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Good governance in Romania includes civil society

19/01/2015

NGOs have expertise to assist authorities in the battle against corruption, analysts say.

By Paul Ciocoiu for Southeast European Times in Bucharest -- 19/01/15

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Romania needs to pay closer attention to civil society groups and citizens who can provide expertise in the fight against corruption, experts told *SETimes* following the release of the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators for 2013, which assesses the governing quality of 200 countries.

The 2013 data, which is the most recent available, shows that Romania made progress in five of the six indicators, namely political stability and the absence of violence, governing efficacy, regulation quality, and state and corruption control, compared to the performances registered in 2012.

But the report highlights that Romania took a backslide in representation and responsibility, an indicator which gauges citizens' participation in electing the government and freedom of speech, association and media freedom.

Commenting on the report, Septimius Parvu, a good governance specialist with ExpertForum, a leading Romanian think tank, said authorities need to rely more on the civil society to perform better on representation.

"NGOs can offer expertise to the government and the parliament, but such contributions are ignored in Romania. Consequently, what we see is the birth of informal groups that are gaining size and are putting more pressure on a central and community level. These are people who rally behind causes," he told *SETimes*.

Thousands of Romanians took to the streets in various cities to protest what they called deliberate bureaucratic obstacles that prevented Romanians abroad from voting in the two rounds of presidential elections in November. Thousands queued for hours outside embassies and consulates in Paris, Turin, London, Munich and other major Western cities and were unable to vote before the stations closed at 9 p.m., sparking fury abroad and at home.

Authorities argued the law prevented them from opening more polling stations, but the country's Central Electoral Bureau rejected that, saying there was legal room for such a measure.

"Something like that, raising bureaucratic mechanisms to block citizens' access to voting, doesn't have to happen in the EU. This is a worrisome picture of the system," Parvu pointed out, adding that Romania's good governing capacity is marred by a chaotic legislative process.

"We witness governmental emergency ordinances passed every three days, decisions made overnight. The fiscal code has been amended 100 times in a non-transparent manner, without consultations with the business environment," he said.

Romanian officials say the last indicator in which the country scored worse than in 2012 concerns a series of problems authorities have failed to address.

"The media is largely politically controlled with very few independent opinions able to make it to the public. At the same time, speaking of quality of representation, this indicator suffers dramatically because the parliament blocks justice investigations against lawmakers," Cristian Preda, a member of the European Parliament and former dean of the Faculty of Political Sciences of Bucharest University, told *SETimes*.



Romania joined the EU in 2007, and is still facing scrutiny from the Union on corruption. [AFP]

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"Romania's main problem exists in the political elites' incapacity to break away from corruption networks," he added.

The European Commission has repeatedly called on the Romanian parliament to lift immunity for lawmakers suspected of corruption and refer them to the justice system. The recommendation has been featured in almost all the reports on progress of justice in Romania, part of the Co-operation and Verification Mechanism that Brussels instituted in 2007, when both Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU.

The Union continues to closely monitor anti-corruption efforts in both countries.

Meanwhile, the improved performance on the five indicators is a direct consequence of Western pressure following the political crisis in the summer of 2012, the worst Romania has gone through in the post-communist period, Preda said.

"After the disaster in 2012, when the rule of law and political stability were endangered, it was very hard not to register a certain progress in 2013," he added.

Two years ago, the newly installed ruling coalition led by Prime Minister Victor Ponta tried to oust President Traian Basescu from power by encroaching upon fundamental democratic principles, to the dismay of Western partners who intervened. Basescu was impeached, but soon reinstated following a referendum that failed to reach the constitutional turnout.

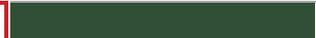
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