



# 2019 annual report

Expert Forum (EFOR) is a think tank in Bucharest established in 2011 by experts concerned with public policies and good governance. We were united by the idea that in Romania and our region, Eastern Europe, we should support the EU to build open, prosperous and non-conflict societies, based on transparent institutions and free and employed citizens.

We deal with policy topics such as administration reform and integrity, decentralization and public budgets, justice and anti-corruption, energy, elections and active citizenship, in Romania and in the region. In recent years we have been increasingly aware of the risks posed to democracy by propaganda manipulation and fake news, originating in the Kremlin, Bucharest or Chisinau.

## POLITICAL CLIENTELISM AND BAD GOVERNANCE

EFOR measures clientelism and bad governance with objective instruments (indexes, maps of local corruption, analysis on key sectors) and develops innovative visual tools to contribute to the public debate. We do this in Romania but, more and more, in other states in the region, as comparisons between different countries make the story more interesting. Together with local partners we analysed the manner in which states spend public funds and organized events in Moldova, Georgia, Bulgaria, and among the old EU countries, Italy and Spain.

[We have developed maps of clientelism](#) covering almost 20 years in Romania, and we started piloting Georgia and Moldova. We took the debate about our results to each of the countries, but also to Brussels, where we discussed with political decision-makers and experts measures that need to be taken to reduce the phenomenon. In 2020 we will also have results [from a project](#) on clientelism and state capture in procurement, comparing Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and Spain.

EFOR released several reports in 2019 related to political clientelism and procurement, including one dedicated to clientelism in [consultancy related contracts](#). Moreover, we toured Romania and Moldova in order to train local activists and journalist about clientelism and provided assistance to them in order to identify and point out local issues in terms of procurement.

We promote good governance outside the EU, for example by [supporting officials and journalists in Armenia](#) better understand the lesson of Romania's integration into the EU, in jointly organized expert tours; or in **Africa**, at the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, where we explained the experiences of the East-European transition.

Following years of efforts to push forward the rule of law and European anti-corruption strategies, in September 2019 [Laura Stefan was elected president of the \*Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative\*](#), an intergovernmental organization of the Balkan countries.



## ELECTION MONITORING

We observe - alone or together with other civic associations (within the FiecareVot coalition) - elections and publicly report fraud or manipulation when they appear, on voting days or during campaigns. In the last years we have been officially registered for monitoring in seven elections (five in Romania, two in Moldova), plus referenda. We had observers at the parliamentary elections in [Moldova](#) (February 2019), [European elections and referendum on justice](#) - 1200 observers, in May 2019 - and [presidential elections](#) - 850 observers, November 2019. We ensured free legal assistance to voters by setting up a call center and through our web platform [www.votcorect.ro](http://www.votcorect.ro), where we answers frequent asked questions and ensure electoral assistance. Most of the complaints from citizens were redirected to relevant institutions and contributed to the amendment of the legislation.

EFOR [has been constantly involved](#) in the decision-making process and has contributed to the amendment of some essential legislation. For example, most of our recommendations on out of country voting have been included in the laws adopted during the summer. Our reports have been highly visible and strongly mediatized.

[libertatea.ro/stiri/doua-zile-pana-cand-ne-alegem-presedintele-cum-traiesc-o-zi-de-alegeri-sutele-de-voluntari-anonimi-care-observa-corectitudinea-votul...](http://libertatea.ro/stiri/doua-zile-pana-cand-ne-alegem-presedintele-cum-traiesc-o-zi-de-alegeri-sutele-de-voluntari-anonimi-care-observa-corectitudinea-votul...)



ȘTIRI ROMÂNIA

Libertatea > Știri > Știri România

**Două zile până când ne alegem președintele. Cum trăiesc o zi de alegeri sutele de voluntari anonimi care observă corectitudinea votului**

EFOR has been a constant interlocutor of international organizations such as OSCE/ODIHR and has partnered to increase the transparency of party financing in Romania with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and CEELI Institute in Prague. In 2019, we organized two meetings with decision-makers and discussed the rules for party and campaign financing; as a results some of our proposals have been introduced in the law, while others are pending or have been included on the public agenda. We stressed [on the issue of high subsidies for political parties](#) and as an effect thresholds have been reduced in 2020 by 30%.



## FIGHTING FAKE NEWS AND DISINFORMATION

EFOR has developed a set of tools for combating fake news and online political manipulation, in Romanian. We aim to build in Romania and the Republic of Moldova replicas of the national strategies to combat the Scandinavian manipulation – i.e. sets of simple and practical actions ranging from online platforms for detecting sources of fake news, to analysing the effects and actors involved, and even administrative response measures, partnerships with social networks or innovative educational products for use in schools and faculties, with the help of young people to better understand trolling on social media and to develop critical, autonomous thinking.

We believe that there is a clear link between disinformation and the bad government. Fake news, government incompetence and clientelism go very well together: anti-liberal political leaders resort to them naturally to build parallel realities, hostile to the space of freedoms and rights in Europe, where they can steal and govern with client methods, the only ones they can. We analysed such connections [in some of our reports](#).

In 2018 and 2019 we organized pilot workshops with teachers and students, in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, in which the best "anti-trolling warriors" received [awards](#).



EFOR developed a toolkit supporting teachers to work with students on fighting disinformation, including an online application called [Get Bad News](#) that allows students to understand how trolling works. We produced [a series of videos](#) explaining

the impact of disinformation and tools to fight it.

## LOCAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES

We continued our series of [Schools for Democracy](#) organized in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The program *School for Democracy* proposes education through alternative, non-formal methods, through which we can reach communities where public debate is almost absent. In 2019 we continued to work with teachers from local communities and to generate discussions on essential topics: active citizenship, education for democracy, rule of law. In January we organized a meeting with all the members of the School for Democracy teachers network, while in February we continued with the first regional edition in [Constanta](#). In October, teachers from Moldova participated in a one week training in [Sinaia](#). After each of the trainings, teachers are provided support to develop and implement civic education projects with the participation of students and other members of the community. In January 2020 we [started a new edition of the School](#).

Similar civic schools have been organized in Moldova together with our partners from Center for Legal Resources. The purpose is to assist students to better understand civic involvement mechanisms and to become community leaders.



## ENERGY

We dealt with the issue of energy, both in the region and in the country, or by analyzing the risks that the Republic of Moldova would fall victim to in the Russian-Ukrainian gas conflict; either protesting when Romania took bad strategic, anti-EU measures, copied from the Gazprom agenda. We [organized public consultations with the associations of owners and experts in energy](#), in Bucharest and Constanța, about the issue of heating where we found that there is more knowledge and wisdom at grassroots level than in the town halls or the relevant ministry. As such, we have launched a public petition to launch reform proposals in the system; you can still sign it [here](#).

Semnați petiția: [www.petitiononline.com/incalzire](http://www.petitiononline.com/incalzire); o înmănăm decidenților pe 22 octombrie (conferință cu presă), pe 10 decembrie (când se discută bugetele) și pe 10 aprilie (la început de campanie pentru locale).



EXPERTFORUM.RO

Încălzirea în București: un dezastru iminent.  
Semnați petiția!

Află mai multe





EFOR [supported civil society organizations](#) by facilitating dedicated workshops on complying with standards imposed by legislation on countering money laundering (AML) and personal data protection (GDPR). We worked closely with national authorities

overseeing GDPR and AML and organized several workshops in Bucharest and around the country. The training sessions will be completed by guidebooks on AML and GDPR applicable standards developed in cooperation with the national authorities.

## POLICY REACTIONS AND DEBATES

In addition to these ongoing issues, we organize public debates, quick reactions to events, comment and participate in civil society coalitions to advocate for good governance, public transparency and European values, both in the country, as well as in Brussels. We held an international conference in Bucharest pleading for the continuation [of international sanctions against Russia](#), whose conclusions were presented in Brussels. What we say is based on a premiere analysis of Russia's influence in Eastern Europe, where we propose a model of analysis: the report [here](#).



[Our annual policy report](#) outlined the revival of populism in Eastern Europe and included the results of a series of projects of the organization and its partners on two main components: measuring clientelism and combating strategic political misinformation.

## PUBLIC CONNECTION

We adopted films followed by debates in the One World festival, [features in movies](#), participate in debates and many radio and TV shows, sharing our opinions on policy issues.



## Thank you!

EFOR wishes to thank all its partners and donors that supported projects, civic initiatives and daring objectives. Join us in 2020 to consolidate democracy and rule of law.

You can find the video version of 2019 and our wishes for 2020 on [www.expertforum.ro/efor-2020](http://www.expertforum.ro/efor-2020).

## Support us

If you like what we do, you can **redirect up to 3.5% of the income tax or donate directly**. This support will allow us to continue our endeavours to monitor the government and enhance democracy.

Read more on [www.expertforum.ro/doneaza](http://www.expertforum.ro/doneaza).

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