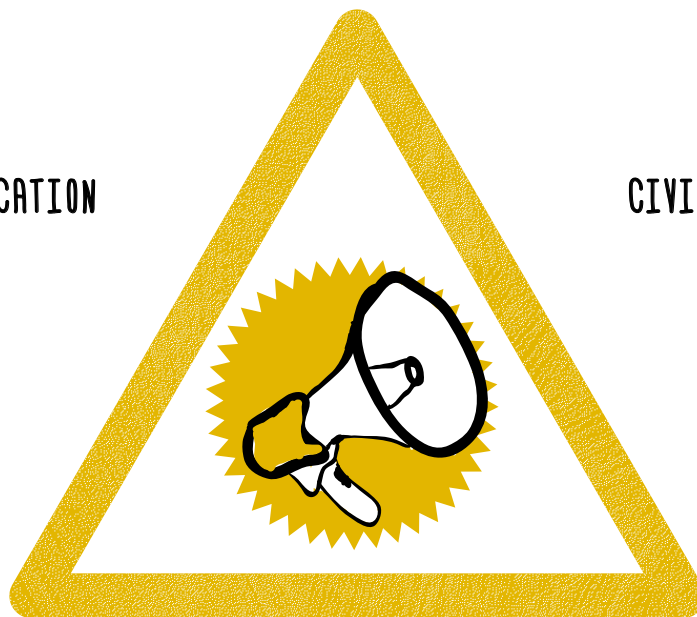
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

CIVIC EXPRESSION

Formal education system functions undemocratically and does not teach students how to live every-day democracy, with only formal existence of the Students Councils, and with the lack of civic education that has not been introduced properly. Lack of the civic education that would be focused on development of civic and social competences of students, social skills, democratic values and knowledge about human rights, democracy, participation and sustainable development contributes to social exclusion and undemocratic hate speech and behaviour.

Civil society organizations for human rights are trying to turn those negative tendencies through advocacy, campaigns and non-formal education, but radical right movements that encourage ethnic and religious exclusiveness and fight against the rights of LGBTIQ people and reproductive rights of women are also very active through religious structures and the civil society. Because of these, it is not even secure that we will be able to protect the liberal democratic standards that we have today, and even further are chances for their development in future. The tendencies that the youth have more exclusive and authoritarian attitudes raise the concern about the erosion of liberal democracy in Croatia. ■

1. Researches that provide information about knowledge, values and attitudes of young people in Croatia as well as about their civic and political participation:
– researches of the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb from 1986 and 1999 that included representative sample of Croatian youth, between 15 and 29 years (Radin, 1988; Radin, 2002);
– research of the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in 2012 that included around 1500 young people between 14 and 27 years of age (Ilišin, 2013);
– research that included around 2000 students (2012, The Institute for Social Research in Zagreb);
– research of experimental implementation of the Curriculum for Civic Education (Spajić Vrkaš, 2014);
– research of the knowledge and attitudes about political and civic topics of high school graduates in school year 2009/10 (GONG and Faculty of political sciences, Bagić, 2011) and in school year 2014/15 (GOOD Initiative with the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb and the experts from Zagreb University, Gvozdanović, 2015).

COMICS FOR EQUALITY

ART TO FIGHT SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND DISCRIMINATION

THE AUTHOR

Marta Meloni. You surely noticed that this Activizenship's issue features a few pages of ComicsForEquality previews. ComicsForEquality has been awarded the Media of the Year Award during the European Democratic Citizenship Award ceremony in Strasbourg. Marta Meloni is one of coordinators of the project. She tells us a bit more about it.

ECF: **Can you briefly present the initiative?**

MARTA MELONI: European societies have been increasingly changing under the influences of migration. The outstanding quantity of interconnections among many cultures of the world requires new forms of intercultural communication and new forms of involvement among direct and indirect agents of this global movement. ComiX4= Comics for Equality has aimed to promote new forms of intercultural awareness, especially among youth, by primarily involving migrants and second generations in Europe in the artistic representation of their migration experiences.

The project produced the "1° European Award for the Best Unpublished Comics by Authors with Migrant Background", which saw the participation of 41 comic artists with 56 eligible comics from 21 different

European countries. The ComiX4= Award was the very first European Award on racism and intercultural issues addressed only to comic artists with migrant backgrounds, who presented the multitude of ways in which migration can take shape and spoke about those aspects they or their parents have lost, found or are in the process of building. All the comics are available online in 9 different languages on the website www.comix4equality.eu and on our Facebook page. In 2 years time, hundreds of FB posts reached more than 370.000 people with more than 7.100 post likes and more than 1.500 post shares. On the website it is also possible to download (in 9 different languages) the ComiX4= catalogue (printed in 9000 copies) with a selection of the best comics of the Award, and the ComiX4= toolkit (printed in 5000 copies) for media and intercultural education with comics. ComiX4= went on tour with its exhibition in 10 different EU countries (Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Austria, Sweden, Belgium, Finland and Portugal) and implemented 15 intercultural comics workshops in 5 EU countries (Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia and Latvia) with 200 young people, directed by some of the comic artists of the Award. The project ended with a final conference on new forms of communication for antiracism and migration with international speakers (Council of Europe, UNAR, Andalucia Acoge, Fabrica).

The project showed its value throughout the years: ComiX4= Comics for Equality project was awarded with the Intercultural Innovation Award in 2014, a partnership between United Nations Alliance of Civilisations and BMW Group and it was nominated Media Initiative of the Year in 2015 within the European Democratic Citizenship Awards by the European Civic Forum.

ComiX4= Comics for Equality was led by Africa e Mediterraneo (Italy), in partnership with NGO Mondo (Estonia), the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation (Bulgaria), ARCA (Romania) and Grafiskie stasti (Latvia) and the collaboration of the Associate partners Hamelin Association and MultiKulti Collective.

ECF: Can you tell us more about the people behind the project?

MARTA MELONI: The project was designed and coordinated by our young team at Africa e Mediterraneo (to know more: www.africaemediterraneo.it). We are all young motivated people with expertise in intercultural communication, media education and comics. We all love innovative ways of communicate and interact with young people on social issues, in particular on anti-racism, discrimination, stereotypes and migration. Also, this project wouldn't have been possible without the outstanding professional work of our partners and the energy of all young people who participated during all workshops, events and exhibitions we carried out.

ECF: Marta, why do you think the project is important?

MARTA MELONI: The project showed the necessity to give voice to the people who experienced some migration experience: their fears, their difficulties, their hopes and their ideas for the future were at the centre of this project and, at the same time, were the main elements of the communication and educational campaign of the entire project. The project was made for them and was possible thanks to their creativity and their great spirit of collaboration and sharing.

As our project clearly showed, a correct and viral communication on these topics is crucial and fundamental for a promotion of a positive narrative on migration. In fact, fair, true and bias-free communication should be one of the main pillar of the effective management of the so called "refugee crisis". We cannot expect to successfully create welcoming European communities if media often describe refugees and migration as a "problem", as a "crisis" and as a "threat". We should all – and "we" stands for the civil society, public authorities and communication agencies – act for a positive language and narrative, aimed to describe and tackle the migration issue as a resource, an opportunity, giving space to best practices, positive experiences in the local territories and success stories. ◼

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YOUTHNET HELLAS
REVIVING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN GREECE

By Dimitris Makrystathis

THE AUTHOR

Dimitris Makrystathis is a youth leader and activist. President of Youthnet Hellas and member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe. He has worked and cooperated with most of the international institutions on themes like youth unemployment and youth empowerment.

CRISIS AND YOUTH

Nowadays Greece is facing a financial crisis that has multiple effects on society, while Europe in general tries to identify or reconsider its position on the world. Many support that there is lack of core values in Europe, such as solidarity and respect between nations and states. Young activists try to prove them wrong! They organize themselves, cooperate smoothly, promote youth mobility and take various solidarity initiatives. They fight against populism and extremism by all means; they build tomorrow's Europe by acting immediately today when and where needed.

VOLUNTEERING RISE IN GREECE

Youth is one the most affected groups by the crisis in Greece. Youth unemployment rate stands at about 60% and young people's future perspectives are

grim, at best. Thousands of young people emigrated searching for better job opportunities and living conditions; the risk of a brain drain is clearly visible in the near future.

On the other side, the crisis led to a flowering of civil society and volunteering-based initiatives. New initiatives came out and many innovative youth-led projects implemented. Young people have to be nowadays adaptable in order to overcome the challenges and barriers they face. One of this successful youth initiatives will be presented in this article: Youthnet Hellas.

YOUTHNET HELLAS: HOW IT ALL STARTED

In 2009 a handful of motivated young people from all over Greece decided to channel their vitality and energy in a new youth-led NGO, while making use of their rich experiences and useful knowledge on Youth Policies, European Mobility Programmes and Volunteering. They established "Youthnet Hellas", a non-governmental organisation that aims to engage young people at different levels through innovative activities, and to promote young people's active participation, information, social inclusion and active citizenship in community life. It soon became one of the most active and popular youth NGOs in Greece!

Youthnet Hellas' specific goals include:
▶ enhancing the role of young people in decision-making processes;
▶ endorsing the development and implementation of policies supporting children's and young people's rights;
▶ encouraging environment-friendly activities;
▶ advocating for the respect and advancement of democracy, peace, diversity and human rights;
▶ strengthening of democratic values and human rights;

▶ encouraging exchange mobility and multicultural dialogue among young people regardless of their nationality.

INNOVATION IN PRACTICE

Youthnet Hellas was innovative since its very first moments. It operates as an online organisation and thus an environment-friendly NGO. It doesn't use offices, it consists only of volunteers and has never received any state funding. Its members and volunteers live in almost every city of Greece, from little islands and border villages to towns and big cities. Youthnet Hellas already counts more than 350 members and hundreds of active volunteers!

The flexible online way of operating gives the advantage to work with young people from villages and remote areas that don't have access to any other organisations, projects, initiatives or activities. It gives them the chance to stay informed about youth policies, be more active in their community and take local initiatives.

The organisation's website and social media pages are used as platforms to inform young people for all the formal and non-formal education opportunities available in Greece and Europe, as well internships and work opportunities. So far, more than 9000 young Greeks follow the news on social media and more than 15000 visit the website daily. The last years, more than 600 young people participated in more than 180 EU funded programmes. In 2014 only, 121 young people (in 35 projects) benefited from these funds!

RECOGNITION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

Although working on a voluntary basis, Youthnet Hellas has an important presence, as well as distinctions in European level. Its actions are well recognised abroad in various ways.

In 2013 Youthnet Hellas was awarded the European Citizen's Prize

by the European Parliament and the UNESCO label at UNESCO's 8th Youth Forum in 2013 for the project "Training for Developing Youth Reporting Capacities". The continuous efforts of its members and volunteers, and the implementation of innovative activities led to another prize in 2015, namely the "NGO of the Year" laureate at the European Democratic Citizenship Awards organised by European Civic Forum. In addition, Youthnet Hellas is the only Greek NGO member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe for the 2014-2015 mandate.

All these awards recognized mainly the innovative work that has been done during the writing of the "Greek Youth Policy Report" over the last four years, and the significant efforts to promote the educational mobility of young people in Europe.

GREEK YOUTH POLICY REPORTING

The absence of national initiatives and campaigns for young people is visible in Greece, so the youth-led organisation, need to step in and provide even more support to young people. During the last years Youthnet Hellas works hard on it and has already influenced the national youth policies by publishing the "Greek Youth Policy Report" annually since 2010.

In this report's pages, the situation in the youth field in Greece is reflected every year. It highlights the well-organised work done in the youth field, and promotes the main actions and activities implemented by Greek NGOs and youth institutions. Thus, these organisations can see their work and efforts recognized. The report is not only published online, but is also available in printed version in public and university libraries across the country, giving it more prestige and publicity.

YOUTH POLICY REPORTING KNOW-HOW TRANSFER

Youthnet Hellas strongly believes and works towards a closer cooperation between stakeholders, actors and organizations in the youth field. Developing sustainable synergies among youth-led NGOs would empower more young people globally in a long-term period. Thus, know-how transfer between youth organizations and other relevant institutions is valuable to achieve this goal.

For this reason, the project "Training for Developing Youth Reporting Capacities (You.Re.Ca.)" was implemented on July 2015. 50 young people from 41 countries were given a trained in order to develop capacities so that they are able to create their own countries' Youth Policy Reports. Experienced trainers transferred this valuable know-how to young people with the aim to develop similar initiatives in their countries.

The You.Re.Ca. project was sponsored by UNESCO and the State of Kuwait and was one of the 15 projects awarded the UNESCO label at UNESCO's 8th Youth Forum in 2013 out of the 1532 totally submitted projects from around the world. Following its great success, the You.Re.Ca. project was presented during the 9th UNESCO Youth Forum in Paris and the Social Innovation and Global Ethics Forum 2015 in Geneva!

DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS AND COMBATING HATE SPEECH

Youthnet Hellas is a European-oriented organisation that represents most of the core European values in Greece. Active youth participation is its most important sector, while it is active also to values such as respect of human rights, freedom of speech and democratic dialogue. In the past, Youthnet Hellas has contributed a lot with its projects and initiatives in other values such as tolerance and non-discrimination, minority rights and gender equality.

The absence of a National Campaign Committee, led Youthnet Hellas to become a partner of the Council of Europe's "No Hate Speech Movement" campaign and run it in Greece, by creating a Facebook page and promoting the campaign online in Greek language. Already more than 2,000 people have been informed about this important campaign and many awareness raising activities are planned for the next months throughout Greece.

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

As the 2015 reaches to the end, Youthnet Hellas plans its future activities having in mind young people's needs and expectations in Greece. It is of high importance to defend human rights and democracy in the times of crisis and Youthnet Hellas will have a leading role in it. Many projects are 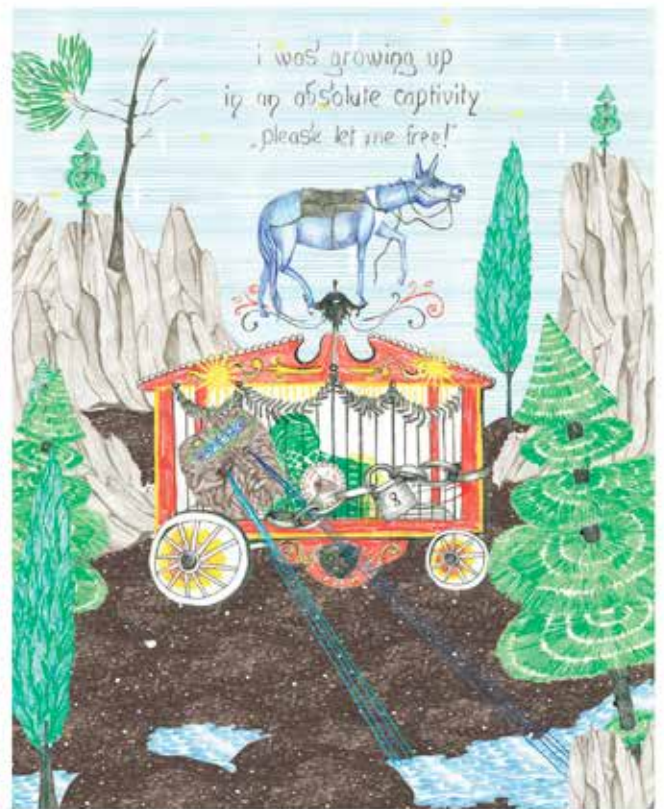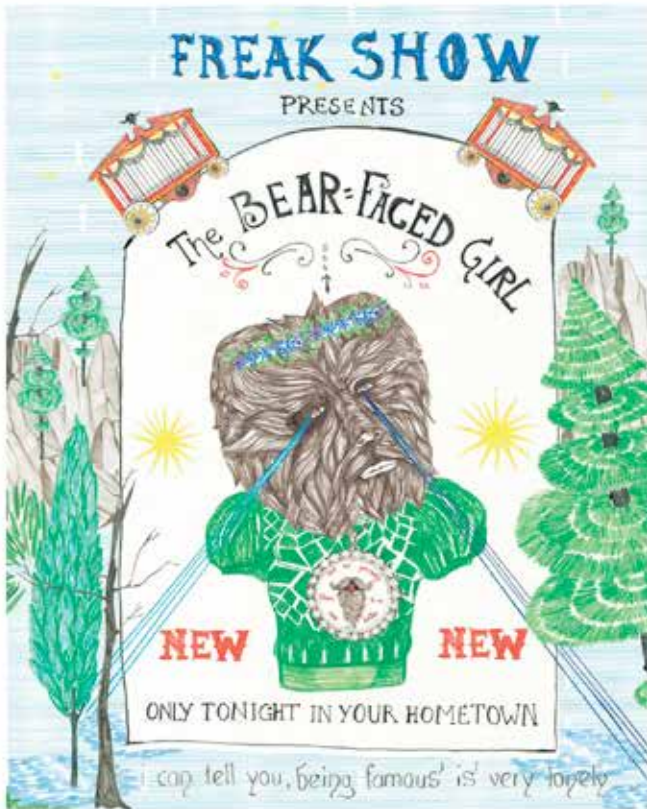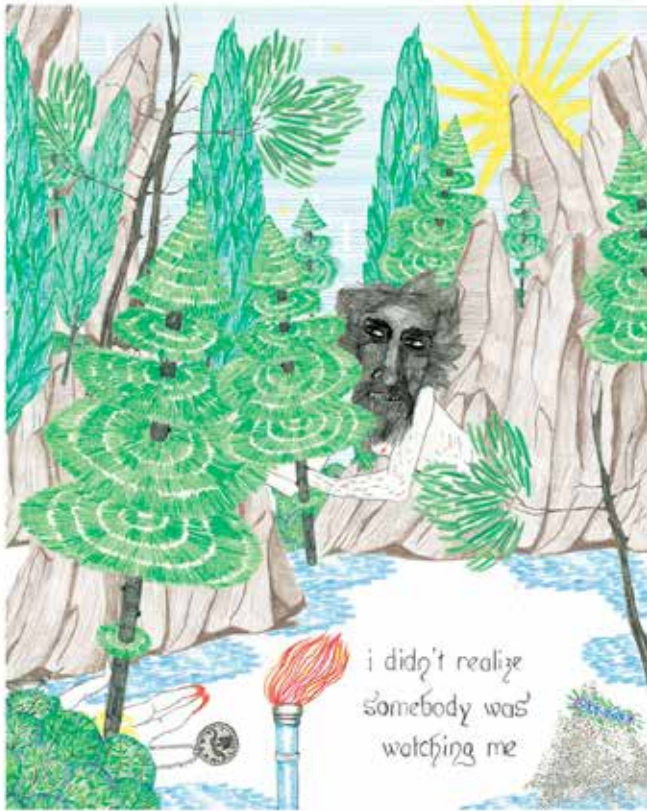planned and will be implemented soon, including support mechanisms for young refugees, anti-bullying campaigns and many more. We all strive towards a better and fairer future for Europe's young generations! ■

Youthnet Hellas has been awarded NGO of the year within ECF's European Democratic Citizenship Awards 2015.

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