CONSOLIDATING STATE LEGITIMACY THROUGH CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION
LESSONS LEARNED FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rationale of choosing the theme of consolidating state legitimacy through citizen engagement in post-communist transition for a background paper for the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on “Public Service Capacity-Building for Post-Conflict Recovery and Development” (Vienna, June 2007) is that due to the profound disruptions and transformations of the post-communist societies, their experiences can be inspiring lessons for states and societies in post-conflict situations. The analysis mostly addresses the fourth topic of the EGM: transparency and accountability and related governance issues, in the broader context of discussing the consolidation of state legitimacy through citizen engagement in transition. It includes actual approaches applied in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular in Romania, and lessons learned (what worked, what failed and why?) in connection with engaging citizens in governance.

The first part of the paper refers to the nature and level of involving citizens in governance processes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The CEE political culture is experiencing a very dynamic process of reconstruction based on a mix of mentalities inherited from communism, ongoing internalization of European Union (EU) norms as well as other values and norms. Some CEE societies enjoyed a pre-transitional phase which prepared the ground for establishing a democratic society sooner. Although basic EU legislation on public participation has been adopted, actual public participation and citizen engagement in governance processes differ across EU member states and candidate countries.

In the second part, the paper focuses on the case of Romania, 17 years after the sudden end of a severe communist regime. The case of Romania is worthy of note because, although it has a lot of similarities with other post-communist countries, its transition started after a violent “revolution” and the development of its democratic institutions has been more difficult. The paper addresses some of the actions of external factors and players (primarily globalization forces, the European Union enlargement and foreign donors) and internal factors and players (the Government and relevant public policies, the legal, political and social framework, citizenry and civil society organizations) in explaining the level of citizen engagement.

In a nutshell, the paper explains that along with achievements (e.g. bilateral and multilateral donors’ support for the enactment and implementation of relevant laws and the development of civil society organizations, the national legislation in favor of citizen engagement, creation of institutions and processes to facilitate participatory governance, strengthened capacity of the public service and some improvements in the delivery of services, the increasing openness of the
Romanian Government leaders to partner with civil society, and activities of non-governmental organizations in promoting popular participation), most Romanian citizens do not actively participate in governance processes.

The transformation of the legal framework is ahead of the change of mentalities. The cultural remainings of the communist dictatorship are still significant for most Romanian citizens. Although a noteworthy part of the population has started to develop participant orientations, most citizens do not participate in governance processes as a result of these mentalities, lack of trust in public institutions, cynicism along with unfulfilled high expectations of the populace (impatient to quickly see in Romania the level of Western European public administration development), uneven access to resources and overwhelming individual daily socio-economic problems, and poor knowledge of their rights and fragile democratic skills. Because people’s mentalities were formed to expect centralized political decisions concerning all aspects and levels of the society, many of them are still waiting for signals regarding various transformations from the political class (and tend to support authoritarian leaders), particularly when other factors are in favor of this behaviour.

There is further room for both the Government and civil society organizations to play a significant role in building inclusive governance. Advancing opportunities for citizen engagement will have to continue at a fast pace in order to have a notable positive impact on policy formulation and implementation such as increasing policy effectiveness and social justice.

I. INTRODUCTION

The paper is based on the assumption that the increased engagement of the citizens in governance processes will consolidate state legitimacy and will ultimately solidify and consolidate peace providing a conducive playing field for all actors to engage in development.

The rationale of choosing this topic for a background paper for the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on “Public Service Capacity-Building for Post-Conflict Recovery and Development” (Vienna, June 2007) is that due to the profound disruptions and transformations of the post-communist societies, their experiences can be inspiring lessons for states and societies in post-conflict situations. It mostly addresses the fourth topic of the EGM: transparency and accountability and related governance issues, in the broader context of discussing the consolidation of state legitimacy through citizen engagement in transition.

Some post-conflict governments (they are probably the majority) come to power with a mix of trust, mistrust, and indifference from various sections of their people and then progressively, depending on their behavior and achievements, either widen the circle of trust and narrow the size of mistrust and indifference, or widen mistrust altogether.¹ The establishment of credible governance and public administration institutions and systems is a critical determinant of sustainable recovery, peace and development. An important challenge political leaders as well as all development partners face in post-conflict and crisis situations is not only how to restore the

public service but especially how to restructure it in such an inclusive, transparent, and comprehensive way that it incorporates or reinvigorates desirable traditional public service values. More open and responsive forms of administration should be encouraged in order to create and sustain a transformed public service that will make a contribution to sustainable peace and to avoid a slide back into conflict and violence.\textsuperscript{2}

Furthermore, in both developing and developed countries, what politicians can do to establish a stronger relationship of trust between citizens and government is a preoccupying topic for government officials\textsuperscript{3}. Yet, as a result of political, economic, social and cultural transformation intrinsic to the transition, the issues concerning popular participation are more complex in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) than in established democracies.

The specific objectives of the paper are as follows:

- To explore and discuss challenges and successes encountered in rebuilding trust in government and engaging citizens in governance during the ongoing post-communist transition in CEE, following profound disruptions in certain countries in the region and throughout deep transformations of their societies.
- To discuss the role of external and internal factors and players in consolidating state legitimacy through citizen engagement in transition and share successful experiences and lessons learned by narrowing down the analysis to the case of Romania, 17 years after the violent end of a severe communist regime. Amongst other issues, the paper elaborates on the following key questions: Which specific measures have been taken in order to ensure transparency and accountability in the post-communist public service in Romania? What new systems of information dissemination have been designed and operated to increase transparency and accountability? What are the options, challenges and advantages of integrating a multiethnic society into governance processes?

One significant constraint of the paper is the dynamic of the ongoing fast-paced socio-political change, the fact that it is difficult and early to offer an accurate assessment of the impact of citizens on governmental decisions in Central and Eastern Europe. With this limitation in mind, it includes an analysis of the actual approaches and policy processes applied in CEE, in particular in Romania, and of lessons learned (what worked, what failed and why?) in connection with engaging citizens in governance.

\section*{II. CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE}

The governance challenges that the CEE countries have encountered after 1990 are distinctive from those that states and societies in other regions are facing due to the specifics of the communist systems and post-communist transition in addition to distinct cultural factors.

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
Across CEE, *transition* has been a complex process of social, political, and economic transformation of post-communist countries on their way towards modern and democratic societies. The political meaning of transition has been largely understood by political leaders and analysts as the abolition of a communist regime and the building of democracy. The social meaning has been identified with the emergence of democratic citizenship, accompanied by all rights and responsibilities and the development of associative life and transformation of institutional landscape\(^4\). The economic meaning has referred to building a functional market economy. In addition, the European Union (EU) applicant countries have put a lot of efforts in implementing the Acquis Communautaire\(^5\) mandatory for the new EU members and candidate countries into national legislation. But having stable democratic institutions, basic rule of law, a market economy and economic growth does not mean that the transition is over.

The CEE *political culture* is still experiencing a very dynamic process of reconstruction based on a mix of mentalities inherited from communism, ongoing internalization of EU norms as well as other values and norms. The socio-cultural environment of transition has an impact on the transition in each country of the region, making each country’s post-communist transition a unique process of transformation. Religion is one of the core factors that can explain why some CEE countries have had more success in the formation of a structured civil society during the communist regime. In some countries (particularly in Poland), the role of religion in strengthening horizontal linkages among citizens has been very strong. While the Polish church has served as a major catalyst for horizontal social capital, the Orthodox church in Romania, for example, has not played this role.

Along with the possibility of a generalized approach for the whole Central and Eastern Europe when we refer to governance reform in post-communist transition, we also find *variations across the region* in the way people, communities and societies react to the new opportunities brought by the transition and the core players’ approaches to citizen engagement. The CEE countries have differences among each other caused by various economic, social and political starting points of transition and different paces and sequences of reforms, specific cultural traditions including civic engagement traditions. Nearly all the realities presented in this paper can be found in the whole region at various levels of development – overall, higher levels of development in Central Europe and lower levels of development in the Balkans. Countries in transition share common problems and policy agenda at same or different stages. Many of the policies implemented in Poland or Hungary a few years ago are currently debated in Romania and Bulgaria.

Thus, transition processes are at different stages in the CEE and they are also perceived differently in each country depending on the local culture, the level of development, and the level of EU integration. Announcing the end of transition after the achievement of a functional market economy and a stable democracy has paved the way to join the European Union for some

---


\(^5\) The *Acquis Communautaire* is the entire body of European laws. It comprises all the treaties, regulations and directives passed by the European institutions as well as judgements laid down by the European Court of Justice. The candidate countries must adopt, implement and enforce all the Acquis before they join the European Union. In addition to changing national laws, this sometimes means that they must create or change the necessary administrative or judicial bodies which oversee the legislation.
of the EU candidate countries’ governments, including the Romanian Government, while stating that the transition was ongoing by some post-communist countries that were already EU members has proved to be helpful for maintaining the status of foreign aid recipient longer.6

In fact, the end of the transition processes from communist to post-communist societies would mean reaching a level of development, stability, and wealth which changes the social perceptions and representations of people about the times they live.7

Further, most foreign donors (international organizations, Western governments and foundations) have distinctive aid objectives to support development in Central Europe versus the Western Balkans: in the Central European post-communist countries aim to boost participatory governance; in the Balkans, particularly in the Western Balkans, in addition to having to put more effort in promoting civic participation (due to lower level of citizen engagement in this sub-region), they also focus on inter-communal relations and aim to reduce the likelihood of violent ethnic conflict.

Some of the donors, especially international and regional organizations have addressed the specific needs of each country in the region. Among these, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has attempted to build upon the success of civil society organizations (CSOs) by providing technical support and capacity development, undertaking an analysis of civil society organizations within specific countries, strengthening the ability of UNDP country offices to help citizens build relations with the state, and stressing the complementary role that civil society can play vis-à-vis the government.8

From the EU perspective, governance must be participatory. The European Commission set up its own concept of governance in the “White Paper on European Governance”, in which the term "European governance" refers to the rules, processes and behaviours that affect the way in which powers are exercised at European level, particularly with regard to openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence. Improving governance in the European Union compels concerted action by all the European Institutions, present and future EU Member States, regional and local authorities, and civil society.9 In all the new EU member states from CEE as well as the EU candidate countries, the European Union provided funds - the Cohesion Fund and the pre-accession funds (ISPA, SAPARD) - to help the development of the region and give citizens the opportunity to get involved in this process. EU and national legislations provide opportunities for public participation with regards to using these funds for social, economic or environmental projects from the programming stage to the discussions about the projects’ impacts on local communities. Although basic EU legislation on public participation considering

---

The paper uses the United Nations definition of civil society, understood as “associations of citizens (outside their families, friends and businesses) entered into voluntarily to advance their interests, ideas and ideologies”. The term does not include profit-making activity (the private sector) or governing (the public sector).
9 http://ec.europa.eu/, “Governance in the EU. A White Paper”
these issues is already adopted, actual public participation standards differ across EU member states and candidate countries and public participation develops at different paces in different EU countries. National legislation often does not provide citizens with access to timely and sufficient information, nor does it specify clear tools for participation.\textsuperscript{10}

There is no high boost of public confidence in government in CEE, despite more visibility of integrity, ethics, and professional conduct in the public service. All societies in post-communist transition are generally discontent with the quality of the public administration and political class. All the CEE countries are still struggling with widespread malfunction of the public administration, perceived in a certain degree of incapacity to provide satisfactory service without an extra-tax made by the bribe or other forms of incentive (e.g. higher power status), a form of abuse of taxpayers. All the countries in the region have underpaid civil servants, citizens used to be mistreated and an almost total absence of formal institutions of accountability of the civil service – besides those making bureaucrats accountable to the upper hierarchy.\textsuperscript{11} According to Mungiu-Pippidi, “there is a correlation between the degree of communization and the quality of administration, corruption entailed. The more intrusive the communist regime, the greater was the arbitrary power of its agents, such as representatives of the administration, and the lower their accountability.”\textsuperscript{12}

After decades of hyper-centralization and authoritarianism, the CEE countries had to emphasize the rule of law, strengthen the capacity of public institutions, and rebuild trust in government in a developing market-type environment. In some CEE countries this happened faster than in other as some of the countries in the region has a pre-transitional phase. In Poland, for instance, such a pre-transitional phase can be identified with the emergence of the Solidarity movement (started by the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union, known as “Solidarity”, founded in 1980), which played an important role in preparing the ground for establishing a democratic system. Therefore, the shift from a “subject political culture” to a participant one was a gradual process in Poland’s case\textsuperscript{13}. On the other hand, nothing similar happened in Romania, as discussed in the next section.

During the communist regime, labor unions had to be accepted by the government and the communist party. There were differences between labor unions in Central Europe and Southeastern Europe. For example, in Poland, the Solidarity broke the rules imposed to labor unions and gained mass support. Although in 1981 Solidarity was officially suppressed, labor unrest and strikes by the end of the 1990s forced negotiations between the government and Solidarity, which resulted in the legalization of Solidarity and in Poland’s first free elections after communism. In other countries, especially in Southeastern Europe (including Romania), the vertical control and the communist repression were stronger and the citizens more submissive.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} The CEE Bankwatch Network, http://www.bankwatch.org/project.shtml?s=460581
\textsuperscript{11} See Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2003), “Revisiting Fatalistic Political Cultures”, Romanian Journal of Political Sciences
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
After 1990 the post-communist transition led to the abolishment of the centralized structure of trade unions and of their compulsory membership. In addition, due to changes such as privatization and restructuring of large enterprises (which led to unemployment and the shift to employment in multinational companies, non-governmental organizations, new small-size enterprises and the service sector), and labor unions could not retain their membership figures. Unionization levels in CEE fell dramatically from 100% to about 25-35% and the new trade union confederations led to excessive fragmentation of the movement everywhere in CEE.\textsuperscript{15}

All the new EU members and EU candidate countries have introduced changes concerning industrial relations and social dialogue: tripartite forums for discussion between social partners, new legislation regarding collective bargaining, and labor contracts and workplace representation of labor interests, consistent with the EU acquis communitarian.

\textit{Specialised government departments} or official positions responsible for inter-sector co-operation have been established in many CEE countries. There are no common standards or rules yet regulating the level or organisational set-up of such departments. The following are examples of government institutions’ coordination with NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in CEE:

- In Slovakia, the post of a special advisor on NGOs at the Department of Social and Intellectual Development within the Office of the Government was established in 1997. In addition, a number of positions were opened at regional and local level for officials responsible for developing cooperation between NGOs and government administration.
- In Bulgaria, posts of special advisors on NGOs have been established under the auspices of the President of the Republic and Parliament.
- In Croatia, a special government department was set up to cooperate with NGOs.
- In Hungary, the Department for Social Relations in the Prime Minister’s Office was created for dealing with legislation that regulates civil society institutions and the development of inter-sector co-operation both at central and local level.
- In Romania, a Department for Co-operation between the Government and NGOs was set up in the mid-1990s. In 1999 this department was replaced by the Department for the Analysis of Social and Institutional Development, responsible for advancing of co-operation between government and the NGO sector. There is now a position of State Secretary for Social Dialogue at the Ministry of Labor, Family and Equal Opportunities.\textsuperscript{16} Besides, the Economic and Social Council - a tripartite autonomous public institution, established in 1997 - has the purpose of achieving a social dialogue between employers, trade unions and the Government.\textsuperscript{17}

Nevertheless, the situation on the ground in the CEE is far from the European social model: while social partners at the European level have virtually become legislators, the CEE social partners have been largely marginalized by their respective governments. The representatives of trade unions in CEE complain about the discrepancy that exists between the letter of law and its practical implementation.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} www.ces.ro
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
All over the region, *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs) have proven as competent channels of mobilising citizens to address important issues at local level. As an illustration, the profound 1996-1997 economic crisis in Bulgaria highlighted the NGO capacity to mobilize the population against an extremely difficult social backdrop. Many non-government organizations joined municipal civil councils set up at the initiative of mayors or heads of local administrations. At their meetings the councils discussed measures and solutions to alleviate the implications of the crisis at local level. The decisions and recommendations of the councils formed the basis of local action programmes.\(^\text{19}\)

However, because in some countries, governments still tend to ignore any advice coming from non-governmental sources, some of the *think tanks’* leaders have chosen to become politically involved (in many cases, members of political parties) in order to promote their views. On the other hand, to strengthen their voice in policy debate and to make a difference on important transdisciplinary and transnational issues faced by most countries in CEE (such as EU accession, NATO enlargement, environmental issues), a number of *policy institutes* have chosen to engage in regional coalitions with other non-governmental partners to develop and promote common regional policy positions. Well-known institutes from Central Europe have been effective in supporting their new partners from Southeastern Europe\(^\text{20}\), where think tanks have encountered more obstacles in making their opinions heard.

### III. THE CASE OF ROMANIA

As discussed in the previous section, along with the possibility of a generalized approach for the whole Central and Eastern Europe when we refer to governance reform in post-communist transition, we also find variations across the region in the way people, communities and societies react to the new opportunities brought by the transition and the core players’ approaches to citizen engagement. The case of Romania is worthy of note because, although it has a lot of similarities with other post-communist countries, its transition started after a violent “revolution” and the development of its democratic institutions has been more difficult and slow.

#### III.1. The Communist Heritage

Pre-communist Romania was a parliamentary democracy and the communist regime was not easily accepted. During the early years of communist rule in Romania, in the late 1940s, the anti-communist resistance had an organized structure, and many people opposing the regime formed armed partisan groups. Despite army troops and secret police, armed resistance continued until the early 1960s, but after that it was almost completely repressed.

When Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the communist leader of Romania between 1948 and 1965, died, he was replaced by Nicolae Ceausescu. Ceausescu led the communist Romania for 24 years

---


(1965-1989), during which he suppressed all opposition using brutal force. Initially, he was a well-liked politician in the country, due to his independent foreign policy, challenging the supremacy of the Soviet Union in Romania, but later his popularity dramatically decreased while his regime became increasingly dictatorial. During four decades of communism in Romania, the State used to dominate all areas of economic, social, and political life, hindering the development of a civil society.

Although the events of the December 1989 “revolution” have remained controversial, they ended the communist regime and started the post-communist transition in Romania. President Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife had been shot after a military tribunal found them guilty of genocide and undermining the national economy. Their execution was announced on national television and was transmitted all around the world. A shocked Romanian population soon moved on to widespread public enthusiasm, along with unrest from troops who supported the dictator, and followed by more than a decade of difficult transition to democracy and peace.

III.2. The Post-Communist Transition. An Analysis of the Main Stakeholders’ Successes, Challenges and Opportunities in Citizen Engagement in Romania

While some post-communist countries (such as Poland due to the Solidarity movement) had a pre-transitional phase on the way to establishing a democratic system, nothing similar happened in Romania, as a result of the toughness of the regime and the high degree of anomic in society. There were hardly any leaders who were not involved in the communism regime and the population was totally unprepared for democracy. Consequently, leaders belonging to lower levels of command in the former hierarchy took over in 1990. The case of Romania is interesting because, although it has a lot of similarities with other post-communist countries, the development of its democratic institutions has been more difficult and has taken place at a much slower pace.21

III.2.1. External Factors and Players

In an increasingly globalized world, governments lack the capacity of designing and implementing effective public policies alone and necessary standards of good governance have to be reinforced at all levels as a precondition for sustainable development. Among these standards, local, national, and regional governance must be participatory, inclusive, transparent, and tailored to the local as well as the national, social, and economic conditions. Globalization has had an impact on the social, economic, environmental and political characteristics of Romania and on the institutions that they are based on, facilitating the post-communist transformations, including the ongoing formation of a new socio-political culture.

Further, the decision of the European Union (EU) to enlarge to the Balkans has had a great impact on governance in Romania. For the last decade and a half, European integration has been the major political objective of the Romanian Government and of all political parties. The EU has played an essential role in helping the EU candidate countries (including Romania) on their way to build consolidated democracy.

During the post-communist transition, in the circumstances of globalization and EU enlargement, *external actors* have played a significant part in encouraging good governance and popular participation in Romania. Western European governments, the United States, regional organizations - mostly the EU, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe -, the World Bank, UNDP, other organizations of the United Nations (UN) system, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have implemented or supported various programmes to assist democracy and encourage public participation and good governance. In addition, foreign foundations have worked with Romanian NGOs to improve the quality of their activities and facilitate their efforts in engaging in meaningful dialogue and joint action with other key players to influence public policy at all levels. Many obstacles in front of development and good governance have also been diminished due to external accountability mechanisms, especially towards the EU.

From the EU perspective, governance must be participatory. Headed for the EU, the Romanian Government has undertaken political and economic reforms including the consolidation of its democratic system, rule of law, respect for human rights, and freedom of expression and functioning free-market economy. After the successful conclusion of the EU accession negotiations in December 2004\(^\text{22}\), the Romanian Government has been working on consolidating the institutions and regulations taken over from the Acquis Communautaire. The implementation of European norms in the internal legislation has entailed the strengthening of the institutional capacity of the government institutions and a greater effort by the Romanian Government for ensuring transparent and participatory governance.

The UN Development Assistance Programme set the foundation for cooperation among the UN System and between UN agencies and the government as well as other development partners, and most of the other assistance programmes were well-organized. However, better coordination between all the assistance programmes in Romania, including harmonization of their project management procedures would have increased their efficiency.

Among other lessons learned, a variety of foreign donors’ projects to support citizen engagement have failed by financing fruitless partnerships or intellectual fashion trends. An example is the emphasis placed by external donors on ethnic identity, which has strengthened, rather than weakened, ethnic tensions. In addition, most of the donors’ programmes attempted to transfer knowledge and skills exclusively to an already empowered minority of educated and socially active citizens, supporting the formation of a group of professional activists, based on the assumption that they would further promote a participatory civic attitude to other segments of society. In fact, most of these programmes generally have not managed to create opportunities for the socially marginalized citizens\(^\text{23}\).

### III.2.2. Internal Factors and Players

#### III.2.2.A. The government

\(_{22}^{22}\) The Accession Treaty was signed in April 2005; the accession of Romania to the EU took place in January 2007.

Post-communist transition requires fundamental transformations of the role of the state as an institution carrying out a broad range of activities to address social and economic issues. After a few years at the beginning of 1990s characterized by confusion between predominance of communist structures, lack of clear reform strategies and pressure for change, strengthening government institutions and promoting good governance have gradually become among the pillars of reform.

 Gazette Accomplishments of the Government toward Ensuring Citizen Engagement

The Romanian Constitution provides the rights necessary for public participation: the right of expression, the right to information, the right of free assembly, the right of association, and the right to petition. Moreover, the Constitution provides that the government should cooperate with the civil society in the rulemaking process.

The government has made progress toward implementing the public administration and civil service management reform, which has maintained a certain level of public hope for a better future of Romania, has contributed to rebuilding the people’s trust in government and has fostered participation in policy-making decisions.

The National Agency of Civil Servants has run several EU Phare programmes and also benefited from the assistance of experts from OECD, World Bank and Western governments, which all contributed to a better management of the civil service and the effectiveness of implementing the reform of public administration, in order to become more transparent, objective, efficient, ethical and customer-oriented.

While restructuring and modernizing the public sector, the latter has been both the objective and the vehicle of reform. The public administration has not been built from scratch, but rather it has been gradually modernized, reducing its malfunctions. Between 1990 and 2000, it slowly improved its service, upgraded the skills of civil servants and the quality of their work, and hired and trained a new generation of civil servants while the previous ones were gradually retiring. For most of this period, obedience and length of service were still valued more than competences and progressive mechanisms to motivate civil servants and to keep accountable for their work did not exist.

Since the end of 1990s, various concerted efforts and accomplishments toward forming a more professional, impartial, stable and efficient civil service have enhanced the transparency and accountability of the government’s activities and objectives, the image of the public administration and the relationship citizen-administration, including through issuing several normative acts. Among many other steps:

- The Ministry of Public Administration was set up in 2001 and its role has improved since then. Currently, this institution is included in the Ministry of Interior and Administration Reform, which also oversees the National Agency of Civil Servants. The mission of the Agency is developing a professional, stable and politically unbiased body of civil servants. The National Agency of Civil Servants was set up by the Law No. 188/1999 on the Statute of Civil Servants.
- Law no. 215/2001 regarding the local public administration includes the principle of "consulting the citizens in solving the local problems of common interest", which presumes the involvement of the citizens belonging to a territorial administrative unit in all the problems and aspects of interest. In accordance with the public administration law, all the meetings of the local councils are public.

- Further, citizens can address different government representatives and express their opinions on relevant public policies. Government representatives at all levels have increasingly conducted dialogue and benefited from views of the civil society on a large variety of public policies. A special Governmental Department for Co-operation with Non-Governmental Organizations was set up in the mid-1990s. In 1999 this department was replaced by the Department for the Analysis of Social and Institutional Development, responsible for advancing the co-operation between government and the NGO sector. There is now a position of State Secretary for Social Dialogue at the Ministry of Labor, Family and Equal Opportunities and also a Governmental Department for Interethnic Relations. Besides, the Economic and Social Council - a tripartite autonomous public institution, established in 1997 - has the purpose of achieving a social dialogue between employers, trade unions and the government. It has the role of a consultative body of the Parliament and the government in areas established by law, and mediator at industry and national levels in case of disputes between its social partners. Its membership is composed of three equal parts of individuals appointed by the government, the national trade union confederations and the national employers’ confederations. It liaises worldwide with social and occupational organizations.24

- The right to free access to information and the transparency of decision-making in public administration is guaranteed by the Romanian legislation. The Law on Free Access to Information of Public Interest was passed in 2001 (Law no. 544/2001) and the Law on Transparency of Decision-Making in Public Administration was passed in 2003 (Law no. 52/2003).

- Law no. 161/2003 comprises measures for assuring the transparency in exercising civil service positions, for example concerning the wealth declaration for the civil servants which have to be filled out yearly. The regime of incompatibilities for civil servants is strict, they being forbidden to have other remunerated or not-remunerated jobs/activities with the single exception concerning their status as professors within universities or artistically areas. In order to insure a neutral body of civil servants, it is forbidden for civil servants to hold leading positions within political parties or to express in public their political views.

- There are rules and codes of conduct to guide the behaviour of public servants, in accordance with the EU standards. An important legislative initiative of the National Agency of Civil Servants was issuing an ethic code for civil servants by Law no. 7/2004. This regulation was completed by Law no. 477/2004 regarding the Code of conduct for the contractual personnel. The National Agency of Civil Servants has prepared a handbook of certain administrative procedures regarding the civil service and also a guide for applying the provisions of the code of conduct for civil servants, which is about to be

---

24 www.ces.ro
adopted. The Agency is also developing a network of public ethic officers in order to provide advice and support for the Romanian civil servants.  

25 The Romanian Government initiated partnerships with the civil society on important national policy issues, such as those related to NATO and EU accession, which empowered people to express opinions on European integration issues, for instance, and moreover acknowledged this as the responsibility not only of the government, but of the entire society.

For at least the last decade, the Presidents of Romania have had regular meetings with institutions of civil society, such as labor unions, employer organizations from various industries, professional associations, policy groups, the media, social organizations, and other interest groups, which relate to certain religion, nationality, or political orientations. The meetings have occurred at various stages of policy cycle on a large range of socio-economic issues, and many of them have resulted in better policies. Guaranteed by the Romanian Constitution 26, the fact that the President of Romania acts as a mediator between the State and the civil society has become a common reality.

The comprehensive debate for the formulation of a National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) that was launched and chaired by President Ion Iliescu between 2000 and 2004 was a demonstration of broad participation of civil society in enhancing public policies. Following a previous National Sustainable Development Strategy (July 1999) 27, the NSSD debate included a series of workshops on key areas of sustainable development with the NSSD main stakeholders: government representatives, academia, private sector and civil society. During the workshops, the stakeholders had the opportunity to debate in a non-partisan non-biased environment and structure possible scenarios for the future development of Romania, and to identify relevant indicators of sustainable development and objectives for the strategic directions to be pursued during the next 15-25 years. The topics covered by these workshops included: energy policies and natural resources; forestry and mountain areas development; environmental protection; agricultural policies and rural development; the social dimension of sustainable development; prognosis models on the long-term economic development of Romania; research, innovation and development strategies; education. Several workshops benefited from the presence of foreign experts, previously involved in the formulation of national strategies of sustainable development in their countries, who shared their experience with the Romanian NSSD stakeholders. 28 Engaging the civil society in this process has helped the government to more effectively formulate a strategic vision and better policies for the socio-economic development of Romania.

Democratization of the society led to more decisions that affect the lives of the individual citizens and communities being made at the local level. Therefore, it offers citizens greater opportunities for public participation. The current legislation is constraining the public

26 The Constitution of Romania, Article 80
27 www.undp.ro
28 For further details, see the UNDP Project “Strengthening the Institutional Capacity of the Presidential Administration of Romania”, 2004, www.undp.ro
authorities and institutions to organize public events for keeping the public informed regarding issues of interest, the progresses and difficulties encountered in solving different problems of the society, and also to ensure the accessibility of the citizens to the administration. In order to encourage the participation of citizens to the meetings, public institutions must inform the community three days in advance before each meeting about its topic, date and place. Until now, citizens have rarely participated, but when they did their recommendations have been included in the public report of each meeting and have had an impact on policy making.

The openness of public officials to the demands and needs of citizens has slowly developed, facilitating the inclusion of the views of concerned sections of the community in public policy-making through consultative mechanisms with the civil society, and leading to the institutionalization of partnership relations between the government and CSOs. The consultations between government institutions and CSOs not only provided opportunity for expressing diverse opinions, but also for reaching consensus on various problems. They made the decision-making process more transparent and tangibly furthered the relations of cooperation between government and society.

The government has facilitated e-participation, enabling policy makers and public officials to better interact with individual citizens and allowing citizens to better express their needs, participate in and influence policy-making, comment on policy implementation, provide feedback on government services (on and off-line services), and file complaints. New systems of information dissemination have been designed and operated to ensure transparency and accountability.

Government institutions at all levels have internet pages, which keep the citizens informed and invite them to share opinions by mail, e-mail, phone, or at public meetings. The initiative regarding the public administration phone line and the website www.administratie.ro enables citizens to address some of their complaints, requests, or suggestions. The access to public information has brought a significant empowerment of people, enabling them to participate in policy making that affects their lives.

At the national level, the Office of the President is a good illustration of transparent and participatory governance. The Presidential Administration developed in 2003, with the support of a UNDP project funded by the Dutch Government, a modern e-petition application system, a new portal managed in three languages and an advanced information management system. The electronic management of petitions helps the Citizen Relations Department of the Presidential Administration to manage more than 30,000 petitions per year, with a full-cycle information model, from receipt of the petition to the printing of the delivery-of-reply envelope. It also offers the petitioners detailed reports for each petition (its current status, and other relevant information depending on the geographic location and subject of petitions). Citizens can also address the President via the website and express their opinions about any relevant topic.

The government has also encouraged horizontal relationships across the civil society sector, such as partnerships between NGOs for an enhanced participatory governance. One of the events organized towards this goal took place in 2003, when the Romanian Government had the initiative to organize a regional conference and an NGO forum as part of the global effort to implement the “Plan of Action” of the Seoul Conference on “The Community of Democracies”\(^\text{31}\), in order to strengthen the partnership between NGOs, governments and international organizations in the CEE. NGOs from 21 CEE countries and from the USA and Western Europe had the opportunity to share knowledge and experience about the consolidation of democracy in the region and on the role of NGOs in promoting good governance.

According to a comprehensive investigation of the legislative and institutional framework for national minorities in Romania\(^\text{32}\), and supported by Reports of the European Commission, the various ethnic groups enjoy the necessary rights and freedoms that allow them to preserve and develop their identity. Romania derives much of its ethnic diversity from its geographic position across major continental migration itineraries. Minorities currently constitute roughly 11% of Romania’s 22 million people, including 6.6% Hungarians, 2.5% Roma population and almost twenty other smaller ethnic communities.

The Council for National Minorities, which was set up in 1993 as a consultative body of the Romanian Government, defends the ethnic minorities’ rights. In the educational field, the legislation states that students can benefit from general education in their mother tongue.

The approach to the representation of all ethnic minorities in the Romanian Parliament ensure greater participation of minorities in policy-making decisions, and is unique in Southeastern Europe\(^\text{33}\), using the virtues and potentials of the diversity and prevent the refueling of ethnic tensions. Organizations of citizens belonging to national minorities, which fail to obtain the number of votes for representation in the Parliament, have the right to one deputy seat each, under the terms of the electoral law. Citizens of a national minority are entitled to be represented by one organization only\(^\text{34}\). The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania has won seats in the Parliament without using this provision and is currently part of the Parliamentarian majority coalition. At the most recent legislative elections (2004), the following parties and associations were granted a seat in the Chamber of Deputies: Association of Italians of Romania; Bulgarian Union of the Banat – Romania; Cultural Union of Rusyns of Romania; The Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania; The Democratic Union of Slovaks and Czechs in Romania; The Democratic Union of Turco-Islamic Tatars of Romania; The Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania; The Greek Union of Romania; The League of Albanians of Romania; The Lipovan Russian Community of Romania; The Social Democratic Roma Party of Romania; The Turkish Democratic Union of Romania; The Union of Armenians of Romania; The Union of Croatians of

---

31 The Community of Democracies, an international process aimed at protecting and consolidating democracy, was launched with the inaugural Ministerial and NGOs gathering in Warsaw in June 2000. A second global conference and NGO Forum took place in Seoul in 2002 and a third one took place in Santiago, Chile in 2005.


34 www.parlament.ro
Romania; The Union of Poles of Romania Dom Polski; The Union of Serbs of Romania; The Union of Macedonians of Romania; The Union of Ukrainians of Romania.

Following some nationalist feelings resulted in escalation of inter-ethnic tensions between the Hungarian minority and the Romanian population at the beginning of the 1990s, engaging ethnic minorities into governance processes highly contributed to building credibility of the government along with sustainable peace and development.

 ➢ Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement

More than in other cultures, in Romania the behaviour and beliefs of the elite can easily hamper the progress towards a consolidated democracy. As discussed in the next section, because people’s mentalities were formed to expect all the levels and aspects of the society to be governed by centralized political decisions, many of them are still waiting for signals regarding various transformations from the political class.

At the same time, politics and policy are most often mixed while there are extremely few political and managerial leaders with capacity for public policy. The flaws of reforms are calling for an enhanced political and managerial leadership with policy skills, interested in efficiently implementing their visions with regard to improving public service delivery, the professionalism of public officials and the image of public administration toward building trust in government and ultimately consolidating state legitimacy through democratic citizen engagement.

Like other CEE countries, successive governments in Romania have worked on absorbing and implementing the Acquis Communautaire (which is mandatory for the new EU members and candidate countries). Although transformations happen now at a high speed, the functioning in practice of the Acquis is “in transition”.

As Romania approached the moment of its integration into the European Union, the wrongdoings of corrupt public officials became increasingly riskier. Transparency and accountability are at the core of the public administration reform. Overall, as evaluated by the European Commission, the Romanian Government has made continuous progress in the fight against corruption, although it is believed that more efforts are necessary.²⁵ As high-level officials declare, “the most important challenge which Romania should face over the next years will be the absorption of European non-refundable funds and a good absorption of these funds depends on the local administration to an overwhelming extend”.²⁶ As the Romanian Prime Minister has drawn the attention, the money allocated from the national budget and the European funds must be spent “in a responsible way”. The local authorities should be accountable for the spending of public money, regardless whether it has been allocated from the national budget or it originates in European funds and the media plays an important role as to the way the spending of this money is reflected.²⁷ Despite the proliferation of anti-corruption efforts, the impact of many anti-corruption projects has been of short duration and the approach to combat corruption has focused

²⁷ Ibid.
much more on the recipients of bribes than on those who pay them. However, the anti-corruption campaigns have recently started to catch up on this.

As illustrated by a study on decentralization and corruption in Romania, the decentralization process during the transition led to the emergence of privileged relations among certain categories of political actors and local government units intended to secure preferential treatment from the centre. These administrative wrongdoings are demonstrated by financial data and are paired with a strong politicization of the public administration. The author concludes that because the enforcement of regulations is loose and the costs of civic information and action by the public are high, decentralization alone cannot solve the problems of poor governance and corruption. He proposes safeguards to be included in the institutional design of decentralization, which should control for local corruption, based on transparency and clearly defined responsibilities.38

Despite the increased visibility of integrity, ethics and professional conduct in the public service, there is no high boost of the public confidence in government. Engaging citizens needs rebuilding trust in government, based on enhancing the image of public administration by improving service delivery, the conduct of public officials and the transparency, especially through e-government. The mechanisms for ensuring ethics, integrity and accountability need to be strengthened in both the public sector. The government institutions still need to pay more attention to informing the public on the provisions of the laws, and more efficiently organize for implementing the legislation related to popular participation in policy making.

As the change in mentalities comes last, there are still government employees who view citizen engagement as an obstacle to decision-making and when they tolerate it, they do it as a matter of formal requirement. Government officials responsible for the drafting of strategic public policy documents have sometimes expressed their frustration about the time spent in consultation with the civil society and the subjective or impolite approach of the CSOs. At the other end of the government-society interaction, CSOs delegates have reported in certain cases difficulties in establishing an open and continuous dialogue with the public authorities and have often expressed resentment when their proposals were rejected by government representatives. Training on public policy-making and negotiations should become mandatory for government employees, helping the understanding that the knowledge of the best policy alternative does not always belong to the government as much as it does not always belong to civil society representatives. On the other hand, greater transparency and accountability of government institutions at all levels of decision-making will allow a more “professional” involvement of civil society in the policy processes in transition.

Although representativity of the Economic and Social Council has been improved through an increase of the number of its members, according to the evaluation of the European Commission, efforts need to continue in view of improving social dialogue in general and solve outstanding issues of fragmentation and insufficient capacity of social partner organizations. Further efforts are also necessary to improve the health status of the population and access to health care,

---

especially among poorer socio-economic groups and minorities. In the area of social inclusion, efforts need to continue to improve the situation of vulnerable groups, such as the Roma, and promote their full integration into society.  

Advancing opportunities for citizen engagement will have to continue at a fast pace in order to have a notable positive impact on policy formulation and implementation such as increasing policy effectiveness and social justice. There is room for improvement with regard to finding ways to “re-moralise citizens” as a possible solution to the democratic deficit by regeneration of a sense of community and collective responsibility. Along with keeping their traditions, freedoms and options, citizens must feel empowered and participate in governance for the benefit of sustainable development. Public education should pay more attention to teaching the importance of citizen participation.

III.2.2.B. The Civil Society

The development of a democratic society has included a difficult and still ongoing transition from the centralised planning system towards a comprehensive public participation system.

During four decades of communism in Romania, the State used to dominate all areas of economic, social, and political life and all levels of society were governed by political decisions. Thus, people’s mentalities were shaped in this manner and, at least in the 1990s, they were still used to expecting signals regarding various transformations from the political class. At the beginning of the 1990s, during an initial phase of revolutionary effervescence, most people believed that problems could be solved by social pressure. There were constant turmoil and street protests in connection to many social, economic and political issues. Many of them were violent, including a few waves of aggressive miners’ demonstrations, and the population failed to create civil society structures able to deal with the political class democratically.

Subsequently, the privatization and restructuring of large enterprises led to massive unemployment. Many intellectuals and other people who had been laid off due to the restructuring of enterprises and of other institutions or were just willing to change their careers in order to pursue new opportunities have shifted to employment in multinational companies, NGOs, new small-size enterprises and service sector.

The number of CSOs has gradually increased while their quality and effectiveness vary significantly. Some CSOs try to work as liaison between the Government and citizens even though many citizens are skeptical whether CSOs represent their interests and concerns. Post-communist Romania has experienced progressively stronger voices of the media, NGOs, labor unions, professional associations, academia, non-governmental policy research institutions, and

---

40 EU funded research on “Engaging People in Active Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe”, http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/bp64.htm
41 For further details, see Stefan A. (2005), “Securitization and Democratization: How They Condition Each Other. The Case of Romania”, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, The Netherlands, p. 50.
community organizations. Other types of CSOs, such as religious organizations, consumer organizations, environmental groups, and charities are present, but less active and less numerous.

- **Accomplishments of the Civil Society toward Ensuring Citizen Engagement**

During the post-communist transition, the media, a number of NGOs, the academia, and policy institutions have been increasingly active in monitoring and assessing governance practices, and providing criticism and recommendations to policy makers.

Romanian NGOs have become increasingly active in environmental policy, child protection, media monitoring, and anti-corruption. Some of them work on programmes related to fueling a more participatory attitude among the Romanian people. They have set up awareness campaigns (press releases, media campaigns, dissemination of citizen guides, newsletters, information booklets and posters, collecting signatures from citizens and submitting petitions) to encourage citizens to participate in governance processes and provided comments on the draft laws on free access to information and the transparency of decision-making in public administration. An illustration is a 2002/2003 Transparency International-Romania project “Governmental Transparency in the Regulatory Process”, aiming at enhancing legal standards for transparency. Together with some other NGOs and other partners, it amended the draft-law on Transparency of Decision-Making in Public Administration presented by the Government.

As the right to free access to information and the transparency of decision-making in public administration have become guaranteed by the Romanian Constitution and legislation, Transparency International Romania (a non-governmental organization) and other NGOs organized media campaigns and coverage in print outlets and public radio broadcasts to promote the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Interest (Law no. 544/2001) and the Law on Transparency of Decision-Making in Public Administration (Law no. 52/2003). In addition, Transparency International organized an awareness campaign among public servants in the local and central administration as well as media in regards to “The Role of the People’s Advocate in Protecting Free Access to Information of Public Interest”. Several NGOs investigated methods for these laws’ future implementation, targeting both public institutions and other NGOs. They issued reports on the implementation of the legal provisions and organized informative debates on the main issues covered by the legislation package.

Some more experienced NGOs organize training for trainers. As an illustration, the practice of diversity management involving ethnicity and the fight against cultural biases have been useful training themes for supporting democracy and popular participation. There are also NGOs that monitor other civil society organizations and others that offer consulting services to other NGOs.

Numerous self-claimed politically independent policy institutes have been created in Romania in the last decade and a half. Besides undertaking policy research and analysis, they publish journals and books, organize round-tables and conferences, carry out education and training activities, undertake opinion polls and activities which all attempt to boost public participation in

---


policy debates. Due to the progress in communication technologies (especially the internet), it has become much easier for Romanian think tanks to collaborate across vast distances with foreign think tanks. They cross the national borders in order to join regional networks and keep themselves updated with the CEE, European and global policy analysis and activism trends. They also disseminate their positions on public policies and reach a larger audience.

Some of them being part of global or regional networks, Romanian NGOs benefit from sharing knowledge on best practices for promoting participatory governance with international organizations, Western Governments donors, CSOs partners from Western countries or other CEE countries. There also Romanian NGOs which already have a strong sense of self-confidence and try to initiate cross border networks. After doing work in Romania on unveiling cases of corruption for a couple of years, the “Clean Parliament Coalition” (a coalition of Romanian NGOs) has launched in October 2006 the “Eastern European Integrity Network”, with the aim to “clean up the political class” in the region.

Overall, the Romanian civil society has been continuously developing since 1990 and has proved that, in spite of the difficulties of the transition, it can also generate constructive solutions to various problems of the society.

➢ Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement

Despite the efforts of foreign donors, the government and CSOs, the Romanian people have not demonstrated eagerness to make full use of their right for free access to information of public interest or the transparency of decision-making in public administration. As indicated by an analysis conducted by the Institute for Public Policy in regards to the number of instances in which Romanian citizens have addressed the courts to ask for the protection of these two rights guaranteed by the Romanian Constitution and legislation, citizens only rarely request public information. They are almost absent from the decision making process in matters that directly affect their interests. The analysis showed that there has been no complaint in a court about violation of the provisions of the law on transparency of decisions and citizens’ participation to the decision making process in the local public administration.44

The transition process from a totalitarian regime to democracy has created obstacles (i.e. job insecurity and increasing social polarization, distrust between elected officials and citizens who blame them of malpractice, confrontations between Western democratic values and local traditions and values) in promoting participatory governance. People are mainly interested whether the government provides jobs, apartments, and social protection, but fail to accept that local communities could fight and succeed to secure some of their interests by getting involved in policy formulation.

The lack of social capital is in part a negative response to the principles of “collectivism” induced in the communist period. However, a sense of commitment to specific groups amongst

those of ethnic affiliation is sometimes found.\textsuperscript{45} NGOs have faced challenges in promoting the idea of voluntary work for community interests among citizens. It has proved to be difficult to persuade people not to wait for the Government to solve their problems but to have initiatives and solve them by working together for common goals. As illustrated by the conclusions of a project\textsuperscript{46} carried out by the Community Development Center, a Romanian non-governmental organization, and funded by the US Department of State, the Romanian farmers are reluctant to associate and even less to participate in governance processes.

A broader public participation would also reduce corruption, increase the efficiency of the use of public budget and external funds and consolidate the democratic political culture. The fight against corruption led by the media and some NGOs has increased the public awareness of anti-corruption work. Yet, coupled with the unsuccessful anti-corruption efforts, it stimulated people’s disappointment with the ineffectiveness of the anti-bribery campaign, their lack of trust in government officials, cynicism, and lack of interest in public participation. Citizens have not stopped to give bribes, by which they contribute in fact to maintaining their own and other fellow citizens’ lack of trust in government officials. When analyzing the corruption, the media, NGOs and international organizations usually target only the demand side of the equation: public officials who abuse their office and the society for private benefit. Civil society organizations could do more to advocate that citizens are not forced by the “state of affairs” to pay bribes and to improve the public understanding of how networks of influence function.

On the other hand, the civil society organizations still have a long way to go towards improving their own reputation, particularly in a country with a large population still skeptical about the legitimacy of CSOs. Mechanisms for ensuring ethics, integrity, and accountability, and generally for improving performance need also to be strengthened in the NGO sector. Providing assistance for democracy to unaccountable NGOs by donors has proved to be a waste of resources.

Since the beginning of 1990s there has been an increasing need of policy debate and public participation as the capacity for policy analysis of the government and the academia were still building up. The positive effects of think tanks’ work on policy-making in the developed countries have encouraged Western donors and international organizations to fund think tanks in Romania in order to support policy debate and provide policy alternatives. The creation and survival of many Romanian think tanks has been facilitated by the available international funding. An important problem for the Romanian CSOs is how to secure their own economic independence and stability after the foreign funding comes to an end. The Romanian business sector rarely gives financial support to CSOs since the business community does not perceive CSOs as effective means to promote its interests except when creating its own non-profit organizations (business associations) to express their interests.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} EU funded research on “Engaging People in Active Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe”, http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/bp64.htm
\textsuperscript{46} Community Development Center’s project “Building Sustainable Rural Communities Together” (2003) tried to advocate the benefits of increasing the social capital and organized community development activities that involved farmers, public authorities, non-governmental organizations and teachers.
The cease of external funding can sometimes lead to the reduction of CSOs operations, which means that the NGO counterparts in society-government consultations may suddenly withdraw from the already fragile dialogue. Some NGOs have proved sometimes to be undependable by going out of business after a few projects or nor being able to justify the spending of Western donors’ financial support, which brought up the question of accountability of NGOs. Their eligibility for public funding can however help them to avoid this situation and would also contribute to a sustainable institutionalization of consultations between the government and civil society.

Within the Romanian policy environment, with the currently polarised political life, the constraints imposed by the European integration and by foreign donors coupled with the difficulty to secure their own financial independence, it is difficult for CSOs to remain objective. Moreover, some of the old research institutes could remain players in the market of policy advice only if their leaders became politically affiliated. The dependence on foreign funding made the Romanian think tanks to exclusively follow certain global and regional research fashions. As an illustration, in the first decade of post-communist transition most think tanks focused on promoting privatisation and free market and ignored topics such as good governance and public participation.

The achievement of synchronized approaches among NGOs would help the strengthening of relations between the NGO sector and the government. However, this is impeded most of the time by rivalry for funding and different interests, sometimes even political attachment, and by other factors. Along with some exceptions, the reality is that cooperation between NGOs in public participation revolves at workshops and seminars that mainly target the education of NGO community on issues related to public participation.48

Many opinion polls reflect that the large majority of Romanian citizens do not exploit their rights as taxpayers and do not intend to participate in governance processes. This attitude will continue for the decades to come as even the young generations have not been educated in school to speak up and publicly defend their position. CSOs could complement public education by using innovative ways of teaching the importance of citizen participation.

During the communist regime in Romania, the vertical control and the communist repression were stronger and the citizens more submissive than in most of the countries in the region. The post-communist transformation of the legal framework is ahead of the change of mentalities. The cultural remainings of the communist dictatorship are still significant and participatory governance seems unusual for most Romanian citizens.

Although a significant part of the population has started to develop participant orientations, most of the rest of the people, for different reasons, have continued to be oriented towards an authoritarian government structure. Because people’s mentalities were formed to expect centralized political decisions concerning all aspects and levels of the society, many of them are


still waiting for signals regarding various transformations from the political class\textsuperscript{49} (and tend to support authoritarian leaders), particularly when other factors are in favor of this behavior. Most citizens do not participate in governance processes as a result of mentalities, lack of trust in public institutions and public authorities, including the judiciary\textsuperscript{50}, cynicism along with unfulfilled high expectations of the populace (impatient to quickly see in Romania the level of Western European public administration development), uneven access to resources and overwhelming individual daily socio-economic problems, poor knowledge of their rights and fragile democratic skills. As shown by opinion polls, Romanians generally display cynicism and are skeptical about the impartiality of the newly created anti-corruption agencies. In addition to their own mentalities, the lowest segments of the society have sometimes difficulties in making their voices heard, due to the mentalities of some public officials. The end of the transition processes would mean reaching a level of development and stability which changes mentalities of public officials, civil society and citizens about the times they live.

\textbf{IV. CONCLUSIONS}

The CEE political culture is experiencing a very dynamic process of reconstruction based on a mix of mentalities inherited from communism, ongoing internalization of EU norms as well as other values and norms. After decades of hyper-centralization and authoritarianism, the CEE countries have had to strengthen the rule of law and the capacity of public institutions and rebuild the trust in government in a developing market-type environment. In some CEE countries this happened faster than in others, as some of the countries in the region had a pre-transitional phase. Although basic EU legislation on public participation considering these issues is already adopted, actual public participation differs across EU member states and candidate countries.

Romania experienced one of the most severe communist regimes in Eastern Europe and its cultural remaining are still significant. Although the government has achieved tremendous progress in fostering popular participation in governance processes, the transition from mass society to structured civil society and democratic participation in policy-making decisions is still ongoing and the work relations between the government and civil society and the citizens, as well as among civil society organizations are still under construction.

The remaining flaws of public reforms are calling for an enhanced political and managerial leadership with policy skills, interested in efficiently implementing their visions with regard to improving public service delivery, the professionalism of public officials and the image of public administration toward building trust in government and ultimately consolidating state legitimacy through democratic citizen engagement.

Participatory governance is unusual for most Romanian citizens. Although a noteworthy part of the population has started to develop participant orientations, most citizens do not participate in governance processes as a result of certain mentalities, lack of trust in public institutions, cynicism along with unfulfilled high expectations of the populace (impatient to quickly see in Romania the level of Western European public administration development), uneven access to

\textsuperscript{49} For more details, see Stefan A. (2005), “Securitization and Democratization: How They Condition Each Other. The Case of Romania”, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, The Netherlands, p. 39.

\textsuperscript{50} Institute for Public Policy, http://www.ipp.ro/
resources and overwhelming individual daily socio-economic problems, poor knowledge of their rights and fragile democratic skills. The end of the transition processes would mean reaching a level of development and stability which changes mentalities of public officials, civil society and citizens about the times they live.

Advancing opportunities for citizen engagement will have to continue at a fast pace in order to have a notable positive impact on policy formulation and implementation such as increasing policy effectiveness and social justice. There is further room for all the key players towards building inclusive governance and encouraging public participation. The mechanisms for ensuring ethics, integrity and accountability need to be strengthened in both the public and the non-governmental sectors. The government and NGOs need to pay more attention to informing the public on the provisions of the laws, and more efficiently organize for implementing the legislation related to popular participation in policy making.

REFERENCES
Books and other publications:
The University of Surrey (2004), “Engaging People in Active Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe”, briefing paper, part of the “Reviewing Education and Training for Governance and Active Citizenship in Europe - A

Other web sources:
The Economic and Social Council of Romania, www.ces.ro/
The European Commission, http://ec.europa.eu/
The Institute for Public Policy, Bucharest, http://www.ipp.ro/
Open Society Institute and Soros Foundation Network, www.soros.org/
The Presidential Administration of Romania, www.presidency.ro/

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.