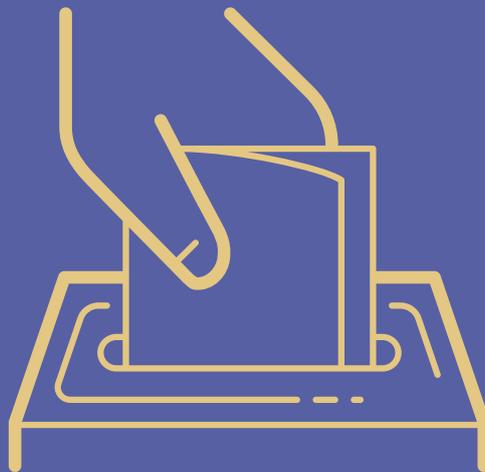


# CIVIL SOCIETY AND ELECTIONS

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## EXPERIENCE FROM AROUND EUROPE AND HUNGARY



EMMM CROSS-SECTORAL WORKSHOP 3  
4 NOVEMBER 2021, ONLINE

Most countries of Central Europe are in a political turmoil in one way or another. In some one government crisis follows another, in others potentially decisive elections are coming up soon. Naturally, these developments have an impact on civil society, as citizen groups, organisations and movements realise they need to participate and have their say in democratic processes during and beyond elections.

This workshop is organised by Ökotárs - Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation with its partners – Civil College Foundation, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union and With the Power of Humanity Foundation - in the framework of a joint project, supported by the European Commission aimed at building the capacity of civil society and facilitating the exchange of knowhow about civic engagement around elections.

The workshop will convene representatives of civil society organisations, movements and groups from around Europe and Hungary to give inspiration and ideas - more specifically to:

- learn and exchange about past CSO campaigns and activism around (primarily) local/regional elections (voter mobilization, candidate forums, election monitoring, etc.)
- find common points and best practices that can be used in future work
- network and make contacts with like-minded organizations

The workshop will be held online (on Zoom), and free to attend with registration. [You can register here.](#) We will send a zoom link to registered participant a few days before the event.

For more information, contact Veronika Móra: [move@okotars.hu](mailto:move@okotars.hu)

Looking forward to seeing you!

## Programme:

### 9.30-9.40

#### **Introduction: project objectives and rationale**

- Veronika Móra, Ökotárs

### 9.40-11.10

#### **Session 1: Civil society and elections in Central Europe**

Opening presentation: Elections in Central Europe: common trends & challenges and ways civil society can jointly address them

- Rast'o Kužel, Memo98 (Slovakia)

Short presentation of campaigns from neighbouring countries:

- Magdalena Pecul-Kudelska, Obywatele RP (Citizens of Poland) Poland
- Oana Preda, CERE (Resource Centre for Public Participation), Romania
- Septimius Parvu, Expert Forum, Romania
- Albena Simeonova, FEA (Foundation for Environment and Agriculture), Bulgaria

Some examples from Western Europe:

- Monica Radu, Maison de l'Europe de Paris, France
- Anne-Kathrin Gräfe, Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement, Germany

Q&A

11.10-11.30 Break

### 11.30-13.10

#### **Session 2: Elections in Hungary**

Presentation: preliminary elections autumn 2021 – what and why, results and lessons:

- Róbert László, Political Capital Institute

Case studies: election frauds and how to counter them – experiences from 2018 and 2019:

- György Bihari, C8 (Budapest 8th district)
- Tímea Bogdán, Érdekem az Érdeked Egyesület (Nógrád county)

Civil society and elections in Hungary: success stories

- István Szulovszky, Civil Kotta (Szentendre)
- Zsuzsa Csabalik, PadTársak / Függetlenek A Szinva Városáért (Miskolc)
- Júlia Konkoly-Thege, A Város Mindenkié, The City is for All (Pécs)
- Bálint Vojtonovszki, Freie Ungarische Botschaft (Berlin)

Q&A

13.10-13.50 Lunch break (with project videos)

**13.50-15.00**

### **Session 3: Breakout groups**

What makes local civil campaigning around elections successful? (mixed groups of international and Hungarian participants)

- which of the activities you liked best and why?
- what do you think made these successful?
- would you organize something similar in your location, and if yes how?
- what would you need to implement such an activity?

Report back from the small groups and conclusions

### **Final session: What can we offer to help you?**

Short presentation of project partners for the Hungarian audience

- Nóra Aujeszky, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union
- Vilja Arató, With the Power of Humanity Foundation



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## Rasťo Kužel

MEMO98

Slovakia

Rasťo Kužel is a media and election expert with over 22 years of international experience. Since 1998, he has been the Executive Director of MEMO98, a proficient media institution delivering media monitoring on behalf of international institutions as well as technical assistance to civil society groups. Rasťo has worked as media and election analyst, consultant, and trainer, participating in some 30 OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions, most recently in Italy, the Netherlands and Iceland. He has also worked in more than 150 election and media-related projects and missions in the framework of the UN, Council of Europe, OSCE, IFES, NED, NDI, DRI, and IMS, among others in Nigeria, Moldova, Myanmar, and Ukraine. In 2011, Rasťo lead a consortium that implemented a UNDP project focusing on media assistance to public broadcaster, civil society organizations, and election administration in Georgia.

For the last five years, Rasťo has focused intensively on the issue of propaganda and disinformation, conducting a research on the impact of Russian narratives in the former Soviet Union countries and beyond, conducting trainings in media monitoring and fact checking and participating at various events focusing on this issue. Rasťo has also focused on the role of social media during elections and ways to tackle their negative impact on elections processes as well as ways how to monitor these trends in the context of international observation of elections.

The introductory speech: „Elections in Central Europe: common trends & challenges and ways civil society can jointly address them” setting the scene of the workshop will be delivered by Rasťo Kužel, representing Memo98 from Slovakia.



## Magdalena Pecul-Kudelska

Obywatele RP

Poland

Magdalena Pecul-Kudelska, a Professor of Chemistry at the University of Warsaw is involved in pro-democratic and human rights movement Obywatele RP (Citizens of Poland) since 2016. Their activities involve defense of human rights and rule of law, but they also promote involvement of civil society in electoral process. They have been campaigning since 2018 for open primary elections in Poland, pursuing an idea very similar to what is happening now in Hungary, so far without success. They have also organized open hearings for the candidates in elections for European Parliament in 2019. The hearings consisted of the candidates answering questions on various political issues, and their answers were subsequently discussed by an expert in the field.



## Oana Preda

CERE

Romania

Two small scale grassroots interventions around the local elections in Romania will be presented by Oana Preda from CERE. These broadly aimed at achieving a better representation of the issues raised by citizens on the agenda of the future mayors and Local councillors. The campaigns also demonstrate that while the end result is important, but the process is equally so: as “together we are stronger”, they also aimed at offering an opportunity for groups of citizens to work together, as a means of capacity building. If strong enough and well organized, citizens can have a saying in how candidates are selected – shown by the example of Floreasca Civica Neighborhood Group.

Oana Preda has been part of the Romanian nongovernmental sector since 1996. She worked with Pro Democracy Association, where became experienced in promoting democracy and public participation. After that, she worked for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) in Romania supporting CSOs in their advocacy efforts. In 2006, Oana Preda was one of the founders of the Resource Center for Public Participation – CeRe, one of the most relevant CSOs in the area of activism and citizens participation. Currently, she is the Director of CeRe. Oana is a civic activist fighting for many causes relevant for the Romanian society.

CeRe’s mission is to contribute to a just and equitable society, where people stand together and their voices are central to the decision-making processes. CeRe works with citizens’ groups and CGOs to help them have a stronger voice. Currently, CeRe is also facilitating the Coalition CGOs group for citizens – an informal network which defends the civic space for participation.



## Septimius Parvu

Expert Forum

Romania

'Election observation in Romania - a growing experience' - Septimius Pârnu will present how the FiecareVot Conteaza (EachVote Counts) coalition, a group of independent CSOs and civic activists was formed and how it became a visible voice during the electoral periods since 2016. Moreover, he will present some of the instruments developed by EFOR to increase the transparency in the field of political funding and to highlight the need for electoral reform.

Septimius Pârnu is an expert in good governance and elections working with the Romanian think tank Expert Forum. He has over 11 years of experience in coordinating projects related to active citizenship, education, election monitoring and political clientelism. Since 2009 he has participated as an expert or coordinated several election monitoring campaigns in Romania and internationally, including in the Republic of Moldova, Slovakia, Lithuania or Montenegro. In 2015 he observed the use of Internet voting in Estonia and has an extensive experience related to the use of alternative voting methods. He has constantly collaborated with international organizations such as the Council of Europe, Community of Democracies or the OSCE / ODIHR.

Septimius analyses political clientelism and political financing and has constantly published reports on these topics. He developed the only platform in Romania that includes data and analysis on the history of financing political parties and electoral campaigns in the last 15 years – [www.banipartide.ro](http://www.banipartide.ro). For several years he has been coordinating a program related to political clientelism, with an emphasis on the implementation of investment programs and reserve funds dedicated to the local administration, constantly publishing articles and developing the only interactive platform that reflects the political side of the implementation of such funds.



## Albena Simeonova

FEA

Bulgaria

Albena Simeonova has become a Member of the Bulgarian Parliament in April 2021 with a civil society background. With degrees in Biology and Chemistry as well as Environment Management, she has been the chairwoman of the Foundation for Environment and Agriculture since 2003. She was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize and the UNEP prize in 1996 and 1997, respectively.



## **Monica Radu**

Maison de l'Europe de Paris

France

Monica RADU will speak about the French civil society experience in elections. Monica is currently in charge of the Center Europe Direct at La Maison de l'Europe in Paris (The House of Europe in Paris), and she was also elected employee spokesperson at the French Federation of Houses of Europe.

She is a doctoral student at IHEAL - Institute of Advanced Studies of Latin America. With a Master's degree in Comparative Political Sociology from the University of Nanterre Paris X, she began her career as a project manager and lecturer at the House Jean Monnet, owned by the European Parliament.



## **Anne-Kathrin Gräfe**

Bundesnetzwerk Bürger-  
schaftliches Engagement

Germany

Anne-Kathrin Graefe will present 'Civil Society and Bundestag elections 2021', a publication that contains demands from the Federal Network of Citizen Engagement (BBE)-member organizations towards the next government in Germany with regard to civil society.



## Róbert László

Political Capital Institute

Hungary

The logistic feat of organising, the high turnout as well as the mutually acceptable results all contributed to the success of the first-ever primary elections in Hungary, to be presented by Róbert László. The indisputably most innovative political initiative of the opposition of Orbán's government broke through bubbles, eliminated the earlier brawls around appointing candidates lasting practically until election day, but also launched some kind of purification process. It also bought about a closer cooperation between the civic and political spheres, and as this trend is likely to continue, it makes no sense to deny, rather to build awareness around it. But the opposition still has a long way to go in reaching out to enough voters to gain parliamentary majority, especially in smaller settlements. Compiling a joint list will probably be the main source of conflict, but internal dominance struggles may also threaten the 6-part cooperation, possibly exacerbated by the government's intervention to undermine unity.

Róbert László is a political analyst and election expert at Political Capital. He graduated at the Budapest University of Economy and Administration (2004) and Corvinus University (2009). He teaches election administration and the National University of Public Service. His main research field is the Hungarian electoral system, and he leads the related projects at Political Capital.



## György Bihari

C8 (Budapest 8th district)

Hungary

György Bihari of the C8 group active in the 8th district of Budapest will present how they build local communities and involve citizens, and show what anomalies they found during the campaign and the voting at the municipal elections in 2019 and what they did against these.

C8 - Civilek Józsefvárosért was founded in 2019, its members are mostly local citizens who want to work for Józsefváros on the long run. The group dates back to 2017, when Közöd Civil Society ran Márta Románé Bolba for a representative seat in a by-election. Then in 2018 with the support democratic oppositional parties they backed Péter Győri in the mayoral by-election. In 2019 the group itself initiated negotiations with the local chapters of the democratic oppositional parties to have a consensus candidate for mayor, which became a great success, as the member András Pikó won the election for mayor with 49.6% of the votes.

György, who has been an activist for about 10 years is a founding and board member of the association. He's always been interested in human rights and been concerned about the eroding state of democracy in Hungary. He always thought that the cure for this is in a strong civil society and this motivated him to enroll in ELTE Faculty of Social Sciences Community and Civil Studies Master programme in 2017, where he realized that one cannot reach the desired changes without holding the local executive power. This motivated him to do an internship at C8, which coincided with the campaign of András Pikó at the time. During the campaign he was the coordinator of the Participatory Workgroup.



## Tímea Bogdán

Érdekem az Érdeked  
Egyesület (Nógrád county)

Hungary

Tímea Bogdán will speak about the voter education work they carried out in villages of Northern Hungary. She was born in the segregated part of Bátortereny to a poor Roma family where survival rather than education was the main motivation. After finishing vocational training, under family pressure she married at the age of 18. While raising two children, she finished her secondary school with great difficulties and is now in the third year of her studies to become a social worker. She's employed as the coordinator of the Children's Chance program in Salgótarján. She has been a community organizer for 8 years, first at the Hungarian Anti-poverty Foundation and now with Ökotárs Foundation. Besides she volunteers at Chance Lab Association, the Donation Taxi and Civil College.

In order to make the advocacy and community organizing work carried out in Nógrád county together with her colleague more efficient and visible, in 2020 they formed the Your Interest is My Interest Association. The organisation is active in a number of villages, including Mátraverebély, Sámsonháza, Kistereny, Mizserfa and Etes.



## Zsuzsa Csabalik

PadTársak / Függetlenek A  
Szinva Városáért (Miskolc)

Hungary

Zsuzsanna Csabalik will talk about the development and past 5-years' experience of the informal and formal communities in Miskolc which consciously engage in politics, focusing especially on the successful municipal campaign and election in 2019.

Zsuzsanna Csabalik represents the 'Padtársak' ('teammates') informal group in Miskolc, which in its „School of Conscious Citizenship' deals with public policy matters, also encouraging cooperation (while keeping all parties at an arm's length). She is also the chairwoman of the Independents for the City of the Szinva (river), which candidated the current mayor at the last elections.



## István Szulovszky

Civil Kotta (Szentendre)

Hungary

Through the example of the 2017 and 2019 municipal elections in Szentendre, István Szulovszky will discuss questions such as what is the role of civil society organisations during elections? Should they engage in politics or not? His contribution will look at election times as a tool of problem solving, mobilisation and issue-orientation in the local elections.

István Szulovszky is a founding member and chairman of the Civil Kotta association of Szentendre, and a full-time community organizer in the regional working group of the “System-level” organizing project of the Civil College Foundation. Civil Kotta was formed as an informal group in 2016 with the goal to support self-organizing local citizen groups, and it has become a registered association in 2021. Its main issues are the protection of local natural values and the people’s right and opportunities to participate in public matters. Its activity has significantly contributed to ousting the old local government, replaced by a more open, “civil-minded one in 2019. Currently the association focuses more on the national context local problems, which they want to solve together with their allies in regional and national cooperation.



## **Bálint Vojtonovszki**

Freie Ungarische Botschaft  
(Berlin)

Germany/Hungary

Bálint Vojtonovszki is a community organizer, sociologist from Budapest (Hungary), living in Berlin (Germany) since 2014. He is Board Member of the Freie Ungarische Botschaft.

'#ittszavazok - to get the diaspora to vote' presented by Bálint Vojtonovszki represents a very special campaign organised by the Freie Ungarische Botschaft, a non-partisan volunteer association founded by Berliner Hungarians working for the rule of law and a solidary society in Hungary, from abroad. FUB started organizing get-out-the-vote campaigns in 2018 for the Hungarian parliamentary elections. A year later they returned with their diaspora partner organisations to organize the Eastern Europeans residing in Germany to participate in the elections for the European Parliament. Last but not least they recently finished a campaign on the right to vote by mail, as most Hungarians living abroad must travel in order to cast their votes - which they find absurd (and not only in COVID times). What did they achieve? What did they learn through these actions? Why should you reach out to your diaspora? – these are the questions Bálint will address in his presentation.