

Twenty-two government delegations from Central and Eastern Europe gathered in Bucharest in mid-November to assess democratic progress in the region and explore ways for strengthening cooperation with civil society and international organizations in strengthening democracy. The Regional Conference of the Community of Democracies, organized in partnership by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNDP, was accompanied by an NGO Forum, co-sponsored by UNDP, Freedom House and Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative (LGI), and hosted by UNDP and Partners Foundation for Local Development.



Community of Democracies Regional Conference, joint government – civil society opening session. From left to right: Ana Vasilache, President, Partners for Local Development Foundation, Raymond Shonholtz, President, Partners for Democratic Change, Victoria Popescu, Director for Global Affairs, Romanian MFA, Mircea Geoana, Foreign Affairs Minister, Soknan Han Jung, UNDP Resident Representative, Nicole Bibbins, Special Advisor for Global Affairs, US State Department, and Albert Van Klaveren, Chile's Ambassador to the EU.

At the NGO Forum, civil society representatives from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, FYR of Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Ukraine, together with guests from Western Europe and the USA, debated on NGOs role in promoting good governance and fighting corruption, and on regional cooperation mechanisms to promote Education for Democracy. As a novelty in the Community of Democracies process, the Romanian Government and UNDP sought to more closely integrate

the governmental and civil society components of the Conference, by organizing three joint government – NGO sessions. This allowed for the NGO community to express their views and concerns and communicate their recommendations to official delegations, during substantive and frank discussions.



More than 80 civil society representatives from Central and Eastern Europe debated at the NGO Forum on how to fight corruption and promote education for democracy.

"This is not a show, but a genuine Community of Democracies in action", said Romanian Foreign Minister Mircea Geoana at the joint concluding session of the Conference, where he acknowledged the democratic progress in the region, but also highlighted the present challenges in countries like Georgia and Azerbaijan, and in the greater Middle East. Minister Geoana stressed the urgency of proposing an alternative societal project to countries and regions engulfed into violence and fundamentalism, a project which should go beyond formal democratic criteria to include basic human development pre-requisites such as social infrastructure, justice, equity, and universal access to public goods.

Addressing the joint government – NGO opening session, UNDP Representative Soknan Han Jung highlighted that "UNDP, as a long-standing trusted partner of both governments and civil society, with important field presence and programmes across the region, is ideally placed to catalyze national and regional dialogue and cooperation, even on sensitive issues such as those to be discussed at this Conference".

The Community of Democracies, an international coalition of the democratic nations aimed at fostering cooperation for the protection and consolidation of democracy, was launched with the inaugural ministerial gathering in Warsaw on 25-27 June 2000. A second global conference took place in Seoul, in 2002. The Bucharest Regional Conference is part of the preparatory process for the forthcoming Community of Democracies Conference in Santiago de Chile.

For more information about the NGO Forum please visit: [www.bucharest-cd-ngoforum.ro](http://www.bucharest-cd-ngoforum.ro)