

- Ian: Well, good afternoon. Good afternoon again. This is really a very special part of our program. As you can see from some of the agenda, we're trying to give you a better sense of some of the things that you may not be so familiar with that GMF does. Those of you who know GMF well will know we have essentially three pillars to what we do. There's a policy pillar and a leadership pillar and there's also a civil society pillar. We're going to just take a few minutes and talk about that third one, the civil society aspect of what we do. Actually, GMF has been doing this for decades and it's the do-tank part, the on-the-ground-action part of what we do. It's very important and I think, as you'll hear, it's probably becoming more and more important for a lot of different reasons.
- Ian: So what we're going to do just for the next few minutes is, first of all, I'm going to introduce a wonderful colleague, but then we're going to show you a brief film that gives you a sense of some of the projects that we're actually supporting on the ground. Then we're going to also have an opportunity to hear briefly from two of our key partners for this work, historically, and how they see it and its importance.
- Ian: Let me just say the three civil society trusts are just a fantastic part of what we do, but we're doing more than that, actually. It's the trusts plus. We have colleagues in Washington, we have colleagues in Brussels and our offices around Europe, who are working on these issues, like Jonathan Katz in Washington, or Rosa Balfour, who you've heard, here in Brussels, who are working on different aspects of this. But the trusts are really the core of it. To say more about that, I'm really delighted to introduce a wonderful colleague of mine, Gordana Delic, who is the director of our Belgrade office, but also the director of our Balkan Trust for Democracy. Gordana, the floor is all yours. Thank you.
- Gordana Delic: Thank you Ian.
- Ian: You're all set.
- Gordana Delic: Good day everyone and thank you for being here. Thank you for coming to this little panel that we have. So what do we do at the GMF is that, as Ian said, for decades we've been building transatlantic bridges between Europe and United States through support to the civil society, not only financially, but we do much more. We're deeply invested in leadership development. We build networks. We build platforms for exchange of ideas, and together with my colleagues at the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, Alina Inayeh, and Joerg Forbrig at the Belarus Fund for Democracy, we have been invested in this work in the last, well, over 16 years.
- Gordana Delic: What we want to show you today is a little film. It's a short four-minute or five-minute film that showcases what actually is happening on the ground and how people feel and why it is still important, even today, to support the civil society and to support democracy and philanthropy and basically the freedom that we

all strive for. So with this, I am going to hand it over to the film, which I'm not quite sure where it's going to be.

Teodora P.T.: I believe in building bridges. I believe that a country cannot isolate itself and say it's a democracy.

Speaker 4: (singing).

Simonida K.: I'm now 37 years old and those 30 years of democracy have probably been my whole life that I actually remember. It's been arrived towards an end of democracy or the end of transition that we're all expecting. However, I don't feel that we have reached an end.

Irina Ljubic: I think the democracy in this country, and in former Yugoslavia actually, had its little spots and little hope, but it was very quickly stopped by some kind of nationalistic and retrograde politicians and their vision.

Saso Ordanoski: You'll never have democracy enough and the democracy as we see, even in the oldest democratic countries in the world, with the most established and elaborated democracies as we know it. The question and the issue of democracy is a daily subject, which you should fight practically as starting from zero almost.

Dilek Ertukel: Democracy is this fragile process and that it can decline at any moment and we all have to continue to work hard. I think democracy is in decline in a lot of places around the world.

Teodora P.T.: It's up to the civil society organizations to work, and building a democracy is an ongoing process. It never stops.

Vladimir P.: Our societies will change and we have to be ready. We have to prepare our societies for the time are in front of us.

Saso Ordanoski: If you are a small state, and not even this kind of microstate, Serbia, Albania, Macedonia, even Bulgaria, these are microstates. If you import stability from your neighbors.

Liubov T.: You always will have these fights. You always will have these disruptions and you always will have the subversions from an adversary if you have this adversary.

Speaker 4: (singing).

Denis Gurskiy: Ukraine was not ready to fight the networks of controlled fake accounts over social networks, that paved the crucial role in news distribution, controlled news, fake news.

- Bardhyl Jashari: Technology and the Internet and social network have this potential to mobilize, to engage, and to gather like-minded people and start and trigger processes, even revolutions, within a society.
- Denis Gurskiy: Equality and democracy and dignity are three major words and values that are shaping the Ukrainian, specifically young, society today.
- Alp Basogullari: [inaudible 00:06:46] these young people change the region, so they lost their rights. Why? Actually, right now is easy to understand your rights from social media.
- Liubov T.: What I feel now, I feel that it's a freedom. It's freedom to think, it's freedom to speak, it's freedom to express whatever you want.
- Simonida K.: I would say there are the pillars of the bridge. I would not say we have built the bridge, because I think it's going to take us some time to actually build that bridge.
- Saso Ordanoski: Just to keep the discussion going and to keep everyone equal in that discussion, that would be enough for me.
- Dragana Z.O.: I would say our region is on the level of some other undeveloped regions. Like it's in nature of politicians to want to control media. The nature of media should be to resist that. What I see as the biggest problem for media in our region is that they stopped resisting enough.
- Dilek Ertukel: We still live in a world where people want to dominate because they fear, they see it as a limited good.
- Vladimir P.: Walls have fallen in 1989. I truly believe that these walls which some politicians are now building in Europe, they will not be able to finish.
- Liubov T.: I expect we will have more bridges, more close ties, culture bridges, art bridges, information bridges, but not walls. Not walls.
- Gordana Delic: I want to thank one of the BTDs, the Balkan Trust for Democracy, partners, who actually made this film. He's here tonight, today, with us, Darko Soković, who started basically his organization as a nonprofit that was so successful and turned it into a profit for nonprofit and now it's a real and serious media fund. Thank you for being here with us. Thank you for this film and for all of your cooperation with us.
- Gordana Delic: We have two distinguished guests that I would like to call on today. One is Mr. Brock Bierman, the Assistant Administrator for Europe and Eurasia from USAID. The other is the Deputy Director-General from DG NEAR, Katarina Mathernova. Both of our guests are champions in assistance and assistance to the civil society

and both have been in this work for a long time. I have the same question for both of you, and I would like to first call on Mr. Bierman, and that is what could the EU and US do together to support the civil society in times like this, with the challenges of today? And particularly what could we do together to strengthen the transatlantic cooperation and build the transatlantic bridges for the future?

Brock Bierman: Great. If it's okay, I'm going to stand up, because I hate to turn my back on folks. I just want to take a quick thanks to GMF for allowing me to come here today and really talk about the importance of our partnership. I want to thank Katarina specifically for her important partnership, and DG NEAR's important partnership with USAID because ... and I'll bookmark my comments. It has never been more important that we support civil society in our work. It has to be a top priority. My folks wrote a 30-minute speech for me. They told me I had 3 minutes, and I'll try to keep it short. But when I think about what we just saw in that film, wow, right? Thank you. I think about how far we've come in a matter of ... 30 years ago I was 25, and frankly I was a young something and I started ... I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for civil society. I started a small group called FOREST, which was Families Opposed to Ruining Environmental State Treasures. They wanted to build a park, an amusement park, in an open space area and the neighbors and I came together and, you know, it was seamless, right? Because that's the society that we grew up in. It was easy to start something like that.

Brock Bierman: A few years later I went to Eastern Europe for the first time. Not so easy. But to think about what has happened in the last 30 years. Back when I visited Eastern Europe for the first time in 1997 I remember them telling me about Subbotnik. The idea of coming together to help society has changed in a generation, and that is amazing, and I see the people who are so passionate about building bridges, and I say to myself, we are headed down the right path. Yes, the bridge is not finished yet. We have established pillars, we've established benchmarks, and I think we do have some work ahead of us, but we've got great partnerships and we have to expand those partnerships. We need to look to see how we can expand it. Because, frankly, folks, democracy and civil society are intertwined with one another. We cannot have a flourishing democracy if we don't have a flourishing civil society.

Brock Bierman: I know I'm pressed for time, but look, I want to say this, there was so much in that film that I could go over. Democracies still learn even after 243 years, we're still learning in the United States. We still have paths that we're changing. Those are positive movements toward what I think is putting people together on the right path. When we think about working with DG NEAR, when we think about working at USAID, and I specifically want to thank, again, GMF and the Black Sea Trust, and the work we're doing with WatchDog.md and countering disinformation and helping people be more active in their communities and understand their roles in the community.

Brock Bierman: I also recognize that we have an important responsibility to bring every democracy, every country that embraces democracy, together. Because without

bringing all democracies together, we cannot have a flourishing civil society. Without flourishing civil society we can't have democracy. So, again, I want to take the opportunity to thank everyone for the opportunity to come here today and work with you. I've only been on the job for a year and a half, this time around, I was with [inaudible 00:13:22] before, but getting to know you, Katarina, has been a real pleasure and a real great partnership, not just at our level but throughout the entire working level, and I think that's what we need to continue to do. We need to put everybody together at whatever level so that we can start creating better partnerships. Thank you.

Gordana Delic: Ms. Mathernova, I have the same question for you, but for the EU perspective, and just for the record, I've known Ms. Mathernova since the 90s when she was on the board of a foundation that I used to work for in Slovakia, and I'm happy every time I see you and I'm so glad you have stayed with the civil society.

Katarina M.: Thank you very much, and thank you very much [inaudible 00:14:04], and everybody at GMF, Jonathan, for inviting me back. It's really a pleasure to work with such dedicated and professional people as yourselves and your colleagues. I just have three points. One is that working with civil society and supporting civil society is really central ... I don't know how to do the turning, so I [inaudible 00:00:14:27], I'm sorry Brock ... is really central to our engagement with our partner countries. To build resilience, to have policy dialogue, political dialogue, we really rely on civil society, both as a service provider but also the one that brings experience, expertise, from a different angle, and is also a watchdog, because we operate in parts of the world where vested interest in all sorts of oligarchic structures and the capture of the state is very strong, and the civil society is really an indispensable part. So that's my first point.

Katarina M.: My second point then, going a little bit like Brock did too, is personal experience. I'm from Slovakia, and when we were going through our transition, the US funding, the US private government funding, UK funding, German political foundations, et cetera, the Dutch, the Norwegian funds, all of that was very present, and the EU funding was sort of a little elusive, because it was so complicated, so bureaucratic, such high amounts that were not really relevant to us. When I took over in DG NEAR, this was really my mission, to see how we can make the funding more relevant, not to finance, but support civil society and our partner countries. So we allowed for institutional grants, not only action grants, we lowered the amounts. We really encourage [inaudible 00:15:57]. One of the things that we did is work much more actively with institutions like the European Endowment for Democracy. I see Pavol sitting in the audience, from the executive board. We also entered into a partnership with the GMF Balkan, not Balkan, sorry, the Black Sea Trust, as the first one, really to expand the clientele of our civil society funding, and really get the money and get the support out of the capitals and to a different type of organizations that we were not able to reach before. My second point.

Katarina M.: My third point is to say that I think it's even more important now, with the attack on media, not only in our part of the world, but elsewhere, with the disinformation, with hybrid warfare going on. We think that supporting civil society is really key to building societal resilience. That it's not only the interaction with the governments and the state actors that is necessary, but also supporting the civil society, and therefore doing it in a spirit of transatlantic partnership is great. Thank you.

Gordana Delic: Thank you so much, and just allow me please to say that the regions where we work have been a true evidence of the fact that the transatlantic cooperation is still vibrant and still working really well, particularly, I would say, in the Balkans. Balkans has been real example of good transatlantic relationship and of good transatlantic cooperation. With this, I would say, we will need to conclude, but do allow me to thank you, to DG NEAR and to USAID, to Ms. Mathernova and to Mr. Bierman for being here with us today, and also thank you for all your support, not just financial, but for the whole of the cooperation that we have had with you throughout the years. It's been a pleasure and I hope that we shall continue for the years to come with this cooperation, and that we will continue supporting the civil society and democracy in the parts of the world where it is most fragile and at stake, basically. Thank you again for being here with us tonight, today. I'm not quite sure.