

Transnational lesson plan

The role of civil society in transition to democracy

Examples from Bulgaria, Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine

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1. Short description of the lesson

The lesson plan gives a working definition of civil society and its role for a healthy democracy. It focuses on three pillars: 1) civil society in times of a totalitarian regime, 2) civil society and its role during change - end of totalitarian regime/ beginning of transition to democracy, 3) civil society today and its value for a resilient democracy.

2. Objectives

1. Describe the role of civil society.
2. Be in a position to compare different civil society movements before, during and after the transition to democracy in different countries.
3. Be able to identify the problems and chances for civil society in the present - on local, national and transnational levels.

3. Key concepts (5-6)

Civil society: “Civil society refers to all forms of social action carried out by individuals or groups who are neither connected to, nor managed by, the State.”¹

Civil society organizations (CSOs): “A civil society organisation is an organisational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process, and which plays the role of mediator between public authorities and citizens. Examples of such organisations include: social partners (trades unions & employers' groups); non-governmental organisations (e.g. for environmental & consumer protection); grassroots organisations (e.g. youth & family groupings). The European Economic and Social Committee represents civil society at EU level.”²

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs): Sometimes civil society is mistaken for the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) only. NGOs are legal entities regulated mainly by a special Non-Profit Legal Entities Act in any country. They are independent of the government and the private sector and are not working

¹ EUR-Lex. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/civil_society_organisation.html.

² Ibid.

for profit; they are guided by certain goals and values set out in their statutes. Such a goal can be to support society as a whole or some of its individual groups (parents, children, artists, minority groups, journalists, etc.).

Active citizenship: “Active citizenship means people getting involved in their communities and democracy at all levels from local to national and global. An active citizen promotes the quality of life in a community through both political and non-political processes developing a combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to work to make a difference in the society.”³

Totalitarianism: “Totalitarianism is a form of government that attempts to assert total control over the lives of its citizens. It is characterized by strong central rule that attempts to control and direct all aspects of individual life through coercion and repression. It does not permit individual freedom. Traditional social institutions and organizations are discouraged and suppressed, making people more willing to be merged into a single unified movement. Totalitarian states typically pursue a special goal to the exclusion of all others, with all resources directed toward its attainment, regardless of the cost.”⁴

Pluralism: “Pluralism, in political science, the view that in liberal democracies power is (or should be) dispersed among a variety of economic and ideological pressure groups and is not (or should not be) held by a single elite or group of elites. Pluralism assumes that diversity is beneficial to society and that autonomy should be enjoyed by disparate functional or cultural groups within a society, including religious groups, trade unions, professional organizations, and ethnic minorities.”⁵

4. Key questions

1. Can civil society exist in a totalitarian regime and, if so, how?
2. What role does civil society play in times of transition to democracy?
3. Why is civil society important for a functioning democracy?

5. Step-by-step description of the lesson

Introductory words: Why focusing on the role of civil society?

The idea that a dynamic, active and independent civil society is crucial to the health of any democracy, has gained momentum in the last century, and even more so after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism in Eastern Europe.

It is a key feature of totalitarian states, such as Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland or Ukraine before 1989/91 that the ruling regime puts under total control all spheres of human life and there is practically no space for people's own initiative or organization outside the structures of power. This, indeed, is the situation within the extreme form of totalitarianism, but various subcultures, underground movements, and, sooner or later, forms of civil protest and disobedience emerge even under the most oppressive regimes.

³ European university college Association (EucA). Available at: <https://www.euca.eu/activecitizenship>.

⁴ Britannica (2021). Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/totalitarianism>.

⁵ Britannica (2008). Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pluralism-politics>.

Transition Dialogue

The attacks seen in recent years in many countries around the world against CSOs that criticize their governments or denounce abuses of power show that non-democratic leaders see civil society as a threat to their existence.

Against this background we deem it even more important to point out the power of the citizens and civil society for change to happen and democracies to flourish. That is why we chose to develop teaching materials that focus on the historical role of civil society for the process of transition to democracy in post-communist countries in Eastern Europe. The lesson plan is split into three units: unit I is dealing with civil society before 1989/91 in communist Europe; unit II explains civil society in times of changes after 1989/91 and; unit III looks into civil society today and why it is important to get involved.

Unit I: “Civil society before 1989/ 91 in communist Europe”

Timeframe: 45 min (without ACTIVITY 1 (homework))

Materials: sticky notes, white board, markers, pre-printed photos, screen that everyone can watch and internet.

ACTIVITY 1 (Homework): Analyze quotes – Who is representing civil society under a totalitarian regime?

Aim: Have a basic understanding who represents civil society under a totalitarian regime and what are its forms and shapes. Learn that there is both genuine civil society and such organized by the state.

Description: Ask your students to listen to or read two quotes (SOURCE A) and answer the following questions:

1. Who represents civil society according to the speaker’s statements? List as many examples as you can find?
2. What does the speaker mean by *“all these groups which were organized by the party and that would not really count as civil society”*?

ACTIVITY 2: Analyze pictures and relate to what has been learned with the homework – Main actors of civil society and function [10 min]

Beginning of the lesson: Give some introductory remarks to your students explaining that this part lesson consists of three parts: 1) civil society under communism, 2) civil society in times of transition to democracy and 3) civil society today.

Aim: Learn who the main actors of civil society are under a repressive regime (difference compared to democracy) and what the function (confrontation and resistance rather than cooperation) of civil society is. Understand how they differ compared to democracy.

Description: Split the class in groups and provide each group with markers, paper (a different color for each group) and a set of pictures (SOURCE B – Pictures SET I). Ask the students to take 5 minutes to look at the picture and describe what they see. Once the 5 minutes are over, hand out *a second set of pictures* (SOURCE B – Pictures SET II). The pictures are presenting different civil society actors from different country contexts (Bulgaria, Germany, Lithuania and Ukraine). While set I is presenting the “fake” civil society organized by the regime, set II is presenting the genuine civil society and protest actions.

Let each group nominate a person that will take notes and present the results of the group. Students should answer the following set of questions:

Transition Dialogue

- What do you see on the pictures? Be as specific as possible (which country, city, year, event, participants, etc.). What are the people doing? How do they look like? Are they representatives of civil society?
- Relate the pictures to the homework and describe which are the pictures representing the genuine civil society, which not and why. Describe the characteristics of both. Use sticky notes in two different colors.

In a next step, invite the note-takers to share on the whiteboard the following clusters of information:

- Who were the civil society representatives before 1989/ 91?
- How are they organized?
- What are they doing?

Gather back in class. First, ask the respective note takers to describe what the group observed on set I and set II of the pictures. Afterwards collect the sticky notes on a board. Wrap up the characteristics of both.

ACTIVITY 3: Analyzing quotes – What comes first -- civil society or the end of a totalitarian regime? [15 min]

Aim: Learn about the repressive apparatus of a communist regime and how it prevents the emergence of civil society.

Description: Provide your students with different quotes (SOURCE C) that illustrate the repressive nature of totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe and discuss the following questions:

- What does it mean for the daily life of the people to live under a repressive regime?
- How can a genuine civil society evolve/ organize itself in a repressive regime? Describe the circumstance looking at the different contexts presented in the quotes.

Possible answer: Poland was not as repressive as Bulgarian regime. That's why resistance movement/civil society in Poland could emerge easier than in Bulgaria... - the more repressive a regime the less strong and therefore the less influential civil society can be

- Can civil society overthrow a totalitarian regime?

Answer: yes and no. The weaker the regime the stronger the civil society and vice versa...

ACTIVITY 4: Summary and Homework [5 min]

Aim: Understanding of the forms of civic participation in a totalitarian regime and the main features of a civil society before 1989.

Description: Wrap-up and repeat the main aspects dealt with in unit I. These are:

- The forms, shapes and function (confrontation and resistance rather than cooperation) of civil society under a repressive regime compared to those in a democracy (for additional support see SOURCE D).
- How people organized protest action in a totalitarian regime and the challenges they faced.

- Understand that what every person does matters, but also understand that world events (e.g. *Perestroika*) do so too.

ANNEX – Unit I

SOURCE A (ACTIVITY 1):

Quotes by Christoph Eichhorn, German diplomat. The quotes are part of a discussion (histoTALK) on the particular role of civil society at the end of a totalitarian regime and the beginning of transition to democracy. The full discussion is available at: <https://www.facebook.com/SofiaPlatform/videos/2936072426612483>.

Quote 1 [min. 08:50 – 10:21]:

“A democracy without democrats does not work and democrats means democratic parties organized in a democratic parliament, voting in a government and voting it out, but also democrats in the general public who are deeply convinced about the importance of democracy – all of it was not there in Germany until 1945⁶. To a certain extent it was there, but very very limited. [...] East Germany from 1945 to 1989⁷ was another totalitarian regime, another dictatorship, a communist ruled system. There was no such thing as civil society. Society was organized in all sorts of groups depending on the one communist party and whatever the communist party ordered these so-called groups in society implemented and executed. But this has nothing to do with a civil society in a free democratic country.”

Quote 2 [min. 37:52 – 40:41]:

“I think we can discuss our joint – German, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish, Czech, Baltic, Ukrainian etc. experience, our joint experience, throughout the night. If we have one word where it all comes down to then it is the word freedom. And the point I would like to make is...you know, when I walk through the Brandenburg Gate⁸ in the middle of Berlin, this is the symbol of freedom denied, freedom lost and freedom regained in 1989. The point I’d like to make is this: sometimes in our discussions we question (you know) was all of this a big illusion. Were we dreaming of paradise 30 years ago and look where we are now. So much more difficult, so many illusions gone. And I would argue that we have to sort of reconsider the fundamental element that we are talking about here and that is freedom. The fact that things take longer or that there are setbacks or that there are illusions certainly does not mean that the fundamental importance of freedom is an illusion or that we should stop investing in it. This is fundamentally important. When you are looking at the East German experience; I mentioned earlier all these groups which were organized by the party and that would not really count as civil society. But at the same time you had people writing songs, you had people working to improve the environment where

⁶ 1945 marks the defeat of Germany in World War II (1939-1945) and the end of the Nazi-dictatorship.

⁷ At the end of World War II, in 1945, Germany was divided into the Western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the Eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR). The latter was ruled under a communist dictatorship till the reunification with Western Germany in 1989/90.

⁸ The Brandenburg Gate is an 18th century neoclassical monument, located in the center of the German capital Berlin. Being a site for many major historical events it is today considered as both, a symbol of the turbulent history of Europe and Germany, but also of European unity and peace.

TD Transition Dialogue

they lived, you had people doing Samizdat⁹, you know, writing down the stories which their parents and their grandparents were telling them and circulating them, writing it themselves and circulating them to their friends. So all of this existed despite the fact that the larger system was a repressive system. So the fundamental desire of every human being to be free was always there and will always be there.”

SOURCE B (ACTIVITY 2):

Pictures SET I: “fake” civil society organized by the regime

- Lithuania - Youth parade



Source: Vincas Tumosa

Pictures SET II: genuine civil society and protest actions

- Bulgaria - First civic protest organized in Ruse against air pollution coming from the Verahim plant in the neighboring, then-communist Romania

⁹ Samizdat was a form of dissident activity across the former Eastern Bloc countries, in which individuals reproduced publications censored by the Soviet dictatorship. This happened often manually because most of typewriters or printing devices required permission to access granted by the Soviet forces. The written off documents were then passed from reader to reader.



Source: socbg.com

- Lenin Shipyard workers on strike in August 1980, with the name of the state-controlled trade union crossed out in protest



Source: wikimedia.org

(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/30/Strajk sierpniowy_w_Stoczni_Gda%C5%84skiej_im._Lenina_09.jpg/1280px-

[Strajk sierpniowy_w_Stoczni_Gda%C5%84skiej_im._Lenina_09.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/30/Strajk sierpniowy_w_Stoczni_Gda%C5%84skiej_im._Lenina_09.jpg))

- Germany – West and East Germans at the Brandenburg Gate and the Berlin Wall, symbolic for peaceful protests that lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe



Source: wikimedia.org

(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1c/West_and_East_Germans_at_the_Brandenburg_Gate_in_1989.jpg)

SOURCE C (ACTIVITY 3):

Quote 1:

"The majority of people developed some sort of dual existence - they kept their real attitude/ sentiment, moral and cultural values within themselves, while outside they put on the mask of adaptive and obedient citizens. A similar mentality exists till today and hinders the development of an authentic civil society. The division of the "real" and the "public" life is in deep contradiction with the essence of civic

consciousness, which ultimately consists precisely in the fact that people share and publicly defend their values.”

Reference: Maria Dermendzhieva, How state security controls the state and the people, in: Sofia Platform Foundation (2017), What happened before '89? History collection on communism in Bulgaria (BG), p. 95. Available at: http://sofiaplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Students-manual_lessons-from-the-past_FINAL.pdf (in Bulgarian)

Quote 2:

“I think at that time, especially in Bulgaria, but also in other Eastern European countries, we had a real totalitarian regime. And if the regime is really totalitarian you cannot topple it from beneath - meaning that you don't have civil society that is allowed to exist and to become strong enough to question the authority of the state.”

Prof. Momchil Metodiev, in histoTALK – The role of civil society in times of transition

Quote 3: Lithuania

The [Communist] party's and the country's leadership lived in isolation from the "working people." People called them "the nomenclature". Much depended on the wishes and will of the heads of the government and their subordinates: service position, distribution of material goods (those never in public shops) and so on. Sanatoriums, food warehouses, polyclinic, canteens and many other establishments accessible only through the back door and without nameplates. People have used to add the word "spec" (as special – ed.) to their names. That created great opportunities for the flourishing of government corruption and outraged the so-called "ordinary" Soviet people.

Čepulis A. Klubo “Po Zodiaku” veiklų prisiminus... (3). Mokslo Lietuva, March 24, 2013, available at <http://mokslolietuva.lt/2013/03/klubo-po-zodiaku-veikla-prisiminus-3/> [17-05-2021]

Censorship under the Soviets was designed not only to protect state secrets, but also to control the ideological content of works of art. The legitimacy of the Soviet regime, the “correct” interpretation of history, the greatness of the Russian people, and the “decay” of the West were but a few of the more important "guidelines" that one had to follow when speaking of the world at large. Adherence to these rules was closely monitored by censors. As they sought to navigate their way around forbidden subjects, writers and artists developed a complex language of metaphors and allusions [Aesopian language] to avoid prohibitions imposed by censors. <...> [B]oth reader and censor scoured texts for possible anti-Soviet references, both performing an interpretive function, the results of which depended on the interpreter's skills.

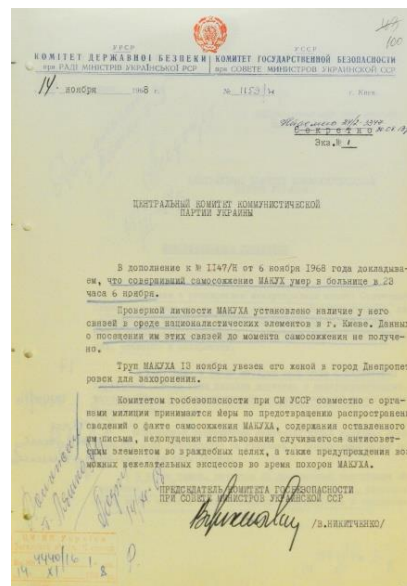
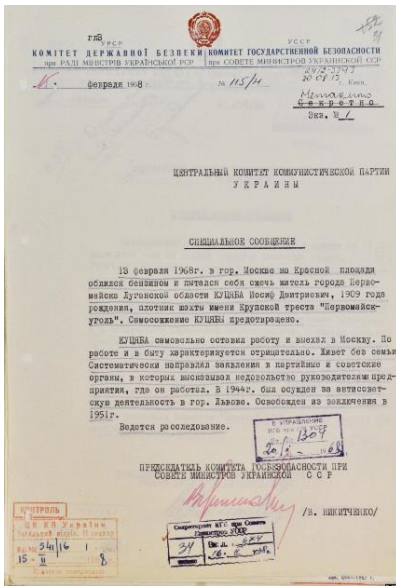
Kmita R. 1965–1972: RESURGENCE, available at <http://www.mmcentras.lt/cultural-history/cultural-history/literature/19651972-resurgence/19651972-resurgence/75970> [17-05-2021]

Quotes 4: Ukraine

Transition Dialogue

1. Special message of the Communist Party Central Committee, February 18, 1986

In Moscow, on the red square, a resident of the city of Pervomaisk, Luhansk region, Kutsyaba Iosif Dmitrievich, born in 1909, a carpenter of the Pervomay coal mine named after the Krupskaya trust, tried to burn himself with gasoline. The self-immolation of Kutsyab prevented the act. Kutsyaba voluntarily left his job and went to Moscow. At work and in everyday life it is characterized negatively. Lives without a family. He systematically sent statements to the party and Soviet bodies, in which he expressed dissatisfaction with the heads of the enterprise where he worked. In 1944 he was convicted of anti-Soviet activities in the city of Lvov. Released from prison in 1951. An investigation is underway. – Chairman of the State Security Committee under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR V. Nikitchenko.

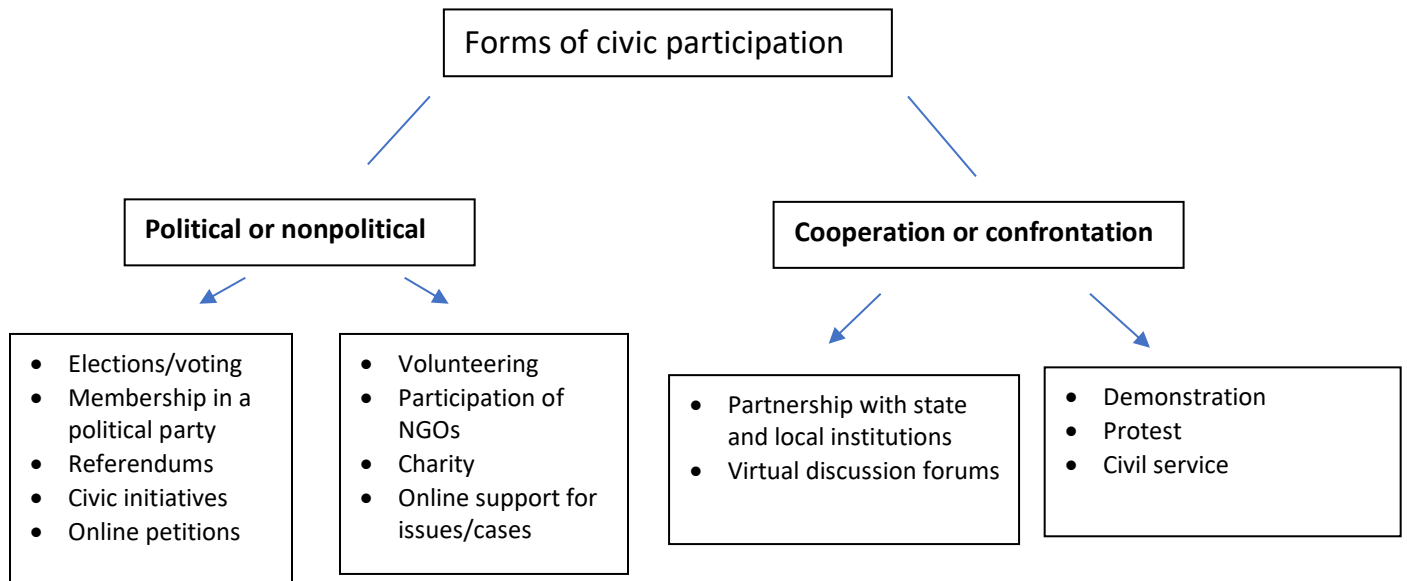


2. Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine

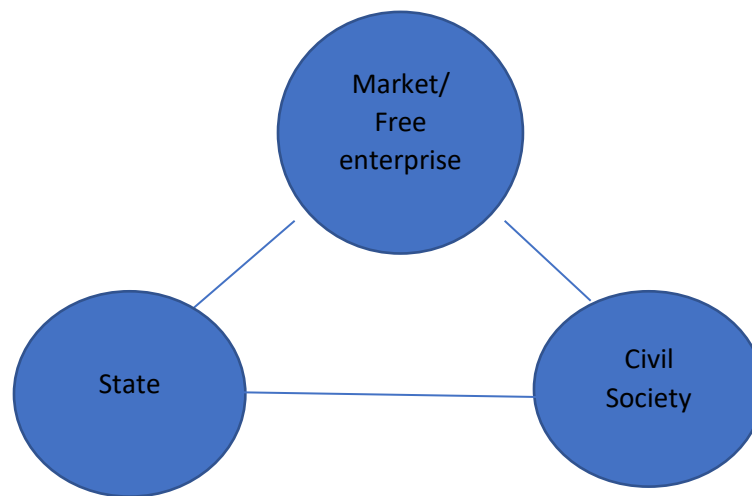
In addition to No. 1147 / H of November 6, 1968, we report that Makukha, who committed self-immolation, died in the hospital at 23:00 on November 6. By checking Makukh's identity, it was established that he had connections among nationalist elements in the city of Kiev. No data was obtained on his visits to these connections until the moment of self-immolation. The body of Makukh on November 13 was taken by his wife to the city of Dnepropetrovsk for burial. The State Security Committee under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR, together with the police, are taking measures to prevent the spread of information about the fact of Makukh's self-immolation, the content of the letter left by him, to prevent the use of the incident by anti-Soviet elements for hostile purposes, as well as to prevent possible undesirable excesses during the funeral of Makukh. – Chairman of the State Security Committee under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR V. Nikitchenko.

SOURCE D (ACTIVITY 4)

Graph 1: Forms of participation – Cooperation vs. confrontation



Graph 2:



- What are possible forms of participation in a totalitarian regime?
- Where could political parties and business be located in this graph?
- Does civil society function outside of the government and private sector? How?

UNIT II: “Civil society in times of changes”

Materials: pre-printed material, sticky notes, white board, screen that everyone can watch, computer, beamer and internet.

Introduction: Recapitulate what has been discussed in unit I regarding civil society. Explain, that this unit will deal with the role of civil society during the change processes in Eastern Europe after 1989 and the fall of the totalitarian regimes.

ACTIVITY 1: Transition of 1989: from ... to...? (15-18 minutes)

Aim: Consolidate learning outcomes of the previous unit. Reflect upon the reasons that brought people to the civil movements and protests in the early 90’ies.

Description: Each student receives one quote (Source A). Ask students to read the quote individually and write down, in their own words, 1-2 reasons that were important factors for massive changes to start in countries of Central and Eastern Europe in 1989.

Split students into the groups according to the quotes received (app. 4-5 students in a group). Ask students to discuss and agree on 1 or 2 reasons to be presented to the rest of the class. Each group appoints their note-taker that would report the results of the group to the rest of the class. Note takers of each group present the results of the group providing a very brief justification behind. Other groups can react briefly. Wrap up the discussion, provide your feedback.

ACTIVITY 2: Triumph of the civil society (15-18 minutes)

Aim: Understand the role that civil society played at the beginning of the transition period to democracy and its contribution to the changes. Understand diversity and uniqueness of each country’s experiences and situation.

Description: Show students a video created by Radio Free Europe“ (Source B). Since students are already working in the groups, ask each group to come up with their own title for the video. Ask 3 groups to name the title and explain why they choose it. Collect feedback from other groups. Choose one of the following questions to discuss with the students:

- Why are the events of 1989 in post-communist and post-Soviet regions often called “domino effect”?
- How can you define the role of civil society in the events of 1989?

ACTIVITY 3: Civil Society in post-communist Europe: weakening or getting stronger? (12-15 minutes)

Aim: Learn about the different perspectives on the role of civil society in the transition period to democracy and understand the argument behind these perspectives.

Description:

Ask students to read quotes and individually reflect on them (SOURCE C – you can select 2-3 quotes that illustrate different perspectives).

On the screen, show the statement of Ralf Dahrendorf, former European Commissioner, author of “Reflections on the revolutions in Europe”, stated shortly after revolutions of 1989:

“It takes six months to create new political institutions, to write a constitution and electoral laws. It may take six years to create a half-viable economy. It will probably take sixty years to create civil society”.

Advise students to relate the statement with the arguments provided in the quotes and ask them to write down “yes” or “no” – whether they agree or not with the statement (N.B. ask them to write full words and not + or -).

Ask students to form two lines against each other according to their answers. The main rule of a debate – “let's vote with our feet” (students can change sides anytime if they feel convinced by the arguments of another group). The group that is smaller starts with their arguments. End the discussion when the climax is reached.

ACTIVITY 4: Inspiration for the next generations (10 - 15 minutes)

Aim: Define and compare causes and role of civil society in the events separated by 30 years.

Description: Ask students to watch 2 short videos (SOURCE D). Clarify with students what they see in the videos. Be as specific as possible (which countries, years, events, participants, etc.). Ask students to identify similarities and differences of all three events (e.g., cause / purpose, engagement, emotions etc.). Write them down on the whiteboard/screen. Wrap up the discussion making a link to the next unit on the civil society of current days.

ANNEX – Unit II**SOURCE A (ACTIVITY 1):****Quote 1:**

1989 represents a break-away of the entire region of Europe from political oppression and a leap towards democracy. On the other side of this spectrum is the meaning of 1989 as the promise of western standards of living that tipped a resistance movement of intellectuals and dissidents towards a mass protest movement. [...] It can be argued that the person who strived for civil liberties and the person who wanted better jeans are not necessarily two different people. What is common to both of them is self-determination, which comes in plural and diverse forms. Thus, 1989 can be viewed as a resistance to endless intervention of politics into the lives of citizens, when governments decide how one can get married, what songs to sing, or how much flour or sugar one can receive. (Simona Merkinaitė. What 1989 can (and cannot) teach us, New Eastern Europe, 2021).

Quote 2:

Transition Dialogue

1989 symbolises the limits of attempting to endlessly reshape and remake society and reattributing the meaning to prosperity, which in reality meant deficiency when a lack of choice meant freedom, military invasion. In 1989, the reality of lived experiences prevailed over ideology and fiction. Seen in this light, the year 2020 became a point of “1989 reoccurrence”, through a new wave of mass revolts against political fictions. The outrage of people in Belarus was sparked by the outrageous lies about the free democratic election and the blunt attempts to conceal the almost universal support for Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The commonality between the workers, students, women, and pensioners’ protests is the shared feeling of enough of living a double life – the private life of isolation, repression and shortage versus the performative public life of happiness, freedom and community. (Simona Merkinaite. What 1989 can (and cannot) teach us, New Eastern Europe, 2021).

Quote 3:

Documentary project created by the Public Interest Journalism Lab (UA) about the protests of Ukrainian miners in 1989 «Чуєш зурким касок?» <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyzpiY7md6k> [min. 02:13 - 05:23]

Quote 4:

In August 1989, the three Baltic states were still under Soviet rule. On August 23, 1989 inhabitants of the three countries decided to make their wish for independence heard by joining hands [in a human chain of more than 600 km]. Euronews spoke to Andres Kasekamp, a professor of Estonian studies at the University of Toronto, about the historic event. “The people behind the event were the leaders of the Estonian People’s Front and they did this together with Latvian and Lithuanian colleagues. It was a magnificent display of Baltic cooperation amongst the three peoples. It was very important to send a signal to the world because the narrative from Moscow about the Baltic movements of freedom, democracy, and eventually independence was that it was only a small fringe group of extremists, nationalists, who wanted independence. But with this chain across all three countries, it was clear that narrative that Moscow was trying to convince the world [...] was simply not true. This reflected the desire of the vast majority of the people.” (Cristina Abellan Matamoros. Baltic Way: 30 years since the 600-km human chain that helped trigger the collapse of communism, 2019).

Quote 5:

“In the 1980s in Poland, if you asked people why they are engaged in civil movements – they would not answer that they are fighting for liberal democracy. I personally do not recall any debates about liberal democracy as a model ... It was pluralism, that was a remedy against ideology in the 80s and the real power of the democratic movements in 80-81 and then 1989, the intrinsic belief in pluralism; but, as it turns out, it is not an easy lesson to learn. I would say that pluralism is the challenge of our time – it is hard to imagine the West without pluralism,” - professor Marek Aleksander Cichocki, philosopher, editor-in-chief of Teologia Polityczna. (Simona Merkinaite. What 1989 can (and cannot) teach us, New Eastern Europe, 2021).

SOURCE B (ACTIVITY 2)

Video: End of Communism: How 1989 Changed Europe (Length: 3:44) –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKXjIZKPjMA>

Additional sources:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hc2XGHA7NK4> (Radio Free Europe, The Revolutions of 1989)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npBjtdiVDAU> (Brian Velez on the Baltic Way)

Merkinaitė S. What 1989 can (and cannot) teach us, available at
<https://neweasterneurope.eu/2021/02/03/what-1989-can-and-cannot-teach-us/>

SOURCE C (ACTIVITY 3)

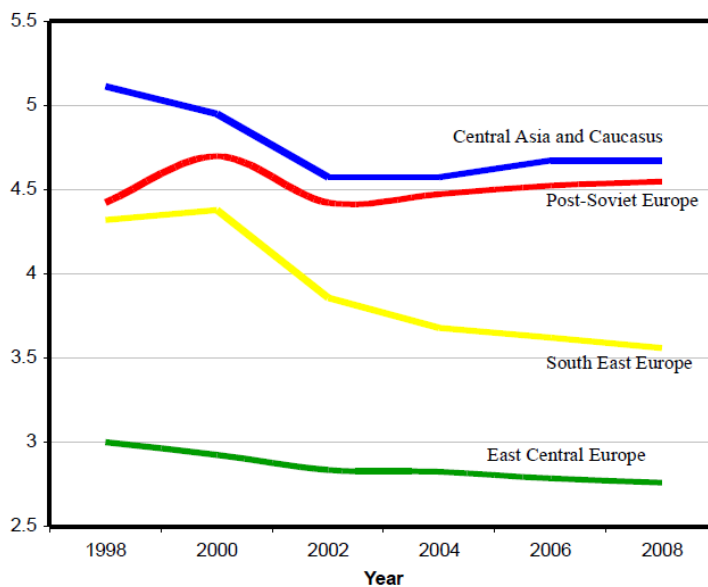
Quote 1:

It is generally claimed that peaceful revolutions in the CEE were carried out by a revived civil society. For this reason, civil society in post-communist countries was expected to be strong and vibrant. However, with the rapid victory of the peaceful revolutions, the level of civic activism in the CEE countries declined, the number of NGOs and the participation of citizens in various non-governmental organizations decreased. An active civil society is essential for both the revolutionary movement and the process of consolidating democracy. It is often overlooked that these different processes require a completely different kind of civic activism. This explains why the involvement of civil society in the CEE countries in changing the old regime and fighting for independence did not create the conditions for a viable civil society in a period of democratic reform. (Spurga S. Democracy and Civil Society in National States and the EU: Democratisation of Central and Eastern Europe. Vilnius, 2012, available at <https://repository.mruni.eu/bitstream/handle/007/16857/9789955194453.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>).

Quote 2:

The Non-Governmental Organization (or Civil Society Organization) Sustainability Index assesses the capacity of civil society to serve as both a short-term partner in implementing development solutions and a long-term actor in ensuring that development outcomes are sustained. This resource allows local civil society to assess the environment in which they are operating and their capacity to advocate, operate sustainably and communicate with citizens. The index addresses both advances and setbacks in 7 key components: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure and public image. See the chart that illustrates NGO Sustainability Index for four groups of post-communist countries below:

Figure 6. The NGO Sustainability Index for four groups of post-communist countries.



Note: lower numbers correspond to better conditions.

(Ekiert G., Foa R. Civil Society Weakness in Post-Communist Europe: A Preliminary Assessment, Collegio Carlo Alberto, 2011, available at <https://www.carloalberto.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/no.198.pdf>)

Quote 3:

When you take a look at the map of Bulgarian civil society organizations, you will see a lot of good think tanks, a lot of organizations that could engage authorities, could participate in decision-making, could deliver high quality services but you will not see mass movements; you will not see NGOs with a great number of followers, you will not see anything like BLM [Black Lives Matter] for example. And this structure of Bulgarian civil society has to do with the history, with the way this sector was re-established in the 90s after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Many NGOs at that time were established with significant foreign assistance provided by donors both, in America and Europe and both, private and public. And the goal of this assistance was to create an infrastructure of NGOs that would promote the transition, that would be change makers in society and that would promote the liberal values, the democratic values, not necessarily to represent citizens. So we ended up with a donor driven sector whose main goal was rather to educate citizens and not so much to represent them. And things haven't changed much since then. (15:55)

Georgi Stoytchev, Executive Director at the Open Society Institute Sofia. Quote from the panel discussion: Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections – Online Study Tour, 24 March 2021. [min. 14:11 - 15:55]

Quote 4:

On the one hand, the return of authoritarianism in parts of the former Soviet bloc stifled emerging civic pluralism, slow down civil society transformation and preserved organizational structures inherited from the communist regime. On the other hand, consolidation of democracy and membership in the European Union have produced diversified, dense and active civil societies that are not much different from their West European counterparts. (Ekiert G., Foa R. Civil Society Weakness in Post-Communist Europe: A Preliminary Assessment, Collegio Carlo Alberto, 2011, available at <https://www.carloalberto.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/no.198.pdf>)

SOURCE D (ACTIVITY 4):

Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAll9jdqo20> (Hong Kong Human Chain in 2019 and the Baltic Way in 1989, 1:32)

Video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVJxvvg759s> (Freedom Way in 2020, 1:25)

Additional sources:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1L_trKFPxE (Hong Kong Human Chain, 0:37)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szNTppbgxGI> (Freedom Way in 2020, 1:55)

UNIT III: “Civil society today. Why to get involved? ”

Materials: sticky notes, white board, screen that everyone can watch and internet.

ACTIVITY 1: Imagine that you are living in a country where you are not allowed to establish an NGO or organize a demonstration [15 min.]

Aim: to imagine/visualize the political system where civil society does not exist, is banned or repressed and to judge its fallouts for democracy and society.

Description: Referring to previous activities, ask students what they think life in their country would be like now if civil society had not taken to the streets 30 years ago in protest against the communist regime. What countries in the world still have a totalitarian regime and what is public life like there? If students are lacking information, ask them to find out about the civil society situation in countries such as Cuba and North Korea on the web or briefly describe them yourself. Explain that also elsewhere in the world, such as Turkey, Syria, China, Hong Kong, and Nicaragua, civil rights are systematically curtailed and civic movements and organizations repressed. You may also refer to the political situation in Belarus and the brutal repressions on the civil society movements after the rigged presidential elections in 2020 (see SOURCE A.a).

Now suggest that everyone tries to imagine what their life would be like in a country where citizens do not have political rights, cannot associate, express their views freely and act without the permission of the authorities. Ask them to recall the titles of books or movies that are set in such places (see SOURCE A.b for inspiration). Note that many of today's series, especially political fiction and science fiction, also portray a collapsing democracy and the birth of totalitarian systems in which citizens lose their political as well as personal rights and freedoms. This is the world presented, for example, in the British series "Year for the year". You can watch the show trailer or its short film review (SOURCE A.c)

Ask everyone for a moment to imagine that also in your country, constitutional democracy is slowly starting to deteriorate, and the authorities are introducing a ban on association, independent public assembly. Discuss:

- How do students feel about these images?
- What can citizens do in such a situation?
- What do you think most people will do?
- How will you behave yourself?
- What could be the consequences of such behavior?

Note: you can suggest that they answer this question using e.g. Mentimeter (<https://www.mentimeter.com/features/word-cloud>) or a similar e-tool.

ACTIVITY 2: What do civil society organizations actually care about? In what areas of life are they active in our country and elsewhere? [10 min.]

Aim: to sketch a general image of diverse areas of work of civil society organizations and actions.

Description: Display the slide (s) (SOURCE B) with graphic materials on the interactive board, illustrating the various areas of activity of community organizations. As it is in Polish (see English explanations below), first ask the students to try to guess which fields of activity each of the pictures relate to. Explain that the illustration in the lower left corner is the hashtag of the campaign “Civil Society Organizations. It works!”, promoting the activity of non-governmental organizations in Poland and building awareness of how many different problems of social, political and cultural life they deal with on a daily basis. Although this graphic illustration concerns Poland, the categories included in it match the activities of organizations and civic movements in most countries.

Ask to illustrate the different areas of action with examples from your town or country. Also check if students would like to add any area of life or a problem that is dealt with by a known organization. Match it to the aforementioned categories or - if necessary - create a new one.

If students fail to address the pandemic in any way, note that the COVID-19 has proved to be a tough test for human and social rights, democratic values, the rule of law in all our countries and that almost everywhere civil society organizations played an important role during the pandemic. They will also be important players in recovery and resilience in the coming years.

ACTIVITY 3: Case studies from our countries [20 min.]

Aim: to analyze an example of the civil society activity/action with special focus on emancipatory/equal rights movements (SOURCE C), to think about the role of progressive ideas in post-communist societies.

Description: Now pose an open question to the class on why in post-communist countries, active citizenship is weaker than in countries with a longer democratic tradition. What could this be the result of? Membership in associations is not a mass here, sometimes it is even elitist and only becomes an element of political culture. Today, social media facilitate communication and interaction of citizens, but still play this role to an insufficient extent.

Ask students to provide some examples of civic activities, including protests in recent years.

Choose an example of a civil movement from your country in the area of equal rights (e.g. women's rights, minorities rights) or other progressive ideas (e.g. ecology, climate change). Based on the students' previous knowledge and information obtained from the network, analyze the selected movement according to the following questions: a) what were they about, b) what caused them, c) who were their leaders, d) what are the effects of their protests, social campaigns and other activities? The teacher may

also propose an analysis of the civil movement from another country, e.g. the protests organized in autumn 2020 by the National Women's Strike in Poland.

As part of the analysis of the case, ask the students to think of one important question they would like to ask the person who participated in those activities. Students can share their ideas for questions and the volunteers can later choose some of them, edit them and actually send them to the activists through social media. If the teacher is ready to devote more time to the topic of civil society, he/she can also let students invite such persons to participate in the lesson (e.g. online). As an extra task, volunteers can conduct face-to-face interviews with activists.

Consider together whether the organizations and movements opposing the mainstream political, social or cultural order play a positive role in democracy and society, or only disturb the social order (or at least - street traffic ...). Why do new social movements arouse so much emotion in traditional societies? Should, for example, governments of individual countries or the European Union authorities support them?

ACTIVITY 4: What do we need civil society for? What are its functions in our own country? Can democracy live without CS?

[15 min.]

Aim: to investigate the potential functions of civil society and its institutions for democracy in our own countries and elsewhere.

Description: Write down on the board (regular or interactive) the question: What do we need civil society for? Ask young people, working in teams of three or four, to talk for a while about the functions of civil society organizations, activities and impact in democratic countries or on the road to democracy. Then give students the text of Larry Diamond's speech at the *What Civil Society Can Do to Develop Democracy Leader Meeting* (SOURCE D), and ask them to jointly list the features that the author mentions. Confront the lists composed by all the teams. Are these functions also important in our country - today and in the future?

ACTIVITY 5: Ideas for young people from students localities to get involved in CS actions or to establish their own association or action - teamwork [20 min.]

Aim: to motivate students to develop their own project ideas and to get actively involved in civil society.

Description: Ask students what community organizations they have participated in or have benefited from in the past - themselves, their friends, family or school. Explain that the scenarios were developed by NGOs from seven countries participating in the Transition Dialogue joint educational program (you

can show the home page <https://www.austausch.org/transition-dialogue-3734/> or Fb of the project in your country.

Now suggest that everyone think for a moment what types of activities are closest to them and what they would like to get involved in in the coming weeks or months. Ask everyone to write their ideas on 1-2 sticky notes, then stick them on the board and organize them together, grouping similar ideas together (the same activity can be carried out using an interactive whiteboard or an e-tool like Jamboard <https://jamboard.google.com/>).

Divide the students into small teams based on their interests for similar topics and ask them to think together about what steps they should take now in order to actually engage in civic initiative in the chosen area. Encourage cooperation in this group also after classes - suggest that each student take on a small task related to it, e.g. searching the network for contacts to local organizations, their activists, current or planned activities, and checking on what terms young people can take part in. Explain that they can also plan their own community action (or even set up an association) on an issue that interests them - for example, student rights, protecting trees from being cut down, or caring for homeless animals in their locality.

Note that some of the problems students want to deal with not only affect their local community, but often the entire country, and even Europe or the world (e.g. climate, environment, exclusion, inequality, and xenophobia). So students can also plan engaging in a wider initiative - e.g. a campaign or civic action carried out on a European or even global scale (such as the youth climate movement <https://fridaysforfuture.org/>). Mention volunteer work - special portals for finding such offers can help you search - in the EU many offers can be found at https://europa.eu/youth/go-abroad/volunteering/opportunities_en Why do some people believe, that there is no real modern democracy without volunteering? e.g. <https://ukraineworld.org/articles/ukraine-explained/why-ukraine-would-not-be-european-without-volunteers>

Summary

Invite students to write down one thought and one question that came up in their heads during class on a post-it note, and to post it in a prominent place as they leave the classroom. Read them carefully and use them as feedback and material for further work with the class.

Note: additional reading materials for teachers are available in the annex.

ANNEX – Unit III

SOURCE A (ACTIVITY 1)

- a. Article: Exploring Belarusian civil society - <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/exploring-belarusian-civil-society/>

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- b. Films about totalitarian societies – <https://mubi.com/lists/films-about-totalitarian-societies-dystopia>.
- c. How To Dystopia when 2019 already sucks: YEARS AND YEARS | Why You Should Watch [No Spoilers] - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_nY-Xj9xm0&list=RDCMUCKUm503onGg3NatpBtTWHkQ&start_radio=1&t=71s

SOURCE B (ACTIVITY 2)

Activities of community organization



- We are building a community – Budujemy wspólnotę
- We protect the climate – Chronimy klimat

- We help to learn – Pomagamy się uczyć
- We save health – Ratujemy zdrowie
- We are joining – Taczymy
- We develop passions – Rozwijamy pasje
- We defend rights – Bronimy praw
- We create culture – Tworzymy kulturę
- #it works – #to działa

SOURCE C (ACTIVITY 3):

Three examples of recent civil society actions from Poland, Lithuania and Bulgaria

Women's Strike Protests in Poland

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-go7zoAGKs&t=47s>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020%E2%80%932021_women%27s_strike_protests_in_Poland

Although the ruling was handed down by Poland's constitutional tribunal in October and should have come into force swiftly, there was a three-month delay, apparently prompted by fears over the size of the protests that ensued. More than 400,000 people came out to protest in towns and cities across the country, leading some government figures to suggest a compromise was required.

Ultra-conservative elements of Poland's ruling coalition have long sought to tighten abortion laws further, even though polls show there is minimal support in Polish society at large for the move. Past attempts to change the law led to huge protests, leading to parliament stepping away from the move.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/28/poland-abortion-ban-sets-stage-for-womens-strike-showdown>.

The protests in Poland over the government's plans to further tighten abortion restrictions began in October – they haven't stopped since. Now, some are calling it the "cardboard revolution" in reference to the handmade placards that have become a distinctive feature of the protests. But what's novel about the movement isn't the ubiquitous signage – it's the young age of its participants.

When looking through the crowds at the protests, it quickly becomes clear that most participants appear to be in their early twenties. That might explain the radicalism of the movement's chants and slogans, but also its creativity and spontaneity. In Poznań, Gdańsk, Kraków, and Warsaw, young Poles used techno to soundtrack their marches, prompting a rare sight at Polish demonstrations – dancing. Young protesters also organised mass bicycle and motorcycle rides and even Halloween-themed actions in which people dressed up and held signs reading "Trick or free choice", in reference to the key demand of the protests – free access to abortion.

As one of the organisers told us, "Now there is a completely different kind of energy. It's wonderful. They are young people and they have no fear of taking to the streets and fighting for their rights."

The protests began when Poland's constitutional tribunal ruled in October that abortions due to foetal defects are unconstitutional. The country already had one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe, and this ruling means that abortion is now legal only in cases of rape, incest or if there is a threat to the mother's life.

The government, led by the conservative Law and Justice party (PiS), has delayed implementing the verdict amid the protests. Since winning a majority in the 2015 elections, PiS has repeatedly attempted to further restrict Poland's abortion laws. In 2016, one such attempt was the catalyst for a country-wide women's strike, inspired by one that took place in Iceland in 1975. Demonstrations, led by women, were held throughout the country, creating new, cross-generational alliances and politicising women in small towns.

The 2016 women's strike marked a new era for the Polish feminist movement. With further waves of protests in following years, networks of feminist activists consolidated, crystallised, and developed – and many bear the distinctive red lightning bolt symbol first used in that strike.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/theyre-uncompromising-how-the-young-transformed-polands-abortion-protests>

Teachers protest in Lithuania

Perhaps the most attention among the protests this year was drawn by the teachers' trade union strike, which caused much uproar in the public. In mid-November, the Lithuanian Education Staff Trade Union (LŠDPS), led by Andrius Navickas, declared a strike regarding the new teachers' wage payment model. The educators demanded not only changes to the wage payment system, but also to raise teachers' wages by 20% by the start of 2019.

The teachers' strike launched on November 12 and soon gained momentum, with several tens of teachers staging a sit in at the Vilnius-based Ministry of Education and Science on November 28. The teachers belonging to the LŠDPS stated they would not leave the ministry until negotiations on their demands would begin. On November 30, teachers returning from a protest were barred from entering the ministry, thus instead they climbed in through its windows.

A number of support events were held for the teachers, with teachers, students and other supporters protesting.

A coordination group assembled by the Ministry of Education and Science visited various schools around the country and spoke to teachers. However, this did not end the strikes and the number of striking institutions rose. Furthermore, Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis stated he sees no basis for teachers to be on strike because apparently with the new model, the average teacher wage rose. Nevertheless, the trade union organising the strike did not stand down and stated that the strike will only end when agreement is reached.

The sit-in was visited by politicians, party leaders, public figures. A number of protests were organised – both by students, teachers, as well as supporters. The striking teachers were discontent they were not listened to, spoken to and their demands not considered. At the time, the Ministry of Education and Science calculated that to implement the teachers' demands, 300 million euro would be needed.

On December 3, PM Saulius Skvernelis declared he is dismissing J. Petrauskienė from her position. On December 9, a mass protest Paskutinis Skambutis [Final Bell] was organised, during which a chain of people formed from the Ministry of Education and Science through Gediminas Avenue all the way to the Seimas and later a further protest was organised next to the cabinet building.

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On December 18, after negotiations with the striking teachers, the minister declared that agreement was reached on adjustments to the teachers' wage payment system. Audits were started in 17 subordinate institutions of the Ministry of Education and Science, internal resources were being sought for teachers' wages. A. Navickas also declared that the teachers will leave the ministry's premises on the next day and ending the strike would be considered in a few days.

<https://lithuaniantribune.com/what-protests-shook-lithuania-in-2018/>

<https://balticword.com/tag/demonstration-in-vilnius/>

An art project, focused on domestic violence in Bulgaria

The project BEAT. was implemented after the murder of a woman by her partner in 2017, in their apartment in Sofia. The fight was going on for almost one hour but none of the neighbors reacted to the screaming and shouting. The team of BEAT. rented an apartment in the same building and installed a drum to measure how long it would take the neighbors to react. After beating the drum for less than three minutes neighbors came to complain about the noise.

Worldwide, nearly 1 in 3 women experience physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner, at least once in their life ([UN Women](#), 2021). The installation wants to shed light on domestic violence and the question of each person's responsibility to civil responsibility – to react and interfere. It is a collaboration with survivors of domestic violence and explores what BEAT. describes as the “ominous silence surrounding domestic violence”.

According to the artists, in many post-communist societies and beyond, it is common for neighbors to react to any loud noise while domestic dispute or abuse is seen as a “private matter”. In Bulgaria, one in four women is a victim of domestic violence, dozens have been killed by a domestic partner or a family member. In some cases neighbors could have interfered to prevent their murder.

On their website, BEAT. provides practical guidelines for those that suspect or witness domestic violence amongst neighbors. The website is available at: <https://projectbeat.org/>.

SOURCE D (ACTIVITY 4): What Civil Society Can Do to Develop Democracy

Speech by Larry Diamond, Presentation to NGO Leaders, February 10, 2004, Convention Center, Baghdad. Available at: <https://diamond-democracy.stanford.edu/speaking/speeches/what-civil-society-can-do-develop-democracy>

Good afternoon.

I want to speak to you briefly today about the role that civil society plays in building and strengthening democracy. You are all civil society leaders, who are engaged in this effort in various ways, so I am very pleased to be able to share these ideas with you.

By civil society I mean the entire range of organized groups and institutions that are independent of the state, voluntary, and at least to some extent self-generating and self-reliant. This of course includes non-governmental organizations like the ones in this room, but also independent mass media, think tanks, universities, and social and religious groups.

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To be part of civil society, groups must meet some other conditions as well. In a democracy, civil society groups have respect for the law, for the rights of individuals, and for the rights of other groups to express their interests and opinions. Part of what the word “civil” implies is tolerance and the accommodation of pluralism and diversity.

Civil society groups may establish ties to political parties and the state, but they must retain their independence, and they do not seek political power for themselves.

Often in transitions, groups arise that seek to monopolize the lives and thinking of their members. These groups do not tolerate the right of their members to dissent, and they do not respect other groups that disagree with them. Some of these groups may merely be fronts for political parties or movements that seek to win control of the state. These groups are not part of civil society and they do not contribute to building a democracy.

What, then, can the independent, voluntary, law-abiding, tolerant and pluralistic organizations of civil society do to build and maintain democracy?

The first and most basic role of civil society is to limit and control the power of the state. Of course, any democracy needs a well-functioning and authoritative state. But when a country is emerging from decades of dictatorship, it also needs to find ways to check, monitor, and restrain the power of political leaders and state officials.

Civil society actors should watch how state officials use their powers. They should raise public concern about any abuse of power. They should lobby for access to information, including freedom of information laws, and rules and institutions to control corruption.

This constitutes a second important function of civil society: to expose the corrupt conduct of public officials and lobby for good governance reforms. Even where anti-corruption laws and bodies exist, they cannot function effectively without the active support and participation of civil society.

A third function of civil society is to promote political participation. NGOs can do this by educating people about their rights and obligations as democratic citizens, and encouraging them to listen to election campaigns and vote in elections. NGOs can also help develop citizens’ skills to work with one another to solve common problems, to debate public issues, and express their views.

Fourth, civil society organizations can help to develop the other values of democratic life: tolerance, moderation, compromise, and respect for opposing points of view. Without this deeper culture of accommodation, democracy cannot be stable. These values cannot simply be taught; they must also be experienced through practice. We have outstanding examples from other countries of NGOs—especially women’s groups—that have cultivated these values in young people and adults through various programs that practice participation and debate.

Fifth, civil society also can help to develop programs for democratic civic education in the schools as well. After dictatorship, comprehensive reforms are needed to revise the curricula, rewrite the textbooks, and retrain teachers in order to educate young people about the crimes of the past and teach them the principles and values of democracy. This is too important a task to leave only to officials in the education ministry. Civil society must be involved as a constructive partner and advocate for democracy and human rights training.

Sixth, civil society is an arena for the expression of diverse interests, and one role for civil society organizations is to lobby for the needs and concerns of their members, as women, students, farmers, environmentalists, trade unionists, lawyers, doctors, and so on. NGOs and interest groups can present

Transition Dialogue

their views to parliament and provincial councils, by contacting individual members and testifying before parliamentary committees. They can also establish a dialogue with relevant government ministries and agencies to lobby for their interests and concerns.

And it is not only the resourceful and well organized who can have their voices heard. Over time, groups that have historically been oppressed and confined to the margins of society can organize to assert their rights and defend their interests as well.

A seventh way civil society can strengthen democracy is to provide new forms of interest and solidarity that cut across old forms of tribal, linguistic, religious, and other identity ties. Democracy cannot be stable if people only associate with others of the same religion or identity. When people of different religions and ethnic identities come together on the basis of their common interests as women, artists, doctors, students, workers, farmers, lawyers, human rights activists, environmentalists, and so on, civic life becomes richer, more complex, and more tolerant.

Eighth, civil society can provide a training ground for future political leaders. NGOs and other groups can help to identify and train new types of leaders who have dealt with important public issues and can be recruited to run for political office at all levels and to serve in provincial and national cabinets. Experience from other countries shows that civil society is a particularly important arena from which to recruit and train future women leaders.

Ninth, civil society can help to inform the public about important public issues. This is not only the role of the mass media, but of NGOs which can provide forums for debating public policies and disseminating information about issues before parliament that affect the interests of different groups, or of society at large.

Tenth, civil society organizations can play an important role in mediating and helping to resolve conflict. In other countries, NGOs have developed formal programs and training of trainers to relieve political and ethnic conflict and teach groups to solve their disputes through bargaining and accommodation.

Eleventh, civil society organizations have a vital role to play in monitoring the conduct of elections. This requires a broad coalition of organizations, unconnected to political parties or candidates, that deploys neutral monitors at all the different polling stations to ensure that the voting and vote counting is entirely free, fair, peaceful, and transparent. It is very hard to have credible and fair elections in a new democracy unless civil society groups play this role.

Finally, I want to stress that civil society is not simply in tension with the state. Because civil society is independent of the state doesn't mean that it must always criticize and oppose the state. In fact, by making the state at all levels more accountable, responsive, inclusive, effective—and hence more legitimate—a vigorous civil society strengthens citizens' respect for the state and promotes their positive engagement with it. A democratic state cannot be stable unless it is effective and legitimate, with the respect and support of its citizens. Civil society is a check, a monitor, but also a vital partner in the quest for this kind of positive relationship between the democratic state and its citizens.

ADDITIONAL READING MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

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One or Many? As far back as 1999, Jacques Rupnik noted that “the word ‘postcommunism’ has lost its relevance. The fact that Hungary and Albania, or the Czech Republic and Belarus, or Poland and Kazakhstan shared a communist past explains very little about the paths that they have taken since.”⁴ This observation applies to postcommunist civil societies as well. They differ from country to country depending on how communist authorities used to treat the associational sphere, how much energy went into the building of new organizations after communism fell, how historical traditions vary, and how current political conditions line up. Postcommunist civil societies can range from assertive and robust to anemic and tightly state-constrained—they are certainly not all of one type. Expert evaluations back up this picture of staggering variance across the postcommunist region. The World Bank Governance Index shows that in the new EU members—especially Estonia, Poland, and Slovenia—civil society’s organizational composition and role in providing citizens with voice and a way to hold governments accountable are not far behind West European standards, and ahead of Greece and Italy. The 2012 U.S. Agency for International Development report on the sustainability of civil society organizations awards good marks to the ex-communist EU members, with Estonia, Poland, and the Czech Republic topping the list. The Eurasian countries (Russia and the other ex-Soviet countries outside the Baltics and Central Asia) run behind, while the five post-Soviet republics of Central Asia bring up the rear.

Similarly, Freedom House’s Nations in Transit 2013 study (which rates the strength of civil society on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being strongest) gives new EU members an average score of 1.95, with Poland achieving the best result (1.5). For the Balkans, the average score was 3.04. For the Eurasian states it was 5.28, with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan sharing the dubious privilege of carding a worst-possible 7 each. In short, a systematic comparison of really existing postcommunist civil societies shows different patterns of transformation, diverging paths of organizational expansion, uneven influence on policy making, and growing intraregional disparities. These civil societies differ from one another along at least three crucial dimensions. The first has to do with the “constitution of public space.” The most important single factor in determining how a given country’s public space is constituted is the type of relationship that civil society has with the state (which includes the degree of access that civil society organizations have to the policy-making process).⁵⁰ Journal of Democracy The state and its agencies define the public space by making laws, by building (or failing to build) institutions, by protecting (or disregarding) rights and liberties, and by implementing policies that either empower or constrain civil society organizations. On the actions and inactions of states, therefore, hinge the health, composition, and capacity of civil society. States vary across the postcommunist space, and therefore so do civil societies. Although no postcommunist state seeks to ban all activity by autonomous civil society groups, Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan come close. As in the CEE region during the communist 1970s and 1980s, civil society faces severe repression. To the extent that it does exist, it tends to be incomplete and “dissident” in nature—again, not unlike what one would have seen in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or Poland before 1989. In another, less severely authoritarian set of postcommunist countries, civil society is treated less harshly, but must cope with tangles of restrictions. Some organizations, especially new NGOs, are marginalized. Others (often with communist pedigrees) receive favors, including public money. The norm is a mix between state corporatism and a regime of arbitrary limits on registration procedures,

funding, types of activity allowed, and international contacts. In Russia, to name a prominent example, such restrictions have grown in severity as many civil society groups have angered the Putin regime by organizing the protest movements of the last few years. In a third set of CEE countries—the new EU members—the rule of law guards civil society, whose organizations are free to take foreign help and receive support from both their own government’s and the EU’s funds. Here we catch sight of a picture that differs in no essential manner from what we see in the established liberal democracies of Western Europe. Moreover, in new member states civil society organizations often have formal roles in policy making and governance, especially at the local level. They may also lobby and use contention, though their effectiveness seldom if ever matches that of their West European counterparts.

https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/ekiert/files/journal_of_democracy_2-14-2014_website_date.pdf

Two questions dominate debates on civil society: 1) Is civil society necessary to undermine authoritarian rule and bring about regime change? 2) What impact does civil society have on government policies and democratic quality, particularly after regime change? The experiences of postcommunist countries shed light on both. In general, we agree with Philippe Schmitter that civil society’s role in precipitating regime change is insignificant. Apart from Poland, there is no convincing evidence that organized civil society contributed to the communist collapse, although the defections of various associations, particularly at the moment of power transfer, were important. In 1989, several CEE countries experienced cascading cycles of mobilization—manifestations more of spontaneous rather than organized civil society—that tipped the balance against communism. That said, we hasten to note that several CEE countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, the Baltics) had consequential civil societies around the time of regime transition. Comparative study, moreover, shows that the stronger a country’s civil society was around that time, the more likely that country was to achieve a higher quality of liberal democracy, to enjoy a faster and stronger recovery from the transition’s economic dislocations, and to feature a lower level of social inequality years later. Yet not all forms of civil society mobilization under nondemocratic regimes help the rise of democracy, particularly if racist or radically nationalist activism is at the forefront (as in the former Yugoslavia). The postcommunist experience as a whole, however, attests to the positive and important role that civil society can play in democracy’s consolidation. After twenty-five years of massive transformations, postcommunist civil societies have built often-impressive amounts of organizational capacity and political influence. This may be exerted through contention, voluntary activities, assorted consultative arrangements, or 56 Journal of Democracy all three. For example, Polish unions and farmers’ groups have been able to defeat or delay many proposed economic and social reforms that they did not like. In other countries, including those that have had color revolutions, civil society organizations have resisted authoritarian reversals and uses of electoral fraud, holding even authoritarian rulers at least partly accountable. Case studies and anecdotal evidence suggest the significant impact that civil society organizations have had on the design and implementation of specific policies dealing with labor and the environment as well as rights for women and minorities (to say nothing of human rights more generally). What is most striking, however, is the disparity of paths and outcomes. Under authoritarian regimes (Belarus, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), independent civil society organizations are thin on the ground, persecuted, and poorly institutionalized, often

Transition Dialogue

resembling the incomplete “dissident” civil societies of the years before 1989. In semi-authoritarian regimes (Russia and Ukraine), the state harasses and interferes with independent citizens and their NGO activities, but social movements make a mark on public life via waves of public protest. Many authoritarian governments have learned to coexist with and manage their (often truncated and not very consequential) civil societies. The democratic civil societies of the CEE region may not be able to match their West European counterparts in numbers and influence, but CEE civil society’s growth has been impressive nonetheless. And when it comes to transnational networking or the legal architecture of the public sphere, there are CEE civil societies that not only match Western Europe but are ahead of such states from Southern Europe as Greece, Italy, and Portugal.