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ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

# Policy Paper

Of the Working Group  
“Social Issues/Civic Participation”

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## Citizens Need to Get Back their Right to Commit to Change

From an objective perspective, the international crisis unveils how crucial reforms are – to develop a new order, since the old one proved to be a failure. The urgent need for modernisation, at least in the field of social commitments, is on the agenda of the European states as well as of the Russian Federation.

However, even if the “system” is in urgent need of social, economic and humanitarian modernization, this does not automatically result in a demand for it.

In the modern world, there are remarkably few opportunities to put reforms into practice that are not only unpopular, but that were simply not explained to society, or to local communities in particular.

First of all, the fate of reforms and modernisation is not only determined by their contents, but also by the principles of reforming as such, and they must consider the lessons of unimplemented reforms and

hypothetical growth points of “civil reforming”: responsible, independent and constructive activities of the citizens and their associations under the circumstances of real change.

This means a strategic and tactical definition of the autonomous state reformer. Modernization that follows an exclusively “top-down”-approach is not regarded as simple, clear or targeted.

Today it is becoming apparent that the state is withdrawing from its responsibility for the fate of reforms in Europe and Russia and that society is supposed to take over this commitment.

It is crucial that support from both government and the public for any “innovative” initiatives as well as any form of public self-organisation and business that coincide with the vector of modernisation are absolutely non-identical with fostering pro-government institutions of civil society (they fulfil a different social function). State bureaucracy must learn to look out of the window, not into the mirror.

Finally it is necessary to get a real grip of the topic of non-implemented reforms and the necessity to address the government’s non-fulfilment.

The crisis of political leadership has caused a rift between European intellectuals; state and business elites are divided, or actively distance themselves from any immature reforms and observe the grass-roots support for modernization with a critical eye. Pending and current reforms must be based on the real social mandate that can be satisfied with the help of civil support.

It is essential to give the citizen and civil society back the right to commit themselves to change processes.

### **The Core of the Problem**

The experience of failed reforms, even of those that were so essential that major parts of society were aware of them, showed that the ambitions of a single modernizer stroke a bad deal with the ruling powers. Whatever they create without public consultations or without the participation of society is met with resistance, is not sustainable and does not solve the actual issues. Time and again, the “window of opportunity” is not used to initiate change. And most importantly, the proposed changes, if introduced exclusively as “top-down” projects, prevent the integration of society and build up a space of “cold civil war”. A high price is paid to achieve such results; and civil society does not take full advantage of the benefits.

Experts realized that only about 36 % of the measures planned in the framework of Strategy 2010 (a Russian reform package that formed part of the Russian government’s strategy in 2000) have been implemented. The section “Power Reform” and also the most extensive (in terms of measures) section “Economic Modernisation” developed best of all. The section “Social Reforms” was implemented below average (cf. paper of the Centre of Strategic Research “Strategy 2010: Level of implementation after 10 years”).

Section	Level of implementation in per cent
Average level of implementation of Strategy 2010 measures; in particular of the following sections:	36
Economic modernisation	39
Power reforms/Government reforms	39
Social reforms	31

The most recent European (as well as Arab) events showed that the European countries including Russia have to face up to serious reforms in their social and economic spheres of life. We must not silently watch how our economic and social systems, as well as society on the whole, dive into chaos.

Inevitable changes cause frustration among the different groups of the population in any case. In particular, the style of reform and its pace will stop to be a choice merely for government organs. Local communities and citizens insist that power snobbism, the introduction of reforms without involving citizens and communities in their development, will lead to fake modernisation or to derail from the track of modernization.

It is quite obvious that the sphere of social modernisation can constitute only a transition from outdated and inefficient “old-style” approaches to the development and implementation of social politics with adequate characteristics for modernized processes. This is only possible if both government and civil institutions are ready for continuous cooperation. The majority of representatives of the ruling Russian government bodies and state institutions at the federal level (64 %) assume that within 10 to 12 years, non-profit organizations will play a significantly more important role in solving the social issues in our country (cf. paper of National Research University Higher School of Economics: “Will government alone find a solution?”) However, practically speaking, alienation can be overcome only with significant efforts. Mutual trust and skills of cooperation will not suffice.

In Russia, the character of cooperation between business, society and power has changed. It put on a bureaucratic face. We are missing real consultations in decision making processes due to restricting consultative mechanisms, among others. The existence of Civic Chambers in the life of the Russian Federation does not change the situation, since its members react to ready-made decisions in the best case. We face the weird situation that it is easier to mobilize people to go out in the streets and raise their voices instead of having their authorized representatives negotiate the advantages and disadvantages of public evaluations in a factual discussion.

Since citizens and their interest groups are not involved in the decision making process, their view on the attitude towards reforms has become “lopsided:” supporters of reforms have lost enthusiasm, indifference has shifted to hatred and hatred to radicalism. This is a threatening trend and all of us, responsible representatives of government organs and civil institutions, are called upon to take action.

So far, social groups remain silent since they have been the losers of reforms and innovation. The ruling powers are able to oppress the “nay-sayers”, but they are not able to safeguard the independence of the losers. The reformers won the battle over the “explainers” (journalists, teachers, etc.), but the latter kept associating reforms with suffering and still send out this message to society.

#### From a Civil Society Perspective

The success of reforms can be assessed only cautiously because government organs themselves must not stimulate anti-reformist attitudes, neither in a targeted, nor in an unreflective manner. There is no point in sowing foes where you can reap partners.

The prevalent style of state management in modernization processes is outstandingly remote from modern state management or existing federal or pan-European best practices. Society does not consider it normal if

- First, any reform is delayed to the very latest, no matter how active grass root organisations might have been and how fiercely they demand the introduction of reforms. They only get started when there is no other excuse and no real way out. They only have the possibility to carry out reforms instantly and in a way that does not permit any alternatives within the timeframe and with the

resources that are left. Society does not see possibilities to discontinue these common practices unless transparent, realistic and accessible mechanisms of consultation emerge to define common priorities in the modernization process for the whole country.

- Second, once state reformers get started, they cannot stop. The fireworks and cascades of innovations are carried out at the same time and one after the other. Society considers this as distrust in the sustainability of what has been done already and in the potential for self-development of existing structures and mechanisms. The classical example for Russia is the reform of the educational system with such a big number of new introductions that exceeded all acceptable limits.
- Third, it is not important how many other resources we have besides those that matter at the moment. The critical factor in the introduction of reforms is the existence of the necessary mass of competent, reasonable and good-willing state administrators who will add what ideologists and reformers forgot to consider or could not anticipate. Society cannot make peace with lacking opportunities for the social enforcement of changes since the executors of reforms will not compromise the sense of the reforms out of zeal without knowledge, out of hate for the painfully wise superiors, and – rarely – self-serving interests. They cripple even those reforms that have potential benefits even for their executors.

The quality of state management is one of the bottlenecks in the implementation of any steps of modernisation. For this reason, in particular the cooperation with social interest groups and the orientation towards the recipient of state services while establishing new bureaucratic practices at the same time, are means of enhancing the sustainability for any vector of modernization and instruments to decrease the population's dissatisfaction in connection with government actions "out of principle".

It is necessary to define a place for society in modernization processes and individual reforms. It is unproductive to divide all civil practices in terms of modernization in anti-state and pro-state practices. We, the citizens, are investing in the future of our country nothing less than the state officials, and we must not tolerate this. Therefore demonstrating a particularly constructive social behaviour, we have the duty to be of mutual support and benefit to each other:

- social enforcement of changes (external control for keeping the rules)
- civic control of reforms
- social expertise on the reasons, mid-term and final results of any reforms
- practices of own "low-level" social mandate for reforms – a "social agenda"

Local communities involvement in social policy is underestimated by state reformers. In addition to creating their own social services, participation in consultations on the priorities of change and evaluating the results, local communities are going to participate in the proper execution of the rules of transparency and accountability of politicians activities, including during the elections.

The public is aware of the fact that the official language of modernization is not accessible for the average citizen or civil association. Any reform has to be explained; its results can be sustainable only if people understand why it is carried out, what it means for the lives of the ordinary people, and how to take advantage of it. Explaining measures in a simple and understandable way does not mean to manipulate the emotions and interests of the people and does not have any implication for government populism. Effective reforms need committed citizens – only then their implementation cannot be linked to "corrupting" these citizens.

Young people today should already in school get to know the basics and examples of social self-organization and activism as a part of the modern European civic culture. According to the public opinion, civic education should be a mandatory part of the state educational standards. This is not so much to stop the senseless teenage riots in the streets, but because Europe as early as possible requires a new generation of concerned, independent, successful and responsible citizens.

The direct involvement of the majority of the people and their associations with the public management of modernization takes place at the level of local self-administration, and there they achieve the greatest effect with the participation of society in social politics not only at the stage of discussion and evaluation, but also in the implementation process. Local associations have to become full-fledged participants in all processes of modernization: from harmonizing interests to direct grass-roots participation and support to take advantage of the benefits of reforms. Therefore, what is happening to real autonomy and to the possibilities of local self-administration is particularly important for modernisation.

### Recommendations

1. We need to create adaptive mechanisms for new reforms, a meticulous assessment of social risks and their counter-measures, the formation of a positive (transparent, up-to-date and matter-of-fact) information platform to go along with proposed new reforms, e.g. remedies for inert, aggressive bureaucracy demonstrating “anti-social” behaviour.
2. It is crucial to create a positive environment for the development of non-profit organisations and acknowledgment for self-organizing, self-help civic initiatives. We need guaranteed accessibility to the minimal infrastructure for civil involvement.
  - It is crucial to minimize the costs for the citizens to organise themselves. This means a de-bureaucratisation of not-for-profit activities, among others the minimization of administrative barriers in the registration procedures of non-profit organizations with various state organs and the liquidation of doubled-up competencies of government institutions bodies that control non-profit activities.
  - The support for various types of civil self-organisation implies the establishment of an infrastructure for civil activities. Self-administration at the federal and local levels has to be able to guarantee a minimum of accessible infrastructure for civil initiatives and non-profit organizations: every city has to have a minimum number of premises for public discussions, meetings, press conferences, seminars, etc.
  - Development of civic education in schools, along with ensuring an adequate level of budget financing, as it is a subject of civic organizations and local communities active involvement.
3. It is crucial to report that mass participation in the development of public politics for grass-roots initiatives (and their associated organizations that defend the interests of social groups who were not able to adapt to changing conditions) today may partly happen as protest actions etc. The government has to learn to deal with such behaviour in a positive way, with monitoring, explanatory or other appeasing measures. For instance, competent prosecutors in the social sphere are distinct by the fact that they always assess such actions not as attacks against the government, but as a sign of protest against publicly violated legal procedures, corrupt “spots” etc. State and local civil officials have to consider this and need to be trained accordingly in order to develop skills for complex reactions to public protest in the social sphere. Such training might be part of an implementation program for state management reforms and civil service, or integrated in the structure of cooperation with the population in the framework of administrative reforms.
4. At the same time it is crucial to promote an expansion of the relationships of public and civil organisations towards the activities (and the reforms of such activities) of governmental bodies: complementary to the traditional “negative” indicators (the line-up of “red flags” as indicators of what is impossible under which circumstances and conditions), add “positive”, “productive” indicators to show what is necessary and what can be done in certain situations (i.e. operational and instrumental recommendations that can be put into practice by government institutions).
5. We need a full support and encouragement of international cooperation of civil societies, exchange programs, and individual civil mobility "across borders." Public organizations are considering such practices as a powerful resource for overcoming by citizens the problem of stereotypes in the

- formation of the desirable and possible changes in the life of their countries and responsible participation in this change.
6. We need a real expansion for the space of public dialogue. It is essential to teach the new generation of state civil servants who are still inexperienced (Soviet, Perestroika, present) in target-driven public discussions and even in simple massive declarations of intents etc. If they lack motivation in their consultation processes with different interest groups it is necessary to integrate such processes in their administrative procedures and rules, and to include them in the results of their activities to force technocratic civil servants to fulfil procedures with such rules and develop corresponding skills.
  7. State organs must learn to find partners to support the introduction of changes in social politics not among loyal or pseudo NGOs, but by creating conditions to involve “silent” progressive groups in public dialogues because they understand the necessity and advantages for the public of such changes. Among others it is crucial to reconsider populist flirtations with “fading” coalitions of redistribution (traditional veterans, women’s organizations, etc.). It is crucial to minimize their artificial subjectivity in social politics that marks them as supporters in the public perception for the moment in exchange for their silence on the occasion of fake government “consultations with the public”.
  8. It is necessary to propose serious endeavours for the support and the restoration of society’s role in entrepreneurial associations (NGOs representing the interests of entrepreneurs). As far as their obvious disorganisation, artificial enlargement and nationalisation is concerned, this leads to major damages for the diversity of interests represented in public dialogues, among others in the social sphere.
  9. We need targeted governmental efforts to create a positive environment for the development of a “civic agenda” of modernisation and for the launch of mechanisms for steadfast public interests and civil activities to ensure the effective introduction of reforms in the interest of the people in our country.
  10. The tasks of public influence for changing the qualities of state management with the help of reforms suggest:
    - to translate the language of reforms from technical jargon into a language of civic policy, i.e. to create and discuss framework and context documents – like Charters and Codes of Civil Rights that are applied to reforms etc. Furthermore, to develop “consumer interfaces” that are valid for the ordinary citizens and provide information and platforms for participation in the evaluation of reforms.
    - to organise an active civic PR campaign and to support a series of targeted civic discussions and public debates that allow the emergence of public interest “growth points” for modernisation and for the rules of cooperation between citizens and administration etc. (e.g. an infrastructure for experts and citizens that is ready for responsible public action as “bottom-up-reforms”).
    - to support the actions (e.g. by government grants or tenders) for developing and proposing the distribution of a “civic action menu” that allows every citizen’s initiative, non-profit organization and business association to take corresponding actions and act as a customer (supplier of tasks, evaluator of particular reform types, independent expert for the quality of services rendered etc.) of modernizing actions at the federal, regional and local levels.
    - to create resources for a Civic Agenda together with interested citizens’ associations for any reforms that can be used for state or civic PR campaigns, for education, extension services, media relations etc.

Representatives of civic institutions insist that they are not focused on creating a massive number of specialized civic initiatives in the context of reforms, but on facilitating the conditions for any non-profit

organization and help them to “spark the ignition” for clear activities and the productive and responsible implementation of reforms.

**It is crucial to give citizens and their associations the right back to act as committed participants in change processes.**

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