



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM
ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

Policy Paper

Of the Working Group “Social Issues/Civic Participation”

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Return the right to be conscious agents of change to the citizens and the civic communities

The world crisis, the latest European events and the "Arab Spring" show that the European countries, including Russia, are doomed to carry out major changes in the social and economic life. Accepting the need for change, we cannot allow our economies, social systems and societies to fall into chaos.

The experience of failed reforms, even those which need is clear for most of the society, shows that the sole modernizer's ambition play a bad joke with the authorities. What they have created without consulting the public and without public involvement meets resistance, is short-term and does not accomplish the stated goals. Time after time, the "window of opportunity" for change is being missed. What is more, the proposed changes, running solely as a top-down project keep on splitting the public, creating a space of "cold civil war", and results received with such a great price are not evaluated or used by citizens in full.

Today, it is becoming apparent that the responsibility for the fate of European and Russian modernization is shifted from the state to society.

It is vitally important to find a place for society, civic organizations and local communities in modernization processes or in specific reforms. It is unproductive to divide all civic practices in terms of modernization into anti-state and pro-state practices. We, the citizens who invest in the future of our countries no less than the state officials, must not tolerate this. In our opinion, following examples must be supported and encouraged as useful social behaviors:

- Public enforcement of changes (external control for keeping the rules)
- Civic control of the reform
- The public expertise of the causes, mid-term and final results of any reform
- Practices of "grass roots" public reform order - its "social agenda".

The public is aware of the fact that the official language of modernization is not accessible for the average citizen or civic 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.

Governments, in consultation with civil society should translate the language of reforms from technical jargon into a language of civic policy, i.e. through public discussion on state documents: like Charters and Codes of Civil Rights that are applied to reforms etc. Furthermore, it is required to develop “consumer interfaces” of modernization, that are acceptable for ordinary citizens.

It is crucial to create a positive environment for the development of non-profit organisations and acknowledgment for self-organizing, self-help, civic initiatives. Accessibility to the minimal infrastructure for civil involvement should be guaranteed.

- It is crucial to minimize the costs for the citizens to organise themselves. This means de-bureaucratisation of non-profit activities, among others reduction of administrative barriers to registration of non-profit organizations, assuring that there is no duplication of information provided by NGOs to various state agencies and elimination 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 take the responsibility for guaranteeing 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 - a subject of civic organizations and local communities active involvement, together with ensuring an adequate level of budget financing,.

The government should take the responsibility for training new generation of public officials in productive and responsible interaction with community groups. Such consultation should be mandatory in administrative procedures and regulations.

Public authorities must learn to find partners for introducing change in social policy, who are not recruited from loyal or quasi-public organizations, and create conditions for participation in public dialogue of any groups that understand the need and the social usefulness of such changes.

At the forefront of the fate of the reform and modernization stays the readiness of the state and society to develop the growing points of "civic reformation", by which we understand responsible, independent and productive activities of citizens and their associations in the sphere of introducing the real change. Therefore, it becomes critical to ensure grass roots support for modernization. Upcoming and current reforms must be based on real public order, secured with the support of the public.

It is vitally important to return the right to be conscious agents of change to the citizens and the civic communities

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