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The “Promo-LEX” Association expresses its concern with the growing pressure on the schools from the Transnistrian region that use the Latin script, and the absence of any sizeable and visible efforts from the constitutional authorities and other actors involved in the Transnistrian settlement to prevent this.

Representatives of the separatist administration in Tiraspol pressured and threatened the managers of the Latin-script schools, and forced them to provide their employees’ personal data. The students from one of these schools were intimidated by the local militia who stormed the school during classes and attacked and brutalized one of the teachers.

On 9 December, the manager of the “Lucian Blaga” Lyceum in Tiraspol was contacted and told he faced an administrative sanction in the form of a fine of up to 2600 Moldovan lei for failing to provide data on the school’s staff members and their salaries.

The same situation was registered at the “Evrika” Lyceum in Ribnita. On 9 December, the separatist administration forced the management of the Lyceum to share their statistical and accounting reports, which contained personal data of their employees. At the same time, the school managers were obliged to go to the de-facto administration of the city to obtain fiscal code certificates. Note that the schools did not ask for the certificates, which were imposed on them as a means of exercising some control over these schools.

These actions by the de facto administration took place in the aftermath of the statement made by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the monitoring of the case *Catan and other 170 v. Moldova and Russia*. The CoE Committee of Ministers urged the Russian government to present relevant information, in the form of an action plan or a report, on the execution of the court decision in that case, as soon as possible. At the same time, the Committee of Ministers expressed its concern with the fact that the Russian authorities failed to provide any information on the taken measures.

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Based on the above, the “Promo-LEX” Association urges the parties involved in the peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian issue to take into account the importance of ensuring free access to education in the region, and that the security of children and the staff members of the schools under the control of the constitutional authorities constitute a priority. We reiterate in this regard that any interference with the educational process is unacceptable, and attacks against the administration or teachers of these schools must be stopped, sanctioned and condemned.

For more detail, contact:
Alexandru Postica,
Attorney at Law,
Human Rights Program Director, Promo-LEX:
Tel: (22) 450024,
GSM: 069104851,
e-mail: info@promolex.md

Hostages of the Cyrillic script

The EU summit in Vilnius raised the profile for Moldova. Teams of foreign journalists do not cease to come here. They don't want official meetings – they come to analyze Moldova and its people. They want to see how similar we are and if we don't pose any dangers to the EU. At the airport departures, they tap me on the shoulder and emit their ‘verdict’: “Too confusing!” In Chisinau, many politicians defend the “Moldovan language” against Romanian and Russian. On the left bank, Romanian is taught in Cyrillic script, in violation of fundamental rights - another generation is raised with a twisted mentality. NGO activists do not see any indication of a state plan that would stop or lessen the magnitude of this process.

In Transnistria, strange things happen even to those on the right bank who do not go too often in the eastern region of Moldova. There are only eight schools subordinated to the constitutional authorities that teach in the Latin script in the self-proclaimed “TMR” (Transnistrian Moldovan Republic). Most of the region's schools are Russian (122 schools), only three teach in Ukrainian, and 32 schools teach in Romanian/Moldovan based on the Cyrillic script.

Tools of indoctrination

The flag of the unrecognized state waves above all the schools. At the entrance, on the wall there is a large head portrait of the separatist leader Evghenii Sevcuic, and quotes about patriotism copied from the works of Lenin, and outdated Soviet symbols of the phantom state. The “anthem of Transnistria”, which begins with the words: “Long live Transnistria, the mother”, is also there - the whole package of indoctrination of the young generation, copied from the Soviets. All this comes to convince the students that Transnistria is a country, Sevcuic is its president, Moldova is enemy number one, and Russia is a friend who provides generous support.

In some schools, the old heating system is replaced with a new one. Old Soviet-time pipes and radiators are replaced with modern equivalents made in Turkey. All on Russian money – money that is not provided directly for the schools for renovation but is allocated via a “presidential” program and gives Sevcuic the chance to reap the laurels of a ‘thoughtful leader’ Another “presidential” program raised the teachers' salaries – also on generous Russian money.

“It’s all we could save”

Strangely, the teachers don’t seem to shy away from journalists. They don’t like to be photographed though, and one can have a frank conversation with them provided you don’t ask their names. “We know that some badmouth us across the river. Yes, we do tolerate certain untruths, and hang all kinds of slogans on the walls. It doesn’t make us proud – at least some of us. But what can we do? Nobody needs us. We were abandoned here, we are like hostages. True, it’s not ok to study Romanian language using the Cyrillic script. But, when a ship is drowning, one must save what one can. It’s all we could save,” we were told by some of the teachers during our many discussions; for obvious reasons, they asked to remain anonymous.

In some places, they often hold additional lessons after the classes in school. Students gather at their homes, and teachers come and teach them Romanian with Latin script, using textbooks approved by the Moldovan Ministry of Education, smuggled past the so-called Transnistrian customs. The students don’t do it for political reasons or out of patriotism for a country that abandoned them, but because they and their parents are aware that they can’t have a Soviet future with a Cyrillic script, and that their chance to escape from the separatist camp is to continue their post-secondary studies in Chisinau. [Romanian in] Cyrillic script is no longer used anywhere. In the absence of alternatives, they often deem it more convenient to go study in a Russian school, as they are usually more equipped.

“We are clinging to every thread to give them a different future. It’s not easy to convince a student who was born and raised here that his motherland is Moldova, not Transnistria, and that he must honor other state symbols (than the ones posted in the school hall). And, despite our efforts, they leave the school with some distorted habits. Imagine being asked to sing an anthem of an inexistent entity, “Transnistrian motherland”, every day in school... They serve in the army and swear allegiance. To whom? To separatist Transnistria. That cannot go without consequences,” the teachers say.

Chisinau, helpless

Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Potang, who is responsible for social issues in central government in Chisinau, told us that the constitutional authorities cannot run the schools in Transnistria because access to those schools is restricted by the region’s separatist forces. “They will not even tell us how many students study in those schools. They refuse any contacts with us. We managed to bring eight schools from the other bank of Nistru into the legal circuit (it is where Romanian using Latin script is taught - ed.) but, as you know, those schools are constantly harassed. For this reason many parents give up and take their children to other schools, run by the separatist regime. We have facilitated access to post-secondary education on the right bank to the students from the other schools. All talks stumble on the political component of the Transnistrian settlement. The principals of these schools are afraid to talk to us, including by phone,” Tatiana Potang told us.

Experts from Promo-LEX, an organization that monitors human rights violations in Transnistria, argue however that the constitutional authorities’ behavior and actions in Transnistria are virtually invisible and discouraging to those who would dare to take a public stance against the illegal regime. “Mrs. Potang is right - people are afraid to talk to the representatives of the Moldovan government, especially on the phone, which is most probably tapped. If those in Tiraspol learn about such conversations, the teachers could be charged with ‘treason’ or would fall victims to staged workplace disputes. As a result, in both scenarios, teachers would lose their jobs, which provide them a minimum for survival. Why would they risk it – and what would be the outcome

of such discussions with the authorities? Experience shows that the government did not provide any support to victims in the region in such cases. Absent a comprehensive state policy to support the residents of the region, it all seems confusing,” says Ion Manole, director of the “Promo-LEX” Association.

The incident a week ago at the “Lucian Blaga” Lyceum in Tiraspol (one of the eight institutions using Latin script), when the local militia stormed the school and questioned the principal, reveals a paradox: the repressive forces unlawfully assume certain rights and powers (to interrogate, conduct searches and prepare and sign protocols), while the constitutional authorities fail to apply the law and comply with mandatory legal procedures. They don’t always identify the perpetrators who entered the high school building without permission. The perpetrators are not summoned to the prosecutor’s office. At the same time, ironically, the local militia puts administrative and financial pressures on the high school’s management.

Interview with Ion Manole, Executive Director of the “Promo-LEX” Association:

Where do you think have thing gone wrong that it came to this state of abnormality, when Transnistrian children have to learn Romanian in Cyrillic script ?

Ion Manole: After the Moldovan- Russian war of 1992, the separatist administration of the region forced all educational institutions in the region to return to the Cyrillic alphabet. There have been numerous attempts by several groups of teachers, parents and students to defend their right to study under the Moldovan education program and remain in a legal educational field. However, because of the indifference and incompetence of the Moldovan constitutional authorities, these people ended up giving in to pressure, intimidation and persecution, to which they had been subjected directly or indirectly by those who took over the country 's eastern region. Let me give you the example of four schools from the district of Grigoriopol, which asked to be allowed to return under the control of the constitutional authorities back in 1999-2000. A single institution managed to accomplish this (it’s the Theoretical Lyceum “Stefan cel Mare”, later evacuated to another location) . Representatives of the other three schools gave up after numerous stances of pressure and intimidation, and all the constitutional authorities did was to assert this fact in some political statements. After the inhabitants of Transnistria assumed such risks in vain, and especially after the attacks on these institutions in 2004, there were no more requests to pass from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet.

There are however eight schools in the Transnistrian region where Latin script survived. How was it possible for them - and not for other Romanian language schools?

Ion Manole: They succeeded only because of the courage and insistence of parents, students and especially teachers from these eight schools. Over the last 10 years, I had the opportunity to talk and participate in various discussions about the problem of these schools. Sometimes I had the impression that some officials in Chisinau would like it better if school administrators would simply agree to pass under the control of the de-facto authorities, thus exempting them the efforts, incurring issues and criticism. The real champions of the right to education in the eastern region of Moldova are the teachers of those eight educational institutions (these are: “Alexandru cel Bun” Lyceum in Tighina, “Stefan cel Mare” Lyceum in Grigoriopol, “Lucian Blaga” Lyceum in Tiraspol, “Evricea” Lyceum in Ribnita, “Mihai Eminescu” Lyceum in Dubasari, the gymnasi-ums in Corjova, and Roghi, district Dubasari, and the boarding school for orphans in Tighina). It is namely the principals, teachers and parents of the students studying there who endured numerous acts of intimidation, persecution and threats.

According to the OSCE, in recent years the number of children in the eight schools from the region teaching in Latin script fell from 5,500 to only 1,500. Why do children leave these schools? Where do they go?

Ion Manole: In general, the number of students has been decreasing steadily throughout Moldova in the recent years, but only the persecuted schools in Transnistria are in such a dramatic situation. The ongoing harassment and bullying of the parents, and the fear of many parents to let their children study in a school under constant pressure, are the main reasons of the decrease in the number of students. We also noted a decrease in the number of people who think freely. In the past 20 years, another generation has grown in the region, influenced and educated by the local propaganda - a generation that does not know the reality and rejects any idea of reintegration. Young families cannot imagine their kids studying in the Latin script. At the same time, perhaps the most obvious cause of the declining number of students in these schools is a dramatic decrease in the number of speakers of Romanian in the region - a consequence of the harsh policy of Russification of the local people. Although there are three declared 'official' languages in the region (Moldovan /Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian), only Russian is used as such.

What are the chances of integration of children who studied in Transnistrian schools using the Cyrillic script in the post-secondary education circuit of Moldova?

Ion Manole: For now, the chances are quite real, because the constitutional authorities created accessible terms of integration and adaptation for those who wish to continue their studies in Moldovan legally recognized higher education institutions. However the situation changes. Conflicts arise between those who studied in the eight Latin-script schools in Transnistria and those who finished schools that were controlled by the separatist regime – the former feel that the latter get undeserved benefits in Chisinau, and are outraged by this.

Russia supports the modernization of the heating system in some schools from the region; some Western states and international institutions provide financial support for the diverse needs of other schools. Why doesn't Chisinau do the same thing?

Ion Manole: Many Moldovan officials have no idea about the real situation on the ground. And if one doesn't know the problems and the reality on the ground, one cannot analyze the situation and come up with effective remedies. We have found that some functionaries are unable to comprehend the meaning of the recommendations coming from the civil society, the residents of the region, or international organizations. Funding social projects in the Transnistrian region must be a priority for the constitutional authorities, and these procedures must be performed in accordance with the national legislation and with the involvement or participation of constitutional structures.

How can we bring those schools back to normality?

Ion Manole: Speaking of schools, the Ministry of Education in Chisinau must analyze every aspect: from the content of the textbooks, teaching methodologies, and observation of the fundamental rights of students, parents and teachers to providing a minimum of furnishing and equipment of all the schools in the region to ensure minimum equal conditions for all students and teachers, as they are residents of the region and citizens, of whom the Moldovan state is responsible, without exception or discrimination. Only an analysis of all aspects of the situation can help make up a list of specific steps needed to return to normality. No miracles will happen without a deep understanding of how things stand, and a coordinated effort in that regard.

Promo-LEX represents the interests of children and parents of the Romanian language schools attacked and devastated by the separatist forces in 2004 at the ECtHR. Have there been any findings of Russia's involvement in those events?

Ion Manole: The main conclusion of the Court is that the separatist regime could not survive without a continued military, economic and political support from the Russian Federation. Unfortunately, Russia continues to apply a policy of double standards. On the one hand, in words, it recognizes and respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova, while, on the other hand, it interferes in a brutal, shameless and illegal way in the internal affairs of our country, thereby encouraging and tolerating violations of the rights and freedoms of a number of Moldovans. After Russia was condemned in the schools case (*case Catan and others v. Moldova and Russia*) and was ordered to pay over one million euros to those 170 victims, many residents of the region thought that Russia would scale down its aggression and demand the separatist administration to respect some basic human rights. Unfortunately, we note that Russia is willing to pay damages instead of observing human rights and respect its international commitments.

Several days ago, the local militia raided the "Lucian Blaga" Lyceum in Tiraspol again. It appears that the separatists use the schools as a lever of pressure on Chisinau. How likely is it that the 2004 scenario will be repeated now?

Ion Manole: The schools subordinated to the Moldovan legal authorities remain some of the most sensitive levers in the destabilization of the situation. Schools: namely the teachers, students and their parents, remain hostages of the separatist regime, which is serious, even unacceptable, given that so many different actors: the OSCE, Ukraine, which have a very clear mandate, can and should help de-escalate tensions and address these issues. I dare say that the situation today results first of all from the incompetence of the constitutional authorities of Moldova, and those involved in identifying a solution to the conflict: firstly, Russia and the OSCE. How else can we explain the fact that, after 20 years of alleged talks, yet there still are no instruments for defending the rights of those approximately 500 thousand people living in the region? There never were and there still are no tools to monitor the situation in the region from the standpoint of basic human rights and freedoms.

Now, with regard specifically to the latest pressures on the schools, we believe that it is a consequence of the poorly thought-out recommendations found in an OSCE report. In January 2013, an OSCE report recommended these eight schools to register with the local de-facto authorities, contrary to the provisions of the Moldovan legislation and European Court's findings. It was believed that, after registering the schools in Tiraspol, the pressure on these educational institutions will scale down or disappear. We saw the high risk behind this procedure and asked the OSCE not to include this as a recommendation to avoid complicating the situation of the schools. Today, schools are under new pressure, and the reason for is that they are now registered and must comply with the conditions imposed by the de facto administration of the region.

Moreover, the registration procedure is illegal from the juridical point of view, because these schools are registered as educational institutions under Moldovan law, which prohibits them to have any other status or additional registration on the territory of Moldova.

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Vitalie Calugareanu,
Deutsche Welle Chisinau

Promo-LEX attended the Parallel OSCE Civil Society Conference in Kiev

On 2-4 December 2013 was held Parallel Civil Society Conference in Kiev, the event was convened by The Civic Solidarity Platform. Thus followed tradition of OSCE parallel civil society conferences in Astana in 2010, Vilnius in 2011, and Dublin in 2012. Civic Solidarity developed the attached policy document containing civil society analysis and recommendations on alarming human dimension issues across the OSCE region and on human dimensions issues in Ukraine, in light of the country's OSCE Chairmanship.

According to statements by the OSCE Chairmanship, a top priority in 2013 was protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in conflict and post-conflict zones and making progress in resolving protracted conflicts. Because the human dimension is an essential part of the OSCE concept of comprehensive security, making progress on human rights in protracted conflicts is crucial for the region's security. In 2013 a significant dialogue took place on resolving the Transnistrian conflict. Thanks to the involvement of the OSCE, the parties to the conflict continued to discuss a number of common issues, particularly socio-economic problems.

The processes occurring in the conflict regions that clearly lead to violations of the local populations' rights and freedoms cannot be treated as "political issues." The authorities involved in negotiations on the resolution of conflicts should not forget that human rights are non-negotiable and that all parties are responsible for observing human rights, including unrecognized regimes.

The use of torture and ill-treatment and the violation of liberty and security of person are the most severe human rights problems in these regions. These problems result from the fact that there are no effective remedies to contest the actions of the unrecognized administrations ruling these regions.

Lack of official investigation of allegations of human rights violations, inefficient prosecution and bringing perpetrators to justice as well as systematic violation of the right to a fair trial of the victims of human rights abuse are of particular concern in the conflict regions because access to justice plays a decisive role in the conflict situations. Inability of the authorities to establish facts and reasons for human rights violations and ensure justice leads to the preservation of the situation when the causes of conflicts continue to exist and may lead to new instances of violence and clashes.

In those OSCE participating States that are also members of the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights is essentially the only institution that can establish the facts of human rights violations and provide some remedies. For example, in 2013 the Court continued to communicate to the Moldovan and Russian governments cases from Transnistria where the applicants complained about the use of torture and the lack of an effective remedy.

International obligations assumed in the framework of regional human rights institutions are binding on the signatory states. Failure to execute decisions of the European Court not only contravenes these obligations but also creates a state of impunity and leads to continuous human rights violations. Lack of execution by the Russian Federation of the decision in the case of *Catan and others vs. Moldova and Russia*, in which the Court established violations of the right to education in the Transnistrian region illustrates this problem.

Recommendations

In the light of the existence of similar problems in conflict regions, yet different real opportunities to address them, we recommend the parties involved in the conflicts and the

OSCE bodies and institutions undertake the following actions:

1. International human rights obligations and commitments should be respected by the de-facto administrations of the conflict territories and the third parties in the conflict regions on the basis of both the European Court judgments and OSCE recommendations.

2. The OSCE participating States in the conflict and post-conflict regions should accelerate their efforts in investigating allegations of violations of human rights of the local residents while ensuring adherence to international standards of investigation. In this regard, the participating States should establish accountability for perpetrators, guarantee the right to a fair trial of the victims of human rights abuses and ensure adequate remedies and compensations to victims and their families.

3. The OSCE participating States should take measures aimed at addressing the root problems of the conflicts to prevent such developments in the future.

4. Persecution and harassment of civil society activists in conflict and post-conflict regions should be stopped, and the development of strong and independent civil society there should be supported by OSCE participating States and institutions.

5. Exchanges between human rights activists

in different conflict and post-conflict regions should be facilitated.

6. Unconditional access for international human rights experts to conflict and post-conflict regions should be allowed, in particular to places of detention which are not under the control of the constitutional authorities.

7. Continuous monitoring in all areas of human rights in conflict and post-conflict regions and the production of monitoring reports that should be discussed at OSCE meetings and supported.

Created in 2011 the "Civic Solidarity" Platform includes over 50 organizations from Europe and Asia and is based on values such as human rights and human dignity, non-violence and peace culture, human rights and freedoms rule against state interests.

For more detail, contact:

Alexandru Postica,

Attorney at Law,

Human Rights Program Director,

Promo-LEX Association:

Tel: (22) 450024,

GSM: 069104851,

e-mail: info@promolex.md

Civil Society Discussed the Transnistrian Settlement in Kiev

Promo-LEX attended an International Conference on the topic "Factors of Cooperation and Dialogue with the Civil Society in the Transnistrian Conflict Settlement", held in Kiev, on 22-23 November 2013.

The organizers of the conference pointed out that resolving protracted conflicts in the

OSCE area, primarily the Transnistrian issue, was one of the main priorities of Ukraine's OSCE chairmanship in 2013. According to them, there is a need to initiate an ongoing dialogue between experts from Moldova, including the Transnistrian region, and Ukraine to see how cooperation with civil society could help resolve the conflict.

The goal of the event was to bring to the fore civic cooperation as a means to settling the Transnistrian conflict, and look for new approaches to cooperation and cross-border confidence-building measures in the region, including by increasing contacts between experts and representatives of the civil society in Ukraine and Moldova, including the Transnistrian region.

The conference ended with a number of recommendations for the OSCE Chairmanship and members states to the 5+2 format talks, which were presented to the Council of Ministers of OSCE Member States, gathered in Kiev on 5-6 December.

Conference participants discussed the need for a working group with a permanent consultative status, which would produce recommendations for the 5+2 negotiations and thus

ensure the participation of the civil society in the process.

The event was convened at the initiative of the Ukrainian chairmanship of the OSCE in 2013, and was organized by the Ukrainian Institute for International Policy and the regional Odessa branch of the National Institute for Strategic Studies, with the support of the Embassy of Germany in Ukraine and the International Fund "Vidrodjenia". The conference brought together 60 experts and representatives of the civil society in Moldova, including the Transnistrian region, and Ukraine.

For details, contact:

Olga Gordila

Tel: 0 (22) 45-00-24

Email: crdt.buletin@gmail.com

Young People from Malaiesti and Tighina Discussed about Tolerance



A seminar on tolerance was organized on 17 November 2013, on the International Day for Tolerance. Twenty young people

from the city of Tighina and the village Malaiesti (district Grigoriopol) attended the event.

The aim of the event was to raise awareness of the role of tolerance in interpersonal relations, and to promote a responsible and tolerant behavior as well as a non-discriminatory attitude in the society. Young people discussed questions such as: What does it mean to be tolerant? What qualities does a tolerant person have? What are the benefits of a tolerant society?

Iana Silosieva, a participant at the event, noted: "For me personally, the seminar was a

unique experience, because, in addition to a load of positive energy, it gave me knowledge and new skills to be more thoughtful in my everyday life as well as the desire to be more aware of the problems of those around me". During the seminar, the young people watched several video clips on tolerance in the society, non-discrimination and human rights. Discussing the messages in the video clips motivated the youth to get actively involved and come up with well-grounded arguments during the discussions. At the end of the event, the participants concluded that it is necessary to organize such events regularly, on various topics.

Initiative Group "Friendship" from Malaiesti, district Grigoriopol organized the event with the support of the Promo-LEX Association, as part of the project "Promoting Human Rights and Strengthening Civil Society in the Transnistrian region of Moldova", implemented with the financial support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

A. Silosiev

Leader of the Initiative Group

Young Leader Get Actively Involved in the Community



Students from the school in village Malaiesti, district Grigoriopol attended a training seminar on the topic “Youth Em-

powerment for Sustainable Participation in the Community”, organized on 10-11 November 2013.

Active participation of young people in making decisions and actions at the community level is essential if we are to build a more democratic, tolerant and prosperous society. For school students in Malaiesti, participation and active citizenship means having the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, if necessary, the support to participate in and influence decisions, to engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.

Thus, during the training session, the students were able to learn about youth participation is, how to get involved, opportunities for mobilization and participation within the local community, volunteering means, and effective time planning.

Students talked about the tools available for youth participation and the involvement of local government in solving the problems of the young people in the community. The training also focused on improving communication and presentation skills, and on the argumentation of ideas and suggestions for organizing alternative (non-formal) activities for young people in the community.

The Initiative Group “Youth Truth” organized the event with the support of the Promo-LEX Association as part of the project “Promoting Human Rights and Strengthening Civil Society in the Transnistrian Region of Moldova”, implemented with financial support by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

O. Ceaicovscaia
Leader of the Initiative Group

Promo - LEX

Advancing democracy and human rights



**National Endowment
for Democracy**

Supporting freedom around the world

Edition coordinated by:

Carolina Bondarciuc

E-mail: crdt@promolex.md

Web: www.promolex.md

Tel/Fax: (373 22) 45-00-24

GSM: 069637849

The **Promo-LEX Association** is a Non-Governmental Organisation focused on promoting democratic values, whose purpose is to advance democracy in the Republic of Moldova, including the Transnistrian region through promoting and defending human rights, monitoring democratic processes and strengthening the civil society.

Promo-LEX Association provides free legal aid assistance on issues of human rights violations for the inhabitants from the Transnistrian region of Moldova. For consultations please contact: Tel: 022 310945

The opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily express the views of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).