



5th Internal Workshop of Democratic Solidarity: **ROLE OF STUDENT MOVEMENTS IN TRANSITION TO** **DEMOCRACY**

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Goethe-Institute, Prague, Czech Republic

This workshop explored the role that students have in the struggle for democracy and human rights within authoritarian regimes. The panelists shared their ideas and comments in this regard, using two testimonies about student protests in Venezuela and Armenia as examples and promoting the exchange of ideas with participants from other countries.

The case of Venezuela was presented in context to the current situation and the important role of students during the protests. Thanks to the mobilization of the student movements, the world learned about the situation in the country. The deplorable living conditions that the population is suffering as well as the political context were discussed. The situation in the country is also influenced by the decreasing quality of education and violence against students. The steps necessary to prevent any other country from experiencing such crisis as Venezuela were also discussed. It was reiterated that hope for the future coincides with the struggle to have access to education and security.

In the case of Armenia, its 1991 student revolution was used as a successful example that helped overcome the totalitarian regime. One of the biggest problems in the country was corruption that existed in all areas of life, including the educational system that lacked organization and mobilization. On the other hand, an emphasis was placed on the issue of international support since in Armenia, the danger included Russian involvement since the regime had its support. In this way, the message of the revolution raised democracy as an internal belief rather than a foreign policy, insisting that decisions had to be made by the same citizens of the country.

Restrictions and limitations:

- In case of Venezuela, the Maduro regime uses terrorist methods and is linked to drug trafficking.
- Youth is rarely in power positions.
- Protesters in Nicaragua are in danger of being imprisoned, tortured, and oppressed - many cannot participate in the fight because of the police and the potential for danger and harm.
- The involvement of many young people in the fight against authoritarianism has forced many to abandon the cause or even have to flee the country.
- Politicization of the education system.
- Dissemination of propaganda and false news by the authoritarian regime.
- Information and education produced by the government are intended to influence public opinion in their favor.
- Lack of exchange of knowledge among the youth of countries that suffer protests with countries like Armenia about the success of their student movements.
- Difficulties with maintaining motivation.



Recommendations:

- It is necessary that student / youth movements have a fixed image and clear proposals in their actions.
- Establish contacts between youth movements in different countries and exchange knowledge.
- Decentralization of protests throughout the country, organization and cooperation between different cities and universities.
- Maintain peaceful protests without the use of violence.
- Strengthen youth organizations and programs to discuss and learn about key issues and the develop critical thinking.
- As in the case of Armenia, in Latin America the role of the international community is central.
- Society must protect young people and the right to access education.
- Understand youth as an integral part of civil society, instead of perceiving it as a separate entity.
- Understand the cultural parts of the movement and the individual identity of youth.
- Look for other mechanisms to inform students of ways of protest that do not carry so much danger
- Promote civic education.¹

¹ Conclusions were issued in the workshop 'Student Power' organized in the framework of the Democratic Solidarity project during the 23rd annual conference of the Forum 2000 Foundation.