



# How to Finish a Revolution: Civil Society and Democracy in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine

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## Summary points

- Civil society in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine remains weak as citizens have little capacity to influence political developments owing to lack of engagement, clientelist networks and corruption.
- Western-funded NGOs form an 'NGO-cracy', where professional leaders use access to domestic policy-makers and Western donors to influence public policies, yet they are disconnected from the public at large.
- New civil voices use more mass mobilization strategies and social media, and are visible in public spaces. They are more effective in influencing the state and political society than Western-funded NGOs.
- Many large Western donors, who invest substantial resources in strengthening civil society, often support NGOs patronage networks and sustain a gap between a few well-established groups and active citizens.
- Wider civic engagement would help build the power of the middle class to work together for enabling citizens to influence policy and further advance democracy in these countries.

## Introduction

In the last decade, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have undergone dramatic changes, often described as ‘colour’ or ‘electoral’ revolutions: the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003; the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, and the so-called Twitter Revolution in Moldova in 2009. These large-scale mobilization events demonstrated citizens’ demand for change and the inability of the political systems to meet their aspirations. More recently the events of the Arab Spring, the global ‘Occupy’ movements and the anti-austerity protests throughout Europe manifested the determination of citizens around the world to become drivers of social change. The growth of the knowledge economy, the empowerment of people through social media and the emergence of transnational citizens’ networks have made non-state actors increasingly powerful voices in domestic and foreign affairs. Citizens are increasingly demanding an expansion of the public space and for their voices to be taken into account by decision-makers. It is one function of civil society to bridge the gap between the formal political process and citizens, but this is hard to accomplish even in Western democracies.

For states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union, the legacy of a shared totalitarian past continues to influence the path of their transition to democracy. For those with aspirations to closer European integration, this is manifested in similar trends, especially with regard to the role and development of civil society. Twenty years of Western democracy assistance aimed at supporting civil society in the post-Soviet states have achieved few tangible results. This paper examines the *quality* of civil society in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, and suggests how donors’ approaches to strengthening it can be re-targeted to encourage democratization more effectively.

The development of civil society rests on several key pillars, including the rule of law, a clear separation of powers within the state, an active political society, and free and independent media. This paper focuses mostly on internal factors that define the quality of public space such as NGO culture, citizens’ perceptions of democracy and activism, emerging civil movements and their

interaction with the state, and finally the role of Western donors. It asks why Western-funded NGOs have not been able to build on the citizens’ self-empowerment in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine after the electoral revolutions in order to hold new governments accountable to their citizens.

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The ‘colour’ revolutions were perceived by the West as a triumph of civil society, a victory for freedom and democracy and the grand finale of the ‘third wave’ of democratization. They brought new leaders to power and changed political elites. President Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia, President Viktor Yushchenko and the Orange coalition in Ukraine, and Prime Minister Vlad Filat in Moldova were entrusted by their respective societies with completing the work of democratic consolidation and building states based on the rule of law. All three countries declared Euro-Atlantic integration a priority, and committed themselves to reinforcing democracy and introducing European standards of governance. In the eyes of the West, they were all relative democratic success stories, backed by the substantial external political support and financial assistance that followed each revolution.

Only a few years later these countries are progressing unevenly on the path to consolidating democracy. The October 2012 parliamentary elections in Georgia proved that peaceful transfer of power is possible, despite numerous obstacles to democratic competition before the elections. In March 2012 Moldova managed to overcome an almost three-year constitutional crisis and elected a new president.

Nevertheless, negative dynamics, especially in Ukraine, raise the question of how to prevent further democratic backsliding and ensure that all three countries remain on a steady path to democracy. There are two factors involved here. The first is related to the inability of the collective power of citizens expressed during the electoral revolutions to manifest itself later in day-to-day political life. The second is that despite millions of dollars of Western assistance spent on strengthening civil society, democracy can retreat unless there is substantial counter-pressure from civil society. Understanding these factors can lead to new ways for consolidating democracy in the post-Soviet space.

### Civil society as public space

A healthy civil society is considered an integral part of any democratic system of governance. Along with free and fair elections, and accountable institutions, it ensures that the voices of citizens are included in policy-making. Different democratic traditions can lead to different pathways for ensuring this inclusion, but a democratic system must enable expression by those affected by policy decisions.

Civil society is defined here as a public space for citizens to engage in collective debate and self-expression, and where public opinions that influence public policy are formed. This space lies between the family and the state, is independent from the state and is legally protected. Fundamentally, civil society is a medium in which the social contracts between citizens and political and economic centres of power are negotiated and reproduced.<sup>1</sup> Civil society implies the existence of independent organizations, with active communication between organizations, citizens and the state, leading ultimately to a certain degree of influence on policy-making. These citizens' groups, which consolidate various interests, can take numerous forms such as membership organizations, charities, think-tanks, neighbourhood associations, informal movements and faith-based groups. Their key characteristic is independence

from the government. All these types are equally important for a vibrant civil society as they provide more avenues for citizen engagement, which can be expressed in formal membership, signing of petitions, participation in demonstrations, volunteering and donations.

With regard to the post-Soviet states, the West perceived the task of supporting civil society development as one of providing financial and technical support to locally registered non-governmental organizations in order to make them active in influencing the state. These local NGOs became synonymous with civil society and *de facto* monopolized the civil society discourse, leaving wider society and other non-institutional forms of citizens' engagement behind.

After the three electoral revolutions, some experts argued that these NGOs had played a crucial role in youth and voter mobilization that led, eventually, to regime change.<sup>2</sup> Others countered that the role of Western-funded NGOs was marginal and that civil protests had been successful largely because of their backing by the local political opposition.<sup>3</sup>

However, after the electoral revolutions, when civil society leaders tried to build on this new wave of participatory spirit, Ukraine's Pora, Georgia's Khmara and Moldova's 'Think Moldova!' and Hyde Park movements failed to transform the collective energy of the revolutions into organized, moderate, citizen power. Some of the movements involved, such as 'yellow Pora', tried to build new political parties, but failed to win seats in parliamentary elections, while 'black Pora' turned into a typical Western-funded NGO, relying on donors' funding and aiming to perform a watchdog function. Khmara was dissolved and most active NGO leaders took high-level jobs in the new Georgian government, while the rest of the NGO sector was alienated and excluded from serious public discourse. In Moldova, no new major civic initiatives emerged from the 2009 protests. Some

<sup>1</sup> Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Joerg Forbrig and Pavol Demes, *Reclaiming Democracy: Civil Society and Electoral Change in Eastern Europe* (German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Serhiy Kudelia, 'Betting on Society: Power Perceptions and Elite Games in Ukraine', in Paul J. D'Anieri (ed.), *Orange Revolution and Aftermath: Mobilization, Apathy and the State in Ukraine* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010).

activists joined the government; others became television presenters or active guests of political talk shows. Groups such as Hyde Park Chisinau transformed themselves into more informal networks. In Ukraine and Moldova, part of the sector was tamed by joining public advisory councils and going into 'business as usual' to implement Western-financed projects with marginal outreach to citizens. Meanwhile, relative media freedom and the mushrooming of the new television political talk shows slightly expanded the public space for ordinary citizens to participate in national debates.

### Civil society or NGO-crazy?

In all three countries, citizens are largely isolated from public deliberations about important issues because local NGOs have little ability to help them formulate opinions and influence state policies that affect them. Western-funded organizations are not anchored in society and constitute a form of 'NGO-crazy': a system where professional NGO leaders use access to domestic policy-makers and Western donors to influence public policies without having a constituency in society.

NGO-crazy means that many Western-funded organizations are disconnected from wider society. Despite the growing numbers of registered NGOs, very few citizens participate, volunteer their time or make donations to NGOs. The low figures for citizen engagement – 5 per cent of the population in Ukraine, 4 per cent in Moldova and 4.8 per cent in Georgia – have remained unchanged for the last twenty years.<sup>4</sup> This has been attributed to a lack of trust in voluntary organizations, stemming from the communist period, which also prevented citizens from organizing in associations during the transition period in post-Soviet countries.<sup>5</sup>

It is because citizens do not know their local NGOs that they are reluctant to contribute their time or financial resources. Instead they mostly donate money to fellow citizens in need, supporting churches, monasteries, beggars and victims of natural disasters. Donations to NGOs in Moldova are ten times lower than to churches.<sup>6</sup> In Georgia, 83 per cent of NGOs report that they have never received an individual donation.<sup>7</sup> The low levels of NGO membership are reflected in the volunteering numbers: only a third of NGOs in Georgia report having even one or two volunteers.<sup>8</sup>

Much evidence today suggests that in the course of the post-Soviet transitions, a rather elitist non-profit-organization sector emerged, which focused on professional consulting and service provision. These features are present in all three countries, where many NGOs sprang up in response to the supply of Western funding, or as spin-offs of various technical assistance programmes.

### Avant-garde NGO elite

To gain a better understanding of the perceptions of NGO leaders in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, a short online survey was conducted, asking organizations to identify their sources of strength and their role in democracy.<sup>9</sup> The findings reveal that NGOs believe they play an avant-garde role in transition, where they know better than the average citizen, and discount the importance of mass movements as a driver of social change. The NGO survey confirms a very strong emphasis on expertise, with 73 per cent of respondents saying that the strength of their organizations stems mostly from the expertise of their employees. One Georgian sociologist describes them as intellectuals and experts who have learned to interact with embassies and Western foundations and acquired the know-how to report on projects.<sup>10</sup>

4 For Ukraine: Democratic Initiatives Foundation, survey, 'Can civil society influence Ukrainian politics?', October 2011. For Moldova: behaviour in the Republic of Moldova, December 2010, <http://www.everychild.md/en/node/267>. For Georgia: 'Citizens' Attitudes towards Civil Society Organizations and Civic Activism: 2011 Public Opinion Survey Results', East-West Management Institute, 2011. [http://www.ewmi-gpac.org/failebi/citizens\\_attitudes\\_toward\\_csos\\_and\\_civic\\_activism\\_report\\_eng\\_55445.pdf](http://www.ewmi-gpac.org/failebi/citizens_attitudes_toward_csos_and_civic_activism_report_eng_55445.pdf).

5 Marc Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

6 Every Child Moldova, December 2010.

7 CIVICUS, '2011 State of Civil Society Report, Georgia Country Profile', <http://socs.civicus.org/>.

8 Ibid.

9 Author's survey, 'Civil Society and Democratization', based on 77 responses from leaders of NGOs financed by Western donors (45 from Ukraine, 16 from Georgia and 6 from Moldova).

10 Interview with Emzar Jgerenia. Georgian weekly *Tabula*, 19 March 2012, <http://en.tabula.ge/print-6531.html>.

In the best-case scenario, NGO leaders approach citizens as either their ‘target audience’ or as beneficiaries of their services. Only 27 per cent of those surveyed described their organization as an association of citizens. Generating a social foundation for democracy and supporting citizens’ rights ranked third and fourth among NGOs’ goals. Building trust and networks was the least undertaken function. Membership development was not perceived as a priority, and only 20 per cent considered that the strength of their organizations came from a membership base. In one survey in Moldova, when asked why people do not join NGOs, 49 per cent responded that nobody asked them to.<sup>11</sup> When citizens are not at the heart of these organizations, they become passive consumers of democracy development aid instead of the driving force behind democratic change.

Western money allows NGOs to attract talent, but their full-time employees are more comfortable networking with Western embassies and various state agencies than holding town hall consultations and engaging with citizens

More than 66 per cent of the NGO leaders surveyed said that the most important function of civil society in a democratic system was to influence public policy; 50 per cent said they aimed to promote accountability in politics; and 52 per cent said that the strength of their NGO was driven by access to decision-makers in government and various administrative agencies. The impact of this effort

is weak, however, especially in policy areas that challenge the state’s political and economic power. Over 70 per cent of Georgian NGO leaders said that their policy impact was minimal.<sup>12</sup> They invest their time and resources on issues where they have little capacity to deliver tangible results. This failure is explained by their weak societal basis, closed government structures, and the irrelevance of their analysis to policy-makers.

The elitist nature of NGOs is largely attributable to the fact that their main sources of funding are foreign. Western money allows NGOs to attract talent, but their full-time employees are more comfortable networking with Western embassies and various state agencies than holding town hall consultations and engaging with citizens. For example, following the 2009 electoral revolution in Moldova, NGO leaders met with foreign embassies and donors to consult over priorities but no major public forum or debate was launched to discuss a national reform agenda.<sup>13</sup> Reliance on foreign financing has not decreased over the years: 95 per cent of Georgian NGOs have never received support from local businesses and the situation is similar in Moldova. In Ukraine, however, about 50 per cent of financing now comes from membership fees, government, citizens and business contributions.<sup>14</sup>

The connection between NGOs and the private sector is nevertheless still weak in Ukraine. The growth of a corporate social responsibility agenda – mainly driven by international companies operating there – offers the possibility of partnership and is viewed by NGOs as a source of sponsorship. Social welfare, education and healthcare are three major areas of corporate support for NGOs, but most companies also view NGOs as inefficient and tend to provide assistance directly to beneficiaries or establish their own corporate foundations.<sup>15</sup> NGO leaders in Ukraine say that the low level of cooperation with business is due to the latter’s reluctance to engage and low level of awareness about NGOs. Thus the reliance on Western sources of funding endures.

11 Every Child Moldova, December 2010.

12 CIVICUS, 2011.

13 Author’s interview: European diplomat in Chisinau.

14 Lyubov Palyvoda and Sophia Golota, *Civil Society Organisations in Ukraine: State and Dynamics 2002–2010* (Kyiv: Kupol Publishing, 2010).

15 Ukrainian Grantmakers Forum, ‘Charity Practices of Ukrainian Businesses’, 2010.

Both large private foundations and local businesses find it too risky to expose themselves as supporters of civic initiatives that may alienate the state. They steer clear of fighting such issues as corruption, human rights violations or media censorship. Two of the largest private foundations in Ukraine, Development of Ukraine and the Victor Pinchuk Foundation, prefer to focus on softer issues such as healthcare, education and culture, providing direct financial assistance to state institutions or individuals. They do not operate as grant-making foundations and often implement programmes themselves.

Reliance on foreign funding drives local NGOs to work towards donor-driven agendas. Many NGO leaders have acknowledged this problem. According to one, 'NGOs work around grants and experts and not around the interest of the citizens'.<sup>16</sup> This leads to a mismatch, where citizens think that issues such as elections and human rights already receive adequate attention from NGOs, and would like to see more initiatives related to economic development.

Increasingly, NGOs are functioning as private consulting companies and not as open, inclusive democratic institutions. Few organizations have operational independent boards, publish annual reports, convene general assemblies of members or have elected executive directors. They provide services to foreign donors who fund their projects and, when possible, to governments. They develop recommendations, write reports, organize training and study trips for government officials, and hold conferences.

These professionals form a prestigious 'NGO bureaucracy' and participate in national and international events. This could be considered evidence of a civil voice, but it is hardly the case. The National Participation Council of Moldova includes 30 NGOs based in the capital, of which only six list membership on their website. This can

scarcely be considered representative of civil society. As one observer in Moldova pointed out: 'Quite often NGOs are centred on one leader or a group of leaders who are trying to promote certain ideas and actions, and over time this leads to a certain detachment from the real voice and needs of the society'.<sup>17</sup>

### Mute voices of NGOs

NGOs have a poor media profile in all of the three countries. Although local and regional newspapers report their activities, television is the main source of information. NGO experts, especially from foreign policy and economic think-tanks, participate in national political talk shows but they are perceived as individual experts rather than as representatives of certain groups in society. NGOs therefore have a weak status as shapers of public opinion. The editor-in-chief of a leading Ukrainian weekly magazine could name only five local organizations and two civic movements out of more than 71,000 registered NGOs in his country.<sup>18</sup> In addition, only 9.5 per cent of Ukrainians say that NGOs inform them about important issues.<sup>19</sup> Most NGO activities pass unnoticed by the wider public. In one recent example, an appeal to the president of Ukraine, signed by 47 NGOs and 13 independent experts, to implement the Open Government Partnership initiative was not reported in the national media.<sup>20</sup> This is partly due to poor NGO communication skills and partly because few donors require media outreach or advocacy efforts from the NGOs they support.

With rare exceptions, leading think tanks and NGOs, which have been financed for over a decade by Western donors, failed to tap into recent innovation offered by social media and networks as a source of outreach – even though increasing media censorship and state-controlled content, particularly in Ukraine and Georgia, make the spread of independent information through social media particularly

<sup>16</sup> Author's interview: Svitlana Zalizhchuk, New Citizen Initiative founder in Kyiv.

<sup>17</sup> Author's interview: Igor Meriacre, Director of NGO Motivacija in Chisinau.

<sup>18</sup> National Institute of Strategic Studies, Kyiv, 'State of Civil Society Development in Ukraine', 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Svitlana Kuts and Lyuba Palyvoda, 'Civil Society in Ukraine: Driving Engine or Spare Wheel for Change?', CIVICUS, 2006, p. 74, [https://www.civicus.org/media/CSI\\_Ukraine\\_Country\\_Report.pdf](https://www.civicus.org/media/CSI_Ukraine_Country_Report.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> The Open Government Partnership is a global initiative launched on 20 September 2011 and has commitments from 55 governments to become more transparent, effective and accountable to their citizens, <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/>.

important. For example, the Razumkov Center, a leading Ukrainian think-tank, has 748 followers on Facebook, whereas the Moldovan Foreign Policy Association and the Institute of Public Policy in Chisinau have no Facebook presence at all.<sup>21</sup> Even for the most successful groups, the social media dynamic is weak. Between January and June 2012, Facebook membership of the New Citizen Initiative grew by only around 8 per cent compared with general Facebook growth in Ukraine of 30 per cent.<sup>22</sup>

Poor media outreach weakens NGOs. Local NGOs like to cultivate a mystique about their activities, which are only open to scrutiny by donors or public authorities, but this creates a negative image and tends to make the wider public suspicious. More than half of Ukrainians who are familiar with NGOs do not know what function they perform.<sup>23</sup> In Georgia, NGOs are the least understood of all public institutions,<sup>24</sup> while in Moldova 80 per cent of the population do not even know what an NGO is.<sup>25</sup>

Paradoxically, NGO leaders surveyed for this research say they have support of society for their work. They rank citizen support third as a source of strength after expertise and access to decision-makers. Yet citizen support is more likely wishful thinking. Only 22 per cent of Ukrainians, 21 per cent of Moldovans and 18 per cent of Georgians say they trust local NGOs.<sup>26</sup> These are very low percentages compared with trust in other institutions, such as the army, police or local government, especially in Georgia.

## The feeble fabric of civil society

Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine share the legacy of a totalitarian regime. The Soviet system aimed to suppress public debate, eliminate critical thinking and bring collective endeavours under state control. It also left behind

flourishing corruption, informal networks, and disengaged citizens who were reluctant to participate in public initiatives. It has given way to a never-ending transition to democracy. The very fact that democracy has been only partially achieved is further damaging public trust and confidence in the system.

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The NGO-crazy in these three countries undermines democracy promotion initiatives. Because NGOs have failed to overcome the Soviet legacy and occupy the narrow public space between the private sphere and the state, governments have *carte blanche*.

### Uncivil societies

In contrast to the Western notion of civility in society, where citizens have broad respect for one another based on trust and security, societies in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have ‘uncivil’ traits with instances of the repression of the will of citizens. Among ‘uncivil’ traits is the weak rule of law and high levels of corruption, apart from in Georgia.<sup>27</sup> Citizens do not form organized groups to drive collective action, rendering them powerless to influence political developments. Private connections and links to kinship and clientelist networks are more instrumental in achieving success in public life and influencing the state.

21 As at the time of writing.

22 Social Bakers, ‘Ukraine Facebook Statistics’, <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/ukraine>.

23 International Foundation for Electoral Systems, ‘Key Findings: Public Opinion in Ukraine, 2011’, [http://www.ifes.org/~media/Files/Publications/Survey/2011/Public\\_Opinion\\_in\\_Ukraine\\_2011\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ifes.org/~media/Files/Publications/Survey/2011/Public_Opinion_in_Ukraine_2011_Report.pdf).

24 ‘Citizens’ Attitudes toward Civil Society Organizations and Civic Activism, Georgia’, East-West Management Institute, 2011.

25 Every Child Moldova, December 2010.

26 For Ukraine: Razumkov Center, public opinion poll, ‘Do You Trust NGOs?’, 2011, [http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll\\_id=81](http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=81). For Moldova: Institute of Public Policy, ‘Barometer of Public Opinion – November 2011’. For Georgia: ‘Citizens’ Attitudes toward Civil Society Organizations and Civic Activism, Georgia’, East-West Management Institute, 2011.

27 Transparency International rates Georgia 64th in the Corruption Perception Index, while Moldova ranks 112th and Ukraine 152nd out of the 183 countries on the index. Transparency International UK, Corruption Perception Index, <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results/>.

Citizens are slow and reluctant to take public initiatives and engage in collective action. Not only well-established NGOs but new types of public associations also face difficulties in engaging citizens. Neighbourhood associations have started to develop in Ukraine, but they remain marginal in Georgia and Moldova. They are set up by citizens to improve the management of apartment blocks and their leaders often view them as grassroots schools of democracy, where citizens learn to cooperate for the public good. According to the Ukrainian government there are around 14,000 registered associations, though this covers only about 10 per cent of all apartment blocks. Despite low satisfaction levels with state-run utilities, citizens are reluctant to form such associations. Legislative deficiencies also limit their further development and the government is reluctant to create a more enabling environment.

With very little formal associative life, citizens rely on informal and kinship networks. The connection between these and often invisible and corrupt networks breeds a culture of closed values and dependency. In Georgia, 47 per cent of citizens say that connections are the most important factor in getting a job. This contrasts with 22 per cent who see education as the main factor.<sup>28</sup> In Ukraine 43 per cent of students declared that they needed connections for any kind of success.<sup>29</sup>

In political life there are also links within interest groups built around integrating people into vertical clientelist networks, which mostly centre around the redistribution of public resources, state jobs or economic benefits. These networks are often built on the economic dependence of interest groups on certain political or financial leaders. They are stronger in a more centralized, resource-rich and corrupt system such as Ukraine, but are also present in Georgia and Moldova. Recent attempts by President Yanukovich to limit Ukraine's democratic space and create a system dominated by

one party have been successful partly because they were based on the distribution of financial resources to interest groups in exchange for political loyalty. It is frequently reported that voters are 'bought' before elections.<sup>30</sup> State funding for sport associations, youth NGOs and art groups is also said to be granted in exchange for electoral support or direct membership of the ruling Party of Regions.<sup>31</sup>

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Another 'uncivil' characteristic of these societies is corruption. Citizens rely mainly on informal networks to deal with the state and protect their rights. This is more visible in countries with higher levels of corruption, notably Ukraine and Moldova, where around 30 per cent of citizens said they offered bribes in 2010.<sup>32</sup> The casual corruption and individual approaches to getting services from the state deprives these societies of the participatory spirit needed to propose systemic solutions to reform sectors such as healthcare, education and law enforcement. Citizens acquiesce in corruption in order to receive services from the state and accept these practices because they feel powerless to change the system.

28 Caucasus Research and Resource Centers, 'An Assessment of Social Capital in Georgia', 2011, p. 18.

29 Gorshenin Institute, 'Students: An Image of the Future', 2011, Ukraine [http://gorshenin.eu/annuals/5\\_students-an\\_image\\_of\\_the\\_future.html](http://gorshenin.eu/annuals/5_students-an_image_of_the_future.html).

30 'Buying in Votes: Who Will Start sooner?', Radio Svoboda, 21 May 2012, <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/24502988.html>.

31 Victor Bobyrenko, 'Civil Society. Thimble Game', *Ukrainska Pravda*, 8 December 2011, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2011/12/8/6819061/>.

32 Transparency International, Global Corruption Barometer, 2010/2011, <http://gcb.transparency.org/gcb201011/>.

### The role of the church

The Orthodox Church enjoys a high level of public trust and has a strong mobilization capacity in the region. It has a self-proclaimed moral authority over many aspects of social life and governance. In all three countries, it is the most trusted institution and a powerful opinion-maker. The level of trust in religious institutions is 68 per cent in Ukraine, 79 per cent in Moldova and 88 per cent in Georgia.<sup>33</sup>

This trust and a strong social outreach allow religious institutions to play a role in the development of civil society. Local parishes have started promoting voluntary action on secular issues related to social inequality, public health and youth engagement. Faith-based charitable foundations, such as Caritas in Ukraine and International Orthodox Christian Charities in Georgia, as well as local religious associations, play an active role in addressing issues such as foster care, and alcohol dependency, and provide assistance to vulnerable individuals. However, the role of the church is more visible where it is involved in politics in a narrow sense, advocating certain political issues and supporting political parties.

The limited space for public discourse in all three countries is often dominated by political and religious actors. The power of the Orthodox Church on non-religious matter is most evident in Georgia and Moldova. Religious leaders dominate the public discourse on various issues in ways that are deemed unacceptable in Western secular societies but considered normal in Georgia and Moldova. While in Western societies a variety of viewpoints is expressed and debated in the public space, in Georgia and Moldova deliberations are between the party of power, the opposition and religious establishment.

The religious discourse often pushes citizens towards intolerant rhetoric and promotes closed societies. Statements by the Georgian Patriarch Ilia II range from the 'harm' caused by Western education<sup>34</sup> to the 'danger' of religious minorities and carry considerable weight in society. One of the largest demonstrations in recent years in Georgia was a protest march in Tbilisi by thousands of people, led by the priesthood, against the law on religious minorities.<sup>35</sup>

In Moldova, recent attempts to pass an anti-discrimination law provoked public protests backed by the Orthodox Church. The law is aimed at removing discrimination against sexual minorities, which is perceived in Moldova as a rather controversial decision. Leaflets vilifying homosexuals and Muslims were circulated in the capital during the protests and were publicly supported by local priests.<sup>36</sup>

Ukraine's religious leaders are less assertive on public issues. Despite maintaining a close relationship with the state, they refrain from outright public mobilization of their supporters. They generally express their views on public matters in the media or by appealing to the senior state leadership. For example, Ukrainian churches appealed to President Yanukovich to prevent gay parades that 'lead to the moral and physical degradation of the nation'.<sup>37</sup>

Such statements resonate with the wider public, particularly in Georgia and Moldova. These societies, which are not exposed to diversity and are mostly homogeneous, have negative and often intolerant attitudes towards people of different race, religion or sexual orientation. Homosexuality, in particular, is widely condemned: in recent surveys, 93 per cent of respondents in Georgia, 71 per cent in Moldova and 59 per cent in Ukraine said they would not like to have homosexuals as neighbours.<sup>38</sup>

33 For Ukraine: Razumkov Center, public opinion poll, 'Do You Trust the Church?', April 2011, Ukraine, [http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll\\_id=83](http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=83).

For Moldova: Institute of Public Policy, November 2011. For Georgia: Caucasus Research and Resource Center, 'Knowledge and Attitudes towards the EU in Georgia', December 2011.

34 'Patriarch: "Refrain from Sending Kids Abroad for Education"', *Civil.ge*, 3 October 2010, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22722>.

35 The Georgian parliament amended the civil code to allow religious minorities to be registered as legal entities, following a suggestion by the Council of Europe that legal protection of religious denominations other than the Orthodox Church should be enhanced.

36 'Battle over Moldovan Anti-discrimination Bill Reaches Fevered Pitch', *Radio Free Europe*, 18 May 2012, [http://www.rferl.org/content/moldova\\_gay\\_antidiscrimination\\_law\\_opposition/24541486.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/moldova_gay_antidiscrimination_law_opposition/24541486.html).

37 'Appeal to the President of Ukraine by the Religious Leaders', *Bohoslov Forum*, 4 April 2012, <http://www.bohoslov.org.ua/distribution/post3505.html>.

38 World Value Survey 2005–2008, <http://www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs/WVSanalyzeStudy.jsp>.

A 2011 joint statement by three church leaders on the twentieth anniversary of the Ukrainian referendum for independence attracted public attention by calling on society to recognize that the reason for the failures of contemporary Ukraine lay with its citizens, pointing to a crisis in values.<sup>39</sup> The statement was endorsed by eleven civic leaders, all highly respected intellectuals, former dissidents and writers. In 2011 they launched the December 1 Initiative, a national debate to re-energize the discussion about how to improve political culture and the state of democracy in Ukraine. The statement points to the need to unite the efforts of citizens who oppose the policies that are damaging the country: ‘Their weakness is in their civic atomization and because they do not join forces.’<sup>40</sup>

## Unrestrained states

The weakness of civil society not only renders citizens helpless to prevent backsliding by ruling elites, it also allows those holding power to commit abuses. This is particularly vividly illustrated in Ukraine. Selective justice in imprisoning opposition leaders, media censorship, corruption, raids on businesses and the use of force against non-violent protests are just some examples of the country’s degradation.<sup>41</sup> In Georgia, despite competitive parliamentary elections in October 2012, the reduction of petty corruption and economic liberalization, the political system still lacks openness and public oversight. State control over the media, abuse of administrative resources by the ruling party during the elections and frequent attempts to tilt the playing field against the opposition Georgian Dream party, established by billionaire

businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili, raise serious doubts about the presence of checks and balances in the previous political system. Moldova’s democratic consolidation is still in question as the country recovers from years of communist rule and moves towards improving freedom of expression and combating corruption.<sup>42</sup>

In all three states democratic reforms are either at a standstill or uncertain, and a significant majority of citizens in Ukraine and Moldova say that their countries are moving in the wrong direction.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, they believe they are powerless to influence the state: only around 18 per cent of Moldovans<sup>44</sup> and Ukrainians<sup>45</sup> say that they have any impact on policy-making at the national level. NGO leaders also express concern about their marginal impact, with 70 per cent of them in Georgia saying that their policy impact is minimal and that they can only achieve success in areas that do not challenge the political or economic power of the state.<sup>46</sup>

Post-Soviet governments often fake dialogue with their societies or limit their role. Ruling elites, especially in Ukraine, manoeuvre around public pressure and became skilled in the rhetoric of civil society while paying only lip-service to it. They adopt civil society development strategies, invite independent experts for consultations, hold public councils and respond to public inquiries. Then they do what they always intended to do. In April 2012 Andrii Kluiiev, the head of Ukraine’s National Security Council, declared that greater citizen access to governmental operations was needed to ensure public control of the authorities and reduce corruption.<sup>47</sup> Yet the reality on the ground is far from a situation of openness and the Ukrainian government takes most of its decisions without serious public debate.

39 Statement of leaders of Ukrainian Churches, Religious Information Service of Ukraine, 1 December 2011, [http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/resourses/church\\_doc/ecumen\\_doc/45747/](http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/resourses/church_doc/ecumen_doc/45747/).

40 Declaration of Initiative Group ‘December 1st’, *Sivershchyna*, 1 December 2011, [http://siver.com.ua/news/iniaciava\\_pershogo\\_grudnja/2011-12-14-9199](http://siver.com.ua/news/iniaciava_pershogo_grudnja/2011-12-14-9199).

41 Freedom House, in its *Freedom in the World* 2012 edition, downgraded Ukraine from ‘free’ to ‘partly free’.

42 See Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2012, <http://www.bti-project.org/country-reports/pse/mda/>.

43 67 per cent in Ukraine (Razumkov Center, public opinion poll, December 2011) and 83 per cent in Moldova (Institute for Public Policy, Barometer of Public Opinion, November 2011).

44 Institute of Public Policy, November 2011.

45 Democratic Initiatives Foundation, ‘Can Civil Society Influence Policymaking in Ukraine?’, 12 October 2011, [http://dif.org.ua/ua/polls/2011-year/chi-zmozhe-gromadjanske-suspilstvo-vplivnuti-na-ukrainsku-politiku\\_.htm](http://dif.org.ua/ua/polls/2011-year/chi-zmozhe-gromadjanske-suspilstvo-vplivnuti-na-ukrainsku-politiku_.htm).

46 CIVICUS 2011.

47 Andrii Kluiiev, ‘Ukraine cannot develop efficiently without people’s active participation’, *Day*, 29 April 2012, <http://www.day.kiev.ua/226046/>.

What is striking is how governments in all three countries adopted major policy decisions without real public debate. Controversial education reforms in Moldova, a new tax code in Ukraine, the extension of the Russian Black Sea Fleet facilities in the Crimea and the Saakashvili government's plan to build the new port-city of Lazi in Georgia are just a few examples of crucial decisions taken without wider consultations. Citizens are not satisfied with this approach: for instance, 68 per cent of Georgians say they regret that the decision on Lazi was taken without any public discussion.<sup>48</sup>

Part of the problem is that governments do not see NGOs as credible counterparts, nor do they consider wider consultations beneficial. Most high-level government officials have a demeaning attitude towards NGOs. Knowing their weak societal basis, government officials believe they are elitist, non-representative and do not understand the complexities of political life. In the Moldovan and Georgian governments, the state-NGO relationship is more intertwined because several top government officials have come from civil society. As a result, their organizations, think-tanks in most cases, became reluctant to take an objective, independent stance on government policies. The migration of these NGO leaders to government revealed the lack of any independent support base for their organizations.

### Public councils

Organized civil society in all three countries is trying to establish dialogue with the state. Public councils that have advisory status to national and local government agencies are often viewed as a way for citizens to provide input to policy-making. Ukraine has a longer tradition of public councils, which since 2004 have existed alongside central and local governmental agencies. They received a new boost in 2011 through a law on civil participation in state policy formulation and

implementation, which required government agencies at both national and regional level to establish public councils. Today 93 per cent of these councils are operational. Analysis shows, however, that they are inefficient as a tool for public consultations. Public hearings and councils are used simply to legitimize decisions already adopted.<sup>49</sup> The state bureaucracy is not ready for transparent cooperation where less than half of central government agencies present their draft decisions for public discussions. Some segments of governance are closed to public scrutiny: municipal construction, land and communal property management, consumer tariff prices and local budgeting.<sup>50</sup> But it is not all the fault of the state; their work is also hampered by deficiencies in civil society itself. Civic leaders are unprepared for effective cooperation, council members have no skills in policy analysis or budgeting, and many violations have occurred as a result of activists dishonestly withholding information.<sup>51</sup>

There has been less analysis of the track record of public councils in Georgia and Moldova, but in the latter there is a more cooperative spirit between the government and local NGOs than in Georgia or Ukraine. The Moldovan authorities are more open to dialogue through the National Participatory Council. Created in 2010, it is well organized, meets regularly and has advisory status to the cabinet. Its head claims that it performs its main function of keeping independent experts informed about key government policies.<sup>52</sup> Where human resources are scarce, there is governmental interest in tapping into the expertise of NGOs. An additional aim is to demonstrate to the European Union the government's active cooperation with civil society.

The 2009 amendments to the law on self-governance in Georgia required local authorities to engage citizens in policy formulation. Public councils and citizens' advisory

48 National Democratic Institute, 'Public Attitudes in Georgia', February 2012.

49 National Institute of Strategic Studies, 2012.

50 Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Studies, National Report on the Monitoring of Public Councils at the Local and National Governmental Agencies in Ukraine, 2011, <http://gromrady.org.ua/?p=7503>.

51 Victor Bobyrenko, 'Civil society. Thimble game', *Ukrainska Pravda*, 8 December 2011, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2011/12/8/6819061/>.

52 Author's interview: Sorin Meriacre, Head of the National Participation Council, Moldova.

committees, composed of public figures and NGO representatives, operate in Tbilisi city hall and in some national ministries, but most exist only on paper. At this stage of the country's democratic transformation these are a useful way to open up national and local government to public scrutiny. Their power is limited, however, often owing to the formal approach by the bureaucracy and weak NGO expertise.

### Taming with money

Funding is another dimension of state–civil society relations. In resource-rich Ukraine, state funding is a way of co-opting civil groups. This is used to create a loyal civil society, especially if money is disbursed on a non-transparent and clientelist basis, which is often the case. In Ukraine, compared with Georgia and Moldova, the level of such financing is high: in 2011 the national budget included almost \$31 million for various associations – four times more than the Soros Foundation's budget for Ukraine.<sup>53</sup> Most of this funding is allocated without any competitive process to sports, arts and youth groups and organizations serving people with various disabilities and veteran associations. Only two out of 78 central executive agencies have a competitive procedure for these funds. The rest are used arbitrarily to support various interest groups. Many regional party leaders 'own' sports associations, which allow both clients and patrons to gain advantage from each other. For example, the state uses financing for sports federations in exchange for membership of or loyalty to the ruling Party of Regions.<sup>54</sup> No state funding is available for human rights, environmental or advocacy NGOs.

The picture is similar in Moldova, where most social benefit associations receive annual state funding. Minor support goes on a competitive basis to projects and cultural programmes organized by public associations. The funding is decentralized and ministries have special funds for promoting certain activities, e.g. the environment ministry's Ecological Fund.

In Georgia, the Saakashvili government chose a different approach. A Civil Institutional Development Fund was established in 2009 with an annual budget of just over \$360,000. It runs open competitions for NGOs and finances around 100 projects annually. This is a marginal amount compared with Western grants to Georgian NGOs, which in 2011 amounted to about \$15 million.<sup>55</sup> But the model of an independent institution managing state financing of NGOs is worth replicating in other countries as it is more in line with the standards of open and accountable governance.

There is a fragile balance between the state and society in all three countries. Improvement will come from building a model where civil society will either counterbalance or complement the state. In all three countries, where democratic gains are unconsolidated, the role of civil society will also shift between counterbalance and cooperation, with more democratic and open systems producing more collaborative civil societies. In Georgia and Ukraine, civil society leans more towards the counterbalancing function, while in Moldova it is inclined to play a more complementary role.

### New civil voices

New forms of civil associations offer insight into what real citizen engagement would look like and what impact it could have on the state. The protests following fraudulent elections in Russia in 2012 showed that, even in a more repressive political system, citizens with a more acute awareness of their political rights can emerge. Post-Soviet transitions created societies divided between cynicism and empowered optimism. Whether joining specific campaigns, protesting against the destruction of heritage sites, volunteering for environmental causes or demanding justice for human rights abuses, the empowered part of society will give a new boost to democratization. Citizens capable of critical thinking about state affairs who are willing to express their views publicly and even challenge the state will be the main agents of change.

<sup>53</sup> National Institute of Strategic Studies, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> Bobyrenko, 'Civil society. Thimble game.'

<sup>55</sup> East-West Management G-PAC project website, '2011 Schedule of Donors' Grants', <http://www.ewmi-gpac.org/index.php>.

### Citizens challenging the state

In recent years, citizens of all three countries have demonstrated a growing willingness to challenge the state and hold their governments to account. More people are willing to participate in political demonstrations and boycotts; more have signed petitions or appealed to the authorities. Around 20 per cent of Moldovans and Georgians appealed to the authorities in regard to public services, political rights and environmental protection.<sup>56</sup> Around 30 per cent of Ukrainians say they would protest in the event of price rises, unemployment or job cuts.<sup>57</sup> These non-violent actions are important expressions of civil energy. Research shows stronger linkages between the quality of governance and the level of such self-expression in society compared with membership of citizens in NGOs.<sup>58</sup>

‘Citizens of all three countries have demonstrated a growing willingness to challenge the state and hold their governments to account’

In 2010 and 2011 Ukraine witnessed an awakening of civil movements that had seemed dormant since the Orange Revolution. Two major national movements related to tax and educational reforms gained prominence. The most vivid example was the 2010 Tax Maidan-II,<sup>59</sup> when about 90,000 representatives from small and medium-sized businesses protested against the new tax and labour codes, with partial success. In 2011 representatives of various organizations, including those supporting miners and Chernobyl and Afghan war victims, blocked

the adoption of cuts in benefits for these groups. Later that same year, students and academics protested against reforms in higher education and influenced the legislative process by developing an alternative law with the help of an independent public committee. Smaller but equally successful were regional demonstrations to stop the destruction of the historic centre and green public spaces in Kyiv.

In October 2011 a new citizens’ initiative that unites about 50 NGOs from the regions and Kyiv launched a public information campaign called *Chesno* (Fair), to monitor the quality of party candidates for the October 2012 parliamentary elections. *Chesno* conducted a poll to ask the public what qualities it wanted from members of parliament, and published the results on its website. These qualities include a good parliamentary attendance record, respect for human rights, declaration of income and no record of corruption. Activists monitor party lists for ‘compliance’ and regularly communicate their findings on websites and in press conferences.<sup>60</sup> As a result of an extensive PR campaign, all major political parties agreed to cooperate with the movement during the October elections – with the exception of the ruling Party of Regions. *Chesno* successfully used social media to build the collective power of the movement. Its Facebook page unites over 6,000 followers. All of these movements were non-political, non-violent and organized by grassroots associations and activists, aiming to protect citizens’ rights.

The scale of state-challenging movements in Georgia and Moldova is smaller. Attempts to mobilize publics around common issues include protests to save historic places such as Gudiashvili Square in Tbilisi or the post office building in the centre of Chisinau. In Georgia, where the public space has been highly politicized, most mobilization was happening around political movements and not around issues of concern to individual citizens. Post-Rose Revolution public movements include

<sup>56</sup> East-West Management Institute, 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Razumkov Center, ‘Public Opinion Summary of 2011’, [http://razumkov.org.ua/ukr/news.php?news\\_id=386](http://razumkov.org.ua/ukr/news.php?news_id=386).

<sup>58</sup> Christian Welzel, Ronald Inglehart and Franziska Deutsch, ‘Social Capital, Voluntary Associations and Collective Action’, paper presented at the 2005 ASPA Annual Meeting, Washington, DC.

<sup>59</sup> Maidan-I referred to the Orange Revolution Protests in October 2004.

<sup>60</sup> Chesno web site, <http://www.chesno.org/>.

Defend Georgia!, the 7 November Movement and, of course, the winner of the October 2012 parliamentary elections, Georgian Dream. All these movements have political goals. A rare exception is a new public initiative, 'This affects you too!', designed to amend the law on political unions to preclude possible intimidation of a wider range of civic organizations. This first major non-partisan public advocacy campaign since the Rose Revolution united over 80 advocacy groups and media outlets, and mobilized around 3,000 supporters on Facebook.

On the eve of the October 2012 parliamentary elections in Georgia, 'This affects you too!' demanded that the authorities ensure that all television channels with a valid licence broadcast with no restrictions during and after polling day.<sup>61</sup> The National Communications Commission failed to deliver on this demand in time for the elections, but the pressure from local and international actors to make the so-called 'Must Carry' law permanent has continued since, albeit with less vigour.<sup>62</sup>

These peaceful protests and expressions of civil engagement are becoming a part of everyday public life and, especially in the case of Ukraine, are expected to grow. At present these protests are the only way to counterbalance the state and defend the rights of citizens. This growing drive for self-expression provides a window of opportunity for civil society activists, encouraging them to talk to citizens and act as platforms for their opinions. Already, some leaders are trying to organize citizens and build up moderate segments of society around specific issues. Current civil society movements try to defend the rights of interest groups and professions: journalists, small and medium-sized businesses, students or urban communities. They often focus on a single-issue agenda such as media freedom, economic liberalization or the preservation of the country's heritage.

### Social media

Social networks allow the creation of more informal, wider groups that unite citizens in efforts to protect their rights. Despite lower internet penetration than in the West, individual usage in all three countries is growing at a much higher rate than business or government usage.<sup>63</sup> On average, about 30 per cent of the population use the internet daily in Ukraine and Moldova, and 26 per cent in Georgia. These numbers are much higher (around 80 per cent daily) among young people.<sup>64</sup> Most young people interact in social networks. Between January and May 2012, Facebook usage expanded by 38 per cent in Ukraine, and 22 and 23 per cent in Moldova and Georgia respectively.<sup>65</sup>

‘The role of social media is important for spreading ideas and motivating citizens to take action where financial and personal risks are low’

Recently, particularly in Ukraine, new movements have successfully used social media to build informal groups, mostly among students, local activists and NGO leaders. 'We are Europeans', the movement for Ukraine's European integration, the public network for the preservation of the historic street Andriyivskyy Descent from commercial development, and Hospitable Republic (against the privatization of Hostynny Dvir – a historical landmark in Kyiv) are just a few recent examples. 'Stop Destroying Gudiashvili Square' in Georgia and 'Postman of Chisinau' or Curaj TV and Hyde Park, all in Moldova, are also networks uniting activists online. The nature of

61 'This Affects You Too!' Appeal, 9 September 2012, *Democracy and Freedom Watch*, <http://dfwatch.net/campaigners-ask-for-extension-of-must-carry-61838>.

62 'Georgia Communication Watchdog Sabotaging Must Carry', *Democracy and Freedom Watch*, 19 September 2012, <http://dfwatch.net/georgian-communications-watchdog-sabotaging-must-carry-30797>. See also 'Must Carry and Must Offer May Stay', *Georgia Online*, 16 October 2012, <http://georgiaonline.ge/news/a1/society/1350412855.php>.

63 World Economic Forum, 'Global Information Technology Report 2012', <http://www.weforum.org/issues/global-information-technology>.

64 Gorshenin Institute, 2011.

65 Social Breakers, 'Facebook Statistics by Country, May 2012', <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/?interval=last-6-months#chart-intervals>.

these networks is democratic and they have horizontal structures. For example, 'We are Europeans' functions as a network of coordinators and members. Membership is open to anyone and activities are organized around thematic working groups chaired by coordinators. The movement is divided into sub-groups that are responsible for media, public events, EU expertise, legal and information technology support, administration and new members. Another important feature is that these movements are not just virtual but also exist in the physical public space. They hold street performances to draw attention to issues. Some, like Hostynny Dvir, occupy public spaces and run independent cultural festivals at the venue.

The role of social media is important for spreading ideas and motivating citizens to take action where financial and personal risks are low. A limitation of online activism, however, is that it cannot confront socially entrenched norms and practices – something that is needed to develop a stronger civil society – as this requires thorough planning and a hierarchy.<sup>66</sup> Many groups spread political commentary or start virtual initiatives without any follow-up to develop ties between members. As a result, many online movements so far have failed to deliver. A Ukrainian Facebook group supporting the civil society candidate for the position of ombudsman on human rights managed to bring only a handful of supporters to Parliament Square on polling day. Its candidate lost to the government-backed one and the initiative collapsed. Offline activities are needed for effective collaboration between core members. Otherwise, social media will be a substitute for 'real' activism and divert public attention from crucial social issues.

## Western donors: time for a new paradigm

Western donors have invested substantial resources in strengthening civil society in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine for almost 20 years. Most try to promote

equality and diversity, to strengthen good governance at national and local levels by empowering citizens to participate in decision-making, and to develop NGO capacity. Through the NGO projects they fund, US and European public and private donors contribute to the dynamic in the public space around training, conferences and study trips.

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) is the largest international donor to civil society in all three countries. In 2010 it spent \$31 million in Ukraine, \$19 million in Georgia and almost \$12 million in Moldova under the heading 'Governing Justly and Democratically'.<sup>67</sup> Although funding to NGOs was cut back for while, especially in Georgia after the Rose Revolution, it bounced back in 2008 when USAID launched new programmes targeting local NGOs. Today Ukrainian civil society receives almost the same level of financial support from USAID as in 2003–04. Moldova and Georgia receive almost twice as much as they did in 2003.

The European Union is the second largest donor to civil society, though it gives substantially smaller sums than USAID. Its programmes include the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).<sup>68</sup> The EU has a thematic programme targeting 'non-state actors and local authorities in development'.<sup>69</sup> These programmes add up to approximately €3 million annually for civil society in each of the three countries. The EU Civil Society Capacity Facility was launched in 2011 with €26 million for all EU neighbouring countries, with about half to be spent in the EU eastern neighbourhood.<sup>70</sup> Thanks to this facility the EU support for civil society under the ENP programme will almost double. Individual EU members, such as Sweden, Poland and Germany, are also active in supporting civil society.

66 Malcolm Gladwell, 'Small change. Why the revolution will not be tweeted', *The New Yorker*, 4 October 2010, [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa\\_fact\\_gladwell](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell).

67 Congressional Budget Justifications, *Foreign Operations, Annex: Regional Perspectives*, 2012, <http://transition.usaid.gov/performance/cbj/158268.pdf>.

68 European Commission, EIDHR 2011–2013 Multiannual Indicative Planning, [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/human-rights/documents/20110321\\_mip\\_eidhr\\_2011-2013\\_for\\_publication3\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/human-rights/documents/20110321_mip_eidhr_2011-2013_for_publication3_en.pdf).

69 European Commission, 'Non-state actors and local authorities in development', [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/dci/non\\_state\\_actors\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/dci/non_state_actors_en.htm).

70 European Commission, Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility, [http://www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=393&id\\_type=10](http://www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=393&id_type=10).

The Open Society Foundation (OSF), funded by George Soros, is also a major funder, with the budget of its local offices varying from \$7.5 million in Ukraine to \$10.7 million in Moldova and \$4 million in Georgia in recent years.<sup>71</sup>

However, there are questions about the effectiveness of Western aid. Does it help to improve the quality of civil society or does it in fact preserve the existing state of affairs – supporting the patronage networks of NGOs and maintaining the gap between a few well-connected groups and the wider public?

It has been argued that Western democracy promotion has contributed to a distortion of civil society. Some research has pointed out that the West approaches civil society with a narrow model of liberal democracy that focuses mainly on individual rights, resulting in the emergence of organizations that are elitist and disconnected from the expectations and interests of society at large.<sup>72</sup> NGO-crazy flourishes when donors are reluctant to support deliberations around ‘real’ issues and focus instead on building the internal capacity of NGOs.<sup>73</sup>

The fundamental problem with Western assistance to civil society in the post-Soviet space is that it leaves much of society untouched. Viewing civil society through the narrow lens of NGOs excludes informal youth groups, intellectuals, faith-based associations, local citizens’ initiative groups and business associations. Despite efforts to improve NGO capacity, create a more enabling legal environment and increase policy impact, local NGOs are not getting stronger. USAID’s NGO Sustainability Index shows a weak dynamic, in which Georgian and Moldovan NGOs have scarcely improved their capacity over the last ten years, while Ukrainian NGOs have done slightly better but have still shown almost no improvement since 2006.<sup>74</sup>

Donors are reluctant to work with new and informal groups, and tend to support the ‘usual suspects’, thus building a network of patronage. For example, in 2010 the OSF-Ukraine awarded 35 per cent of its civil society funding to 22 Ukrainian NGOs, which received grants two or three times during the financial year.<sup>75</sup> Most of these organizations are also recipients of USAID grants from Ukraine National Initiatives to Enhance Reforms (UNITER), a civil society capacity-building programme implemented by PACT International.

Major donors treat citizens as mere recipients of aid and NGO expertise, while their participation in policy-making and NGO development is viewed separately. In Moldova, for example, USAID financed two separate programmes, implemented by the US organizations IREX and FHI 360, focusing on citizen participation and civil society capacity-building respectively. In Georgia, this is done by another two US organizations, the East-West Management Institute and Management Systems International. The distinction of donors between citizen participation and civil society development is detrimental to building up genuine participation and higher levels of self-expression for citizens.

As for civil society as a public space for citizens’ debate and expression, the track record of donors is also dubious. As noted above, public space in all three countries is characterized by powerless citizens, a dominating state and a lack of issue-driven debate on public policy. The West has underestimated challenges of the post-Soviet transformation such as suppression of private initiative, the symbiosis between political elites and an oligarchic economy, aversion to political pluralism, the fragility of national unity and the scope of state-building tasks. Donors took the traditions of a free society for granted and assumed that the methods of Western civil society could be transferred. They have

71 For Ukraine: International Renaissance Foundation, *2011 Annual Report*, [http://www.irf.ua/files/ukr/programs/irf/annual\\_report\\_2011\\_ukr\\_final.pdf](http://www.irf.ua/files/ukr/programs/irf/annual_report_2011_ukr_final.pdf). For Georgia: Open Society Georgia Foundation, *2008 Annual Report*, [http://www.osgf.ge/files/wliuri\\_angarishi/Annual\\_Eng\\_2008.pdf](http://www.osgf.ge/files/wliuri_angarishi/Annual_Eng_2008.pdf). For Moldova: Soros Foundation – Moldova, *2011 Annual Report*, <http://www.soros.md/files/reports/2010%20ANNUAL%20REPORT%20EN.pdf>.

72 Maria Muskhelishvili and Gia Jorjoliani, ‘Georgia’s On-going Struggle for a Better Future Continued: Democracy Promotion through Civil Society Development’, *Democratization*, Vol. 17, No. 4, August 2009.

73 Anna Matveeva, ‘Exporting Civil Society: The Post-Communist Experience’, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 55, No. 2, March/April 2008.

74 USAID NGO Sustainability Index 2010, [http://www.usaid.gov/locations/europe\\_eurasia/dem\\_gov/ngoindex/](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/dem_gov/ngoindex/).

75 Renaissance awarded a total number of 139 grants to strengthen civil society in 2010. International Renaissance Foundation, *Annual Report 2010*, [http://www.irf.ua/files/ukr/programs/irf/zvit\\_2010.pdf](http://www.irf.ua/files/ukr/programs/irf/zvit_2010.pdf).

continued to award grants to NGOs focused on institution-building, advocacy and increasing dialogue with the state, even though it was becoming obvious that this approach was ineffective ten years ago. In 2002 Thomas Carothers questioned the assumption that post-Soviet countries were simply transitioning from totalitarianism to liberal democracy and pointed out that donors had not adjusted to the unsteady path of transition or taken account of the role of underlying historical and social conditions within these countries.<sup>76</sup> Today there are hardly any new approaches to strengthening civil society in the region.

‘ The fundamental problem with Western assistance to civil society in the post-Soviet space is that it leaves much of society untouched ’

There is little innovation in the ways in which additional funds for civil society are invested. The EU’s Civil Society Facility also follows the old approach to civil society support where well-established groups will receive funding to monitor state policies for their compliance with commitments to the EU. Preliminary analysis indicates that about 30 per cent of its budget will be allocated to the EU-based consultancies to map civil society in the region and provide training and networking for NGOs. Within each country, priorities may differ. In Moldova, additional funds will go to existing programmes. In Georgia, it will probably be used to involve NGOs in policy dialogue with the state, duplicating a much better-funded USAID programme.

Most experts today agree that funding for civil society is substantial and that there is even a problem with the local capacity to absorb it. The difficulty is not how much but how to nurture civil society.

## Aiding civil society

In order to ‘finish’ the colour revolutions, democracy promoters and local activists need to focus on society itself. Active and empowered citizens, not the expertise and capacity of a few NGOs, are the indicator of civil society’s strength. Despite all the shortcomings of NGO-crazy, citizens believe that these bodies are still important.<sup>77</sup> In order to capitalize on and enhance citizens’ trust, NGOs leaders must design a strategy for engaging them more.

Good NGO work is crucial for the quality of public space. It defines the culture of public debate and holds governments accountable. The defining principle of their work should be to ensure a two-way relationship with society. Whatever choice civil society leaders make, it is crucial that they remain independent. In practice, governments are unwilling to give more space to citizens in decision-making. It is up to citizens to demand and occupy this space. They should expand it little by little, by becoming better organized and more active, educated and demanding.

NGOs need to become more transparent, increase their media outreach and build more domestic and international networks. They should create independent boards, involving private-sector representatives, and expand their membership. They also need to catch up with the growing use of social networks, and to take greater advantage of the organizational opportunities offered by the internet.

NGOs would benefit from shifting their outlook from one limited to the issues of the Helsinki Declaration and human rights to one that encompasses economic justice, access to services and consumer protection. Most well-established groups direct their advocacy towards human rights and monitoring state policies, paying no attention to inequality, education, access to public utilities and the poor delivery of public services. Some NGOs do try to fill the role of the state, especially in providing social services. In Ukraine, the wider public familiar with NGOs says that they address areas that the government is unable

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Carothers, ‘The End of the Transition Paradigm’, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2002.

<sup>77</sup> In Ukraine support for NGOs almost doubled since the Orange Revolution and is now about 76 per cent. International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2011.

or unwilling to address.<sup>78</sup> But they mostly redistribute material help rather than alternatively create new products and innovative practices in the public space, which could then be transferred to state practices or the political space. Experimenting with local participatory budgeting, education reform, social enterprise, economic justice, neighbourhood associations and citizen control over the electoral process could lead to more sustainable social change.

Civil society in all three countries would benefit from Western support that focuses on building up moderate forces. Prioritizing greater citizen participation in organizations, as well as social trust, tolerance, openness and self-expression can do this. The domination of public space by the state and political life is suffocating liberal democratic developments in these countries. In order to expand the public space, donors can facilitate debate among citizens, helping to strengthen public opinion that could influence the state.

This requires long-term donor commitment as it takes time for new behaviour to take root. Donors often switch focus between priorities and instruments aimed at enabling active citizenship, such as access to information, participatory councils, rural community centres, neighbourhood associations and public spending monitoring. They would do better to invest more long-term resources into just one or two priorities that could produce a tipping point in empowering civil society.

Instead of attempting to replicate the better-funded programmes that the US government has been implementing for decades, the EU could try different approaches to revitalize civil society. These could include switching from a top-down approach, whereby local NGOs are forced to work with the government, to a bottom-up one that would include West European grassroots organizations in programme design and decision-making.

In order to strengthen the role of civil society in policy-making and promote a more favourable attitude among the Georgian, Moldovan and Georgian governments and local

authorities towards their citizens, donors need to improve awareness of European practices in citizen engagement and community organization. Western financing could also support training for local leaders in community organization and mobilization.

‘ Helping citizens in the post-Soviet space to cherish freedom and embrace their responsibilities in a democratic system of governance is crucial ’

Donors could also consider supporting non-conventional actors beyond existing NGOs, such as youth groups, students’ associations and universities, grassroots citizens’ initiative groups, intellectual circles, schools and religious organizations that pursue charitable and community goals. They could link teams of activists, creating more national and international networks, and create projects to stimulate new patterns of social behaviour and provide a clear vision of an alternative future. The belief that few NGO leaders alone can prevent democratic backsliding is a fallacy. Donors should enlarge support to new groups in addition to funding well-established NGOs.

Donors also need to consider incorporating conditionality in their support for NGOs, based on criteria including connections with citizens. This could mean requiring co-funding for projects from membership fees, a certain number of open community meetings in public places, media outreach in the community, and a share of volunteer work as a community contribution.

To reinvent democracy support there is a need to return to the fundamental principle of a participatory democratic society where people have more say and more power. As Karl Popper pointed out, ‘Democracy may help

<sup>78</sup> *Key Findings: Public opinion in Ukraine*, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, July 2011, [http://www.ifes.org/~media/Files/Publications/Survey/2011/Public\\_Opinion\\_in\\_Ukraine\\_2011\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ifes.org/~media/Files/Publications/Survey/2011/Public_Opinion_in_Ukraine_2011_Report.pdf).

to preserve freedom but it can never create it if the individual citizen does not care for it.<sup>79</sup> Helping citizens in the post-Soviet space to cherish freedom and embrace their responsibilities in a democratic system of governance is crucial. For it will be these citizens, despite the weaknesses of civil society today, who will decide the future path of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, just as they did in 2003, 2004 and 2009.

Although voting in elections is an essential element of the process, if the citizens of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine want true democracy, transparency and personal freedom, they also need to engage in public debate and build social trust. What was started on the central squares of capitals during the colour revolutions must continue in self-expression and participation in public and political life.

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79 Cited in Ian Jarvie and Sandra Pralong (eds), *Popper's Open Society after 50 Years: The Continuing Relevance of Karl Popper* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 44.

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