

FREEDOM FROM FEAR IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY: HUNGARY

**Satellite event for the World Forum for Democracy – Central European University,
November 19, 2015**

The satellite event organized at the Central European University (Budapest) was centered around the issues raised in Theme 2 of the World Forum for Democracy, i.e. *Freedom from fear in diverse societies*. The CEU conference took Hungary as a case-study and aimed at putting the issue of migration and the influx of asylum seekers into a broader context of public acceptance and integration by questioning the legitimacy of the broadly understood integration claims. Speakers consistently emphasized that Europe, and Hungary in particular, has been characterized by a growing number of deterrent measures aiming at keeping refugees and migrants away. As the keynote speaker observed: deterrent measures do not work and they merely result in the change of migration routes and contribute to the more frequent use of smugglers and crime organizations. Migration and the influx of refugees is often seen by states as a security and humanitarian threat. The appropriate state approach thus is often policing and charity, and the vertical intervention is primarily centered on immobilization.

The refugee crisis has been in the region and especially in Hungary on the one hand foregrounded by a narrative of crisis, on the other hand as a duty to protect resulting from the equation of the security threat and the threat to the society. Anti-immigration campaigns, such as the one concluded by the Hungarian government, not only harms the migrants who are the most directly affected but also impacts and contaminates the mind of those who otherwise have no negative feelings on the issue. Without institutional help de-biasing is impossible and in the Hungarian context when the billboards were placed all over the country, avoiding exposure is a difficult task. While the preliminary results of public polls do not suggest a radical increase of the traditionally high level of xenophobia, there are worrying trends: the proportion of those who unequivocally have no negative attitude visibly decreased.

The conference also provided a forum to hear from the grassroots and established organizations working with refugees about their experience during the refugee crisis in the summer and early fall of 2015. Besides hearing about the organizational issues and challenges, representatives of the civil society organizations spoke about the difficulties that working in a hostile political environment raises. Despite the unprecedented support received from the public, their cooperation with the established charity organizations and the governmental agencies remains controversial. However, the

lack of institutional constraints help these grassroots movement to quickly adjust their activities and mission to the changing social and legal setting, and although their work is not needed in Hungary any longer they continue their operation in the crisis regions.