



Citizens and Politics

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

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



How can citizens influence policies?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Environmentalists not only talking to themselves anymore

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



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

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

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

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

Geopolitical issues

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Politicians are also citizens

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

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

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

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

In CEE we have the expectation that we can do nothing

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



nápady
pro
budoucnost

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

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

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

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

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

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

Distinction between policy and politics

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

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

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

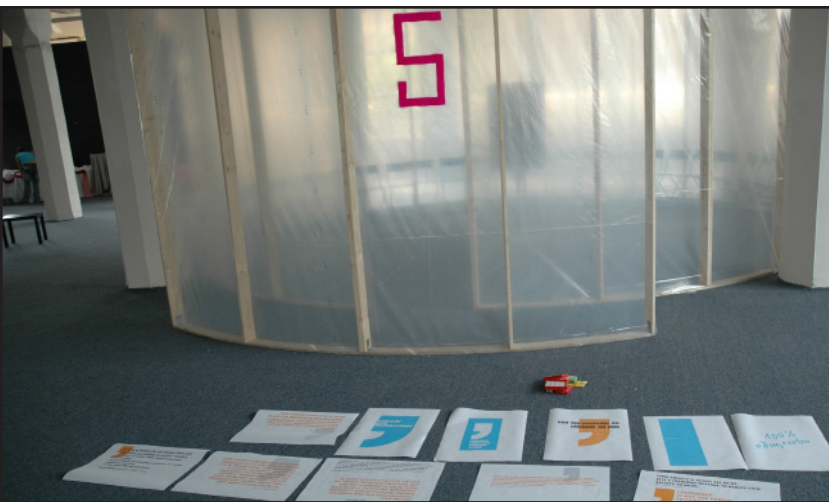
tively in changing rules and legislation is winning.

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

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

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

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



Changing the rules doesn't mean actually delivering the change

Reclaim
the power
we give to
politicians

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

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

P: Yes, exactly.

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

The issue
has to be
engaging
+ timing

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

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

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

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

NGOs are not non-political organizations

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

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

P: The same in England!

Majority decisions may be hurtful to minorities

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

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

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

Politics are 2 things - setting agenda and taking decisions

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

Mod: Good point

Solid analysis is needed

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P: In communication.

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

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

Producing thousands of papers that no one reads

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

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

Can new tools bridge the gap between politicians and citizens?

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Ownership of EU opportunities

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

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

Political parties will cease to exist

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

individual thing.

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

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

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

Hybrid democracy

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

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

More and more informed citizens

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

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

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

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

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

Voices from the room:

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

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

