

Drivers of democratization in East Central Europe 25 years of civil society

**Central European University, Budapest
Nádor utca 9, Popper Room**

November 24, 2014

9.00 – 15.00

According to Abraham Lincoln, *democracy is government of the people, by the people, for the people*. The fall of the Berlin Wall signifies for many East Central European countries the beginning of or a return to democracy. In all countries of East Central Europe, the breakdown of communist regimes was achieved through public participation, either as enduring resistance like in Poland, or as popular upheavals like in Romania. The citizens of East Central Europe showed commitment to changing the regime and assumed risks in order to see their cause gain momentum. 25 years after the fall of communism, it is again the people that drive democratic deepening, it is the citizens that pressure governments for more reforms and changes in their newly acquired democratic systems. The recent years saw a massive surge of public protests and mobilization of the population for more democratic measures in many of the post-communist countries – usually associated with weak and struggling civil societies.

In this conference we explore the ways in which civil society evolved in East Central Europe in the last 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of communist regimes. We also investigate how civil society changed its repertoires of action, strategies, discourses and gained legitimacy, from the period preceding 1989, when it was up against totalitarian regimes, until 2013, when it has secured a legally binding place for itself and pressure for more substantive democracy. While each country is different and communist and post-communist contexts vary, the role and importance of civil society in bringing about change has been unquestionable, both in 1989 and in 2013.

The conference is organized with the kind support of the Budapest Office of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, and is part of the Central European University's 'Frontiers of Democracy' series.

9.00 – 10.00 Registration

10.00 – 10.15 Opening remarks

- **Péter Balázs**, Director, Center for EU Enlargement Studies (CENS), Central European University (CEU), Budapest, Hungary

10.15 – 11.45 Panel I. – Civil society and 25 years of post-communist transformations in East Central Europe

Chair: **István Hegedűs**, Hungarian Europe Society, Budapest, Hungary

Speakers:

- **Bogdan Mihai Radu** and **Zselyke Tófalvi**, Center for EU Enlargement Studies (CENS), Central European University (CEU), Budapest, Hungary: *Gods and Caesars. The role of churches in the breakdown of communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe*
- **Mateusz Falkowski**, Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland: *Civil society in Poland: from "self-liberation" to new challenges*
- **Gabriel Andreescu**, Romanian National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest, Romania: *Civil society: discontinuity and continuity in Romanian postcommunism*
- **Branko Ancic**, Institute for Social Research, Zagreb, Croatia: *Role of civil society in Croatia 25 years after. What are our expectations?*

11.45 – 12.30 Lunch break

12.30 – 14.00 Panel II. – Civil society in recent democracies; country in focus: Hungary

Chair: **Balázs Dénes**, Open Society Foundations, Budapest, Hungary

Speakers:

- **András Bozóki**, Central European University (CEU), Budapest, Hungary: *Civil Society in a Broken Democracy*
- **Márta Pardavi**, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Budapest, Hungary: *25 Years of Human Rights NGOs in Hungary: Smiles and Worries*
- **Veronika Móra**, Ökotárs, Budapest, Hungary: *Ökotárs, the EEA/Norwegia NGO Fund and civil society experiences in Hungary*

14.00 – 15.00 Roundtable with all conference speakers:

Civil society in East Central Europe after 25 years of transformations: the road ahead;

Moderator: **Balázs Dénes**, Open Society Foundations, Budapest, Hungary