

Summary

A panel entitled “Democratic Transitions and the Role of Visegrad Countries: The Way Forward” was held on Wednesday, May 14, 2014 at the Central European University in Budapest. Participants discussed the outcomes of the first phase of the Forum 2000 Foundation’s long-term project, Visegrad Platform for Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Civil Society.

Jiří Schneider, Senior Fellow and Director of Special Projects at the Prague Security Studies Institute, opened the discussion by thanking the partners and supporters of the project, spearheaded by the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) and the Central European University in Budapest.



The Executive Director of the Forum 2000 Foundation, **Jakub Klepal**, added special thanks to all participants and emphasized the importance of the project in the framework of the Forum 2000 Foundation mission. *“We established this project to share and spread the unique historical and political experience of Central Europe with the democracy transitions and development. The first stage of the project took place during the 17th Forum 2000 Conference in September 2013 and we are glad to present its outcomes.”*

Jan Hornát, Project Coordinator at the Forum 2000 Foundation, opened the presentation summarizing the results of the project’s first phase, then went on to discuss the universal yearning of democracy and finally called attention to the issue of the rule of law in democratic transitions and development: *“Elections and democratic institutions can become meaningless without the rule of law.”*

Zsuzsanna Végh of the Central European University stated that democracy assistance is much more complicated than we think. *“The transitions to democracy are different than they used to be 20 years ago. Our experience thus does not mean that we know the best practices and have the greatest recommendations for other countries.”* According to Végh, countries want to be seen as unique donors, but in so doing can thwart all collective attempts and efforts to promote democracy.

“Democracy is about solidarity and we must acknowledge that free government is never given for granted – we need to safeguard it,” pointed out **Danuta Glondys**, Director of the Villa Decius Association from Poland. She proclaimed that we have to develop democracy assistance programs, which will focus on the complex issue: *“The problem of democracy development is not only a question for foreign countries, but for the local governments and public bodies in the Visegrad countries too.”*

Ferenc Jári, Eastern Partnership Coordinator at IVF, followed up on this statement, when he underlined the need of involvement of different organizations and institutions for a successful democratic development. He connected this issue with the geographical dimension and declared that every region has its own role and natural interests: *“Eastern Partnership is an inherent political playground for Visegrad countries and every country from the V4 should be visible in Ukraine at these days.”*



Jári added that the IVF seeks to primarily focus on the “agents of change” in every country – that is, the NGOs and their sustainable development, the media and universities.

Attila Bartha of the Center for Policy Studies at the Central European University summarized some of the main points of the discussion and reflected that the hardest thing in democracy assistance is finding the balance between the expertise approach and every day policymaking.

At the end of the debate, **Jiří Schneider** indicated two keywords that should guide future democratic transitions: “intermediary structures” (i.e. the connecting lines between the society and government, which are, of course, culturally conditioned) and “accountable government.”