# Towards a New Social Contract

## Civil Society, Civic Engagement and Participation

### Michael Bürsch, MdB (Member of the German Parliament)

- Every single one of the great challenges we are facing in politics and in society can only be met with the voluntary engagement of active citizens. Strengthening civil society gives added normative, balanced power to all areas of social life through self-organisation, volunteering, self-responsibility, trust and mutual support, which are the rules governing civil society. This requires companies responsible to the common weal. It requires a state willing to protect, recognize and provide opportunities for civic engagement instead of imposing unnecessary red tape to regulate and hamper such activities. And it also requires civil society organisations to give activists a voice in the decision-making process and to have the courage to allow more internal democracy.

- It's all about a new relationship between state and society, not defined in categories of state planning and state control of social processes but emerging as a new cooperative, shared responsibility between partners. Therefore, opening governmental institutions and decision-making processes for civic participation is one of the most important tasks for all levels of government (national, regional and local) on the road to achieving greater civic engagement.

- Successful reforms in politics need a socio-political model. While financial concerns dominate the debate, the necessary reforms are going to lack both quality and acceptance. An ideal model for a political agenda for reform would seem to be the model of 'civic engagement'.

- The development of a framework geared towards greater civic engagement must not aim exclusively at raising the commitment of individuals. A socio-political strengthening of the civil society is even more important – it aims to provide improved opportunities for engagement in the task of shaping and developing the community.

- Communities are focal points of an active civil society and viable democracy where the new division of responsibilities between politics, administration and citizens can assume concrete shape. In this sense, a local authority is not merely a "school for democracy" but also a "school for civil society".

- **Corporate social responsibility is not an act of philanthropy, but a business strategy issue, trying to create benefits both for the company and society at large.**

- **Modernising the welfare state is a case in point, demonstrating the new division of responsibility between civil society and an activating state. The future will not hinge on whether or to what extent we can afford or wish to have a welfare state; the crucial factor will be who is going to provide those benefits which are both necessary and desirable for society. Should it be the state, the market or networks of civic engagement?**

- **Social policies in a civil society environment focus on people's abilities and experiences. The main focus is on activating our own strengths and enabling us to determine our own lives. Thus, the people concerned will no longer be needy recipients, but active participants.**

Our society is facing huge challenges: demographic change, restructuring of social insurance systems, education reforms, how to regain growth and employment, to name but a few buzz words. In this context, the role and responsibility of civil society are frequently mentioned. But what exactly do we mean by "civil society"? There are at least two interpretations, one defining **civil society** as **a social sphere** which is **neither state, nor market or family**, but refers to all organisations and types of organisation which are non-governmental, non-profit and do not aim to achieve regulatory power. Germany in particular offers a great variety of such organisations. These comprise clubs and associations, self-help groups, neighbourhood initiatives, charities, social movements, NGOs and networks, political parties and trades unions, non-profit foundations etc.

It is well known that a strong civil society excels at a high degree of organisation which is why internationally, it has become standard to assess the quality of a civil society by the number of individual organisations involved in it. These non-governmental and non-commercial organisations form the institutional core, the infrastructure without which civil society would be weak, insufficiently comprehensive and inflexible.

It would, however, be short-sighted to focus exclusively on the organisational aspect, especially for promotion and practical support analyses of a civil society. Apart from the institutional factor, there is a second indispensable resource a strong civil society as offer: **there is no civil society without active citizens who are involved on a voluntary and non-profit basis, promoting both their own interests and the well-being of others and society at large.** In other words: no civil society without civic commitment, i.e. citizen participation which is voluntary, works for the common good and usually free of charge.

This interpretation of civil society refers to an area of activity and activity-focus which is voluntary, non-profit, community-oriented, peaceful, non-violent and public, i.e. more than family-based support.

**"Civil Society" comprises voluntary work by citizens, not just organisations. It involves the spontaneous power of social self-organisation, practical social solidarity, self-determination, as well as an active role in shaping the community and, not least, a civil society assisting in furnishing social benefits, health care, education and other services the state cannot or can no longer provide on its own.** According to a study commission of the German parliament,

**civil society is a model** describing a community where citizens can use bodies of self-organisation and other opportunities where they can participate on the basis of a constitutional democracy and guaranteed basic rights and thus have a crucial impact on their community (Study Commission report, p. 59).

The civil society model is also a suitable frame of reference for current reform projects and debates. Here, too, there are moves to increase the responsibility of the individual and reduce the role of the state – a reform policy approach, which does not aim for a general withdrawal of the state, but is geared to establishing a new, equitable, socially balanced and intelligent division of responsibility between the state and civil society.

**Guidelines are provided by a socio-political vision: people playing an active part in the community will invigorate and change Germany's democratic and social structures and adapt them to meet future social requirements.**

Approximately 23 million people in Germany are committed to different kinds of voluntary work. They are engaged in community-focus work in sports clubs, auxiliary fire brigades, the churches and other charitable organisations, voluntary agencies, the hospice movement or soup kitchens, self-help groups or neighbourhood initiatives as well as in local politics, pressure groups, political parties or trades unions.

Studies also show that improved framework conditions at government, business and civil society levels, and better access to engagement,

would lead to millions more people willing to become involved. These numbers are a reminder of the strength and vitality of Germany's civil society: there are many different ways in which people are active for the community and the common good. Wherever people are able to solve social tasks on their own initiative and through their own engagement, government should avoid trying to take over from them, but give support – that is what an 'activating state' is all about.

Civil society as a reform project requires a great deal from institutions and players in state and society. Involved citizens, willing to commit to the common good need engagement-friendly, participation-oriented structures in politics and administration, in the labour market and in civil organisations themselves, in other words: institutional reform policies with a civil society focus in virtually all walks of life.

In its 2002 report, the Study Commission looking into "The Future of Civil Society Engagement" recommends prioritising better **opportunities of participation for those committed, an improved civil society infrastructure facilitating access to community engagement, better protection for those actively involved, less red tape and a clear improvement of the culture of recognition**.

Promoting community engagement as a comprehensive project of social reform aims at both opening governmental institutions to democratic participation, and at the internal democratisation of civil society organisations. In short: a new relationship between state, business and society should be created.

## Civic Engagement offers Potential for Democratisation

Civic engagement strengthens social cohesion. **Every day of voluntary work welds people to-** **gether socially, creating a climate of solidarity, of belonging, of mutual trust, maintaining and**

**enhancing what we call the** "social capital": members of society feel part of a whole, understand each other, experience the reliability of shared rules, standards and values, ultimately even trust in government institutions.

Apart from offering the power of social integration, civil society commitment has another democratic, political dimension. Traditional work in an honorary capacity, rooted in 19th century Prussia, a pre-democratic age, was relatively independent of the ruling system and adopted politically neutral terminology, but **contemporary civil commitment maintains political links to a democratic system of government and society. In this sense, today's engagement exceeds old-style honorary offices**, or volunteer work etc. It constitutes an activity which is public, targeted at a political community and becomes the engine and driving force turning society into a civil society. Civic engagement, in other words, is "volunteering for democracy".

This dimension of civil society commitment receives added importance because it refers back to a model of civil society, a vision where citizens shape their own communities in the spirit of self-responsibility, cooperation, self-determination and according to the rules of democracy. This democratic political ideal of strengthening civil society gives a specific socio-political shape and sharpness to the policy of promoting civic engagement.

The political and academic debate has long been determined by a view of individualisation which focuses on committed citizens at the heart of the debate and which presents civic engagement as a colourful 'opportunity fair'.

Civil society-friendly framework conditions should not be aimed exclusively at increasing individual commitment. The socio-political objective of a strengthened civil society is even more important as it tries to create improved opportunities for people who wish to shape and develop their community through their committed work alone or in association with others.

Bearing this in mind, the reform opportunity of a strengthened civil society means additional normative strength for other areas of social life as well, brought about by the rules of a civil society: freedom from hierarchies, volunteering, self-responsibility, mutual respect and support, self- organisation etc. This requires the world of business to put forward companies with a sense of community responsibility. This requires the state to refrain from passing unnecessary regulatory constraints which hamper civic engagement, providing instead protection, recognition and opportunities. And it also requires civil society organisations willing both to undergo democratisation processes and to provide the best possible co-determination rights to those committed. Concerning social politics, promoting civic engagement broadens the scope of institutional reform policies, applying equally to state, business and civil society.

## Daring more Democracy in Civil Society Organisations

Civil society is not just a matter of individuals. Typical features include a variety of different organisations of every conceivable size – starting with the German Charities Association (Deutscher Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband), down to

self-help groups, from Greenpeace to local environmental pressure groups and covering virtually all kinds of subject, from global issues down to a struggle to keep a local lending library. All these organisations constitute the basic

institutional structure of the civil society. In Germany, this also provides an important framework for civic engagement.

They all have one thing in common, which sets them apart as civil society organisations: the voluntary nature of their joining forces, the self-responsibility and self-organisation of the players involved and the independence from government standards. They also share another feature because they are all undergoing a process which might be called structural change in civic engagement and which raises the challenge of specific reform requirements for civil society organisations.

Important changes are underway in the motivations and activity-context of civic engagement. In the past, people tended to enter into a long-term commitment to one particular organisation, remaining "true" to their group throughout their lives, today's activists opt for a more spontaneous and project-based engagement. Greater individualisation in career plans mean social milieu and accompanying organisations increasingly lose their hold on people. **Engagement has to fit into a particular stage in people's lives and changes as circumstances change.** Therefore, organisations need to court active people and motivate them to stay the course.

Even more important is the realisation showing that people involved in the community increasingly voice an interest in self-responsibility and self-determination for their activities. People already have to follow orders and bow to constraints at the workplace; **civil society activities are expected to open a new area of experience and activity, characterised by self-determination and self-responsibility. The "new volunteers" therefore, make different and far-reaching demands of co-determination and want to have a say in designing the future.**

In this sense, civil society organisations themselves are in need of reform. Civil Society does not live up to its name in all its manifestations. Particularly, typically traditional honorary offices, such as in the fire brigade, charities or disaster prevention, obviously have great deficits where co-determination by their own participants is concerned. **There is still a gap between the model of a living environment shaped according to democratic rules by self-assured, responsible citizens on the one hand and the reality of associations, clubs and other types of civil society organisations on the other.** Using modernisation efforts to close this gap between ideal and reality is a major challenge for civil society organisations. Activists claiming self-determination as well as co-determination demand open-mindedness and internal democratisation from traditional associations and societies in particular.

In this vein, the social bodies for example diagnose a **crisis of engagement policies" which covers difficulties in volunteer-recruitment as well as problems in the way the social bodies define their own social engagement and raison d'être**. Successive waves of professionalizing and economising the benefits provided have pushed aside the defence of concern for the public good and representation of social interests. Currently, there are indications that a civil society-oriented charities renewal strategy is underway. Its success, however, will largely depend on not linking the issue of opening established organisational structures for active civic participation to simply raising the number of volunteers.

Civic engagement includes activities such as networking with other local players and institutions, opening one's own facilities and services to other groups and neighbourhood associations or setting up intensive cooperation etc. Existing ex-

amples of such cooperation, as between youth-help centres and schools or companies, opening senior citizen homes to the community, collaboration between hospitals and self-help groups, need to be systematically integrated into processes across the different organisations and developed into models, professional plans and organisational patterns. In other words, civic engagement should be a systemic part of organisational development.

## Committed Citizens and Activating State: Towards a New Division of Responsibility

A policy of promoting civil society and civic engagement signifies saying farewell to the idea of a state having unlimited responsibility and ushers in autonomy, design authority and self-responsibility for the citizen. But this does not signal a programmatic realignment of the state to focus on its core tasks only, however these are defined. On the contrary, the objective is the establishment of **a new division of responsibility which will be rooted in a new relationship between state and citizen, defined in cooperation and partnership, and no longer follow the old system of the state as the sole authority for planning and controlling social processes.** Government remains responsible (in the role of guarantor), but will hold back whenever citizens themselves wish to assume responsibility for a specific task. The state also opens its institutions to citizen engagement. Strengthening civil society will also bring about a new relationship between state and (civil) society as well as changing the tasks and institutions of the state.

As far as public servants and employees are concerned, in recent years they have become aware they are unable to guide social development on their own. This is not entirely due to the financial constraints of the public purse; two other factors are far more crucial: the complexity of social learning processes is increasingly slipping out of the control of the state and, even more crucial – the needs and interests of people in general are becoming more diverse and individual. **The need to adapt state benefits for citizens to their needs and lifestyles makes state planning increasingly inappropriate; customized services can only be offered on the basis of close cooperation with the civic players concerned**. Citizens, though, are increasingly self-confident and knowledgeable, influencing their own circumstances instead of being recipients of state benefits. Now they interpret their role as active citizens, assume responsibility and choose participation.

In most cases, though, a cooperative relationship between state and civil society players as partners is more programme than reality. The structures and methods of such cooperation are not sufficiently developed, nor has this cooperation itself yet become an established fact for both sides. That is why opening up public institutions and decision-making processes is an important step for a civil society-oriented reform policy at national, regional and local level. A significant factor for the future of the civil society will be how successfully a culture of cooperative action and decision-making can be developed, which would even cover the institutional level.

# Participation-orientation of Governmental Institutions

An activating state creates opportunities for participation and even empowers people to express their needs and help find solutions. What benefits everyone is no longer defined by the state and its administration, but by the citizens themselves.

Participation can sometimes assume a rather different shape from what the administration expects. For government bodies and other institutions this means a complete rethinking. **Public servants and employees need to be prepared and skilled at dealing with committed citizens. In a manner of speaking, therefore, self-activation is also part of an activating state,** even if this entails going beyond the state's traditional role: Public sector workers can support civic engagement within the framework of their jobs. Citizens make their expertise and experience as specialists in their own everyday lives available for policy-making.

This illustrates a new division of competence between state and society. For the relationship between citizen and state to change requires the state to open up to society, to civic engagement. Civil Society cannot end where government starts. Citizens are more than customers; they are also makers and shakers.

Concepts to modernizing the administration at the national, regional and local levels need to be measured against the opportunities for a citizen to contact government at all levels and not just as a recipient of benefits, but as an informed citizen with a voice, with power, a critical view and responsibility. Whether an institution is truly open or whether there are opportunities for engagement is not a matter of how many people do work in an honorary capacity. What matters far more is whether these institutions can be successfully anchored in society and the local environment. Open-mindedness towards engagement means developing a culture which is carried by civic engagement and geared towards participation in planning and decision-making. Developing this kind of a power to act among those bearing responsibility in politics, the administration and civil society is an important task for the policy of engagement of the future. A case in point for active citizen participation is the national programme "Social City" which aims at promoting development in marginal neighbourhoods and communities.

## Strengthening Local Authorities

Unpaid work for a district council, active membership in a club or collecting signatures for a pressure group – most civic engagement in Germany occurs at the local level. Municipalities and Local Authorities cannot operate without the help of committed local citizens. Sports and cultural events, the fire brigade as well as educational, social and health facilities at the local level would be unthinkable without the voluntary work of ordinary citizens. Local government politics is the one level of government which enjoys close links to daily life, to the genuine interests of the people, and have traditionally shown a special responsibility for developing and strengthening democracy in Germany. The Basic Law, for example, guarantees Local Authorities the right to "settle local community affairs in their own responsibility, but within the general legal framework". It is the declared objective of local self-government and its constitutional basis, to motivate and enable citizens to take their own concerns in hand and settle issues on their own responsibility thus helping to develop democratic capability.

This means that **local Government serves as a focus for an active civil society and viable democracy, providing a forum for the new division of responsibility between politics, administration and business, to assume concrete shape**. Models like the "citizen's community" or the "citizen's municipality" can be seen as indicators for a growing willingness on behalf of Local Government administrators to allow participation. Another example is the procedures enabling participation in direct democracy, i.e. planning nuclei, workshops for the future etc. These are still too rare, but are starting to operate particularly at the local level.

The ideal of the citizen community goes beyond local politics and comprises all areas of life which are organised at the local level and all factors with an immediate influence on communal local life, covering, for example local papers, local businesses, trades union chapters, self-help groups and other civil society players, including those not integrated in the institutions of local self government. The presence of cultural, social and educational facilities, churches and foundations is crucial for local civic engagement, even if these do not come under local government jurisdiction. Occasionally, community engagement by major companies headquartered in a local area, can be more important for developing community projects and structures than a town council and local administration. The challenge is harnessing these different players and their activities and decisions to be truly cooperative. Local politicians and local government administrators can act as mediators in such a process**. In this sense, Local Authorities are not just "schools for democracy", but also "schools for civil society".**

## Corporate Citizenship as a Business Strategy

Supporting community organisations and projects through donations is a widespread practice in Germany, and this willingness to donate money is certainly deserving of praise. Such occasional philanthropy, however, fails to utilize the full extent of possible corporate engagement. Restricting corporate citizenship to what former BDI[1] President M. Rogowski considered as following laws and paying taxes to contribute to government revenue, which the state can then use for the common good, is also a rather sortsighted approach.

**A systematic coupling of business objectives with the public interest is crucial.** "*Corporate Citizenship is not about how a company gives away its money, it's about how it makes its money*" – this thesis, postulated by Bradley K. Googins, one of the leading US experts on the subject impressively states a fundamental fact which in Germany cannot be repeated too often. Corporate Citizenship, Corporate Responsibility, Corporate Social Responsibility, whichever term is used, **should not be an act of charity but a question of business strategy.** The potential of mutual benefit for both businesses and the community is considerable. Good examples from Germany, and even more from other countries, where Corporate Citizenship is developing in a more dynamic way, are impressive. There are also persuasive arguments for a comprehensive, community-focused win-win strategy to emerge.

A redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of state, society and business is needed. A civil society focus needs to reach out to all areas of social life: strengthening the rules of civil society

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1  BDI – the German equivalent of the CBI, an umbrella organisation of employers.

(self-organisation, volunteering and self-responsibility in solidarity) and extending this to businesses as well as community organisations. A stronger civil society requires an enabling and supporting state, which remains actively involved and responsible for society at large, but does not misuse either committed citizens or socially responsible companies as stopgaps for simply cutting some benefits which governments at national, regional and local level, find difficult to finance given empty public coffers. Civil society as a reform policy target also requires companies to act in a responsible manner vis-à-vis the community, very much intentionally and also in their own best interest because as "corporate citizens" they are part of civil society too. **Social stability and solidarity are prerequisites for successful business; investment in the 'social capital' of society is therefore in the best interests of the market players.**

Issues of a division of responsibility between state and civil society are already the subject of intense debated in different circles in the context of reform policies. But this debate does not yet attach sufficient importance to the role and responsibility of business. Comparisons with locusts are of little help, as is the repeated, equally polemic objection regarding the costs Germany already pays in social contributions and taxes, which would make an increased social engagement impossible. The never ending to-ing and fro-ing between demands for regulation and deregulation prevents us from seeing a third way approach, which rests on the ides that functioning markets need stable societies. Accordingly, both civic organisations and government institutions should not consider businesses only as potential donors, but as potential partners for the project of a civil society-driven modernisation of our country. As an alternative to all sorts of conflict strategies, we should opt for a culture of cooperation between business, government, and civil society where everyone is a winner.

## Modernising the Welfare State – the Role of Markets, Governments and Civil Society Networks

Civil society and civic engagement are promoted as part of far-reaching socio-political objectives aimed at increasing the democratic participation of citizens in the processes of decision-making and of developing informed political opinions, in extending the scope for self-organisation and self-determination in shaping the community on the basis of public collective action, which goes beyond state and market and the new division of responsibility between state and society.

Social work in the widest sense is a model case in point for this new division of responsibility between civil society and activating state. The concept of the activating state relies on the resources of individual citizens and associations of an organising social solidarity by offering welfare and civil (self-)help. The provision of social services through civic engagement is gaining in importance and covers activities of charities as well as school students and parents joining forces in renovating a classroom. The idea of a civil society can also provide direction for reform and modernization of the welfare state.

The welfare state is an achievement in terms of history and civilisation. Providing security for individual risks in life by means of government guarantees, and in a spirit of solidarity, improves equal opportunities, raises the quality of

life and strengthens democracy and business. This aspect and purpose of the welfare state must not be put in question. Yet there are major challenges for the welfare state: growing numbers of senior citizens and many unemployed are dependent on social benefits, while at the same time, the number of people paying into the system is declining, as is the tax revenue earmarked for such benefits. All this has led to financial bottlenecks and a debate on modernisation which focuses primarily on cost reductions and cutting benefits – a short-sighted approach from the point of view of community engagement:

**The question for the future is not how much of a welfare state we can or wish to afford, but rather, who is to provide the necessary and socially desirable social benefits in the future – the market, government or networks of civic engagement and mutual assistance on the basis of voluntary solidarity.** The correct answer is: it's in the mix! All three sectors can and should contribute significantly to coping with social tasks. To this end they should each offer to a new division of social work what they can do best and at which they excel. **It will remain up to government to ensure that certain standards are met, and that a decent life is not dependent either on the mercy of the market or the accident of civic engagement. Instead, social civil rights should be upheld, allowing people to lead a free and self-determined life, reliably, and without interference.**

Self-initiative out of necessity is all very well: there are quite a number of individuals and groups of people in our society who depend, permanently or temporarily, on charitable organisations. In the social sphere, in particular, there are outstanding examples of help and self-help, e.g. food centres for the poor, distributing surplus food to the needy, papers like the 'Big Issue' which allow a considerable number of those selling these papers to return to a secure life, as well as, of course, the charitable work of churches and other charitable organisations. Among the great achievements of the continental welfare state vis-à-vis other, e.g. Anglo-Saxon traditions of charity-work, are the social rights given to the needy, which are intended to enable them live a decent life in self-determination, independent of civil engagement where attention often fluctuates from one cause to another, concentrating on refugees from the Balkan wars yesterday, flood victims in the East of Germany today and street-children in third world slums tomorrow.

All the same, the new division of responsibility between government and civil society promotes and even demands participation and co-responsibility for citizens, particularly in the area of social policy. **Joint responsibility for community tasks is a civic obligation as well as a civil right. Opportunities for participation should also be taken up.** Why should the state alone be responsible for social benefits? The established principle of solidarity, currently often used to justify rigid organisational structures and bogged down promotion cartels, would have to be re-defined. The welfare state would also have to (re-)open institutions to the kind of civic engagement which has disappeared over time from traditional welfare areas in health and education.

## Help towards Self-Help and Self-Determination

Civic engagement is no substitute for government action, but a supplement, albeit an indispensable one. It furnishes a very characteristic contribution to the quality and appropriateness

of the services provided by the state. But where is the special quality of civic engagement, which should provide better services than those offered by the professional state-run social system?

This specific quality of the civil society contribution is illustrated in **self-help in health care**. Self-help groups in Germany, altogether between 70,000 and 100,000 with about 3 million members, offer knowledge and competence, establish contacts between people, represent their interests and have started to become an indispensable factor in the health sector, particularly in providing care for seriously and/or chronically ill patients. Moving from membership in a self-help group in ones own interest to engagement in the wider sense is a fluid process. Communicating acquired expertise to other concerned people, organising events oneself – these are obvious steps from self-help to helping others which also correspond to the increased self-confidence of citizens who have begun to take responsibility for health into their own hands.

These self-help groups do not simply fill a gap left unplugged by a public health service strapped for resources. **Self-help groups do not offer the same service for less money, but another type of care, a change in perspective**, typical for the participatory structures of civil society: from the systemic view of the welfare state recipients of benefits appear as objects of welfare, weak, in need of help, marked by specific deficits they cannot handle on their own. **In the self-help context, on the other hand, patients act as subjects with their own resources and competence.** Here, people exploit their own potential, their strengths and their weaknesses to live with their illnesses or overcome them.

To some extent, we are dealing with a paradigmatic case of social services, where the recipients act and have to act as "co-producers". Any therapy can only be successful when patients con-tribute to their own recovery. That is why the quality of health care is not determined exclusively by professional care providers. Active participation of citizens, seeing themselves as co-producers of their own as well as of public health and acting accordingly, is equally important. This dual role is described in the German Social Code as "**solidarity and self-responsibility**", in the chapter on health insurance where it refers to an expression of a mutually supportive society of contributors, tasked with maintaining, restoring or improving the health of insured persons. This is therefore the mandate of the public health system which also speaks of the co-responsibility of insured persons for their own health, contributing to avoiding the onset of disease or disability or overcoming its consequences through leading healthy lives, starting preventive care early on and actively contributing to treatment and rehabilitation (§ 1 SGB V, German Social Code).

**A crucial task in modernising health care is the activation of patient's competence, self-responsibility and willingness to participate.** This makes the contribution of self-help groups and comparable organisations to the modernisation of the health care sector unique and indispensable. The people concerned are moved to take active charge of their own health, thereby making a contribution which for reasons of quality and structure, the health care system itself is unable to provide. This is no substitute, but a complementary supplement to the professional health care sector.

In an interesting example of legislation in the spirit of the activating state, the above recognition has led Germany to adopt a regulation on the public promotion of self-help which supports the infrastructure for civic engagement instead of conferring a right to benefits. Organisations need funds: for contact points for people

to turn to, for PR work to communicate their existence and knowledge, for rooms for work and meetings etc. Since this work is extremely interesting to – and beneficial for – society, the legislator decided to subsidise the necessary basic funding to the tune of 36 million Euros annually, which is a contribution of €0,50 per insured person per year. Self-help groups can submit applications to health insurance schemes for funds supporting their projects.

One representative of the volunteers once explained the special quality or productivity of civic engagement as follows: **Professionalism makes for distance, crisis demands closeness and humanity**. Full-time employees in the social sector are undoubtedly not remote or without sympathy because of their jobs. But they have a different logic apply, are bound by institutional constraints and are very much hemmed in by deadlines. Professional care workers perform what is necessary, the compulsory section, while volunteers have the time and freedom to devote themselves to the extras, the free section. They provide care, a chance to talk, something out of the ordinary, something unscheduled. It is frequently easier for volunteers to get close to the patients and to build trust, which brings a special quality to the care or other social services they provide. **Civic engagement, in this sense, is the real-life side of the welfare state.**

The change of emphasis from compensating for deficits to activating resources is not limited to coping with illness. This approach can be applied to many other groups in society which we consider disadvantaged: migrants, senior citizens, the homeless and the disabled. **Civil society social policy takes people's abilities and their resources as the yardstick, strengthens networks and supports self-help.** Such a social policy will utilise the special quality of civic engagement, the voluntary aspects and competence of people actively involved in the community, in order to be close to those concerned and to adjust social services to the needs of the recipients.

In a democracy, citizens are not supposed to be passive observers when the state takes decisions, nor should they simply be entitled to claim or receive social benefits. An activating state assumes its control functions are limited and has high expectations of the citizens. According to the above model, people are seen as approachable and willing to cooperate in the political arena. They have internalised their status as members of a political set-up, a polity, and accept the fact that this role gives them not only rights but also obligations.

This changes the relationship between the welfare state and the individual. **As people involved who have their own resources or are members of private networks or social associations, individuals assume an importance going far beyond being a client of the institutions of the welfare state.** The principle of "promote and demand" only makes sense against this backdrop: If you demand proper contributions by everyone you rely on the existence of a certain capacity to do so, and this needs to be promoted. The concept of an activating state is dynamic and requires an interchange of demands, reality, and learning process in order to flourish.

## Improved Participation means Activation

This optimistic description definitely raises doubts as well: isn't it blue-eyed or even cynical to tell people who for different reasons depend on the welfare state to look to their own re-

sources and competence? Isn't the reason why these people depend on the state their lack of resources to gain a foothold in the labour market? Indeed, when we emphasize the potential of self-help and solidarity-networks, we must not forget that there are still inequalities regarding opportunities to participate in civil society. These exist in prosperity levels and education as well as in the contacts, networks and access to publicity, which are so important for the civil society. Studies such as the 1999 and 2004 surveys on volunteerism show how better educated people with a job are far more actively engaged than others – community work is largely a middle-class phenomenon. Promoting civic engagement without paying attention to social injustice risks reinforcing, albeit unintentionally and involuntarily, the better chances for more prosperous segments of society of making their views felt, to the detriment of those who really need the welfare state to represent their weaker interests.

In other words: **an activating state should pursue a social policy which does not simply build on existing resources but actively supports the development of competences among the needy. It is all about "empowerment", enabling, emboldening in the sense of giving power**. From this angle, the purpose of social policy is not financial assistance which long term frequently causes and cements new dependencies instead of eliminating old ones. The point is to ensure participation in education processes, strengthen self-confidence and existing mutually supportive social relations. Thus, the over-employed term "help to self-help" does provide a socio-political guideline after all.

One group which should become an increasing focus for social political efforts is the migrants.

At the very latest when the first generation of immigrants grows older, we understand that they do not just contribute to the social insurance system, but are also dependent on its benefits. Frequently, though, these benefits never reach them – for a lack of linguistic competence or fear of professional, often anonymous welfare state institutions. Family and cultural networks may be widespread, effective and more resilient than those of the established German population; nevertheless, they cannot cushion everything, which often leads to hidden poverty among the elderly migrants.

In this respect, the objective of an activating state should be to discover and strengthen a self-help potential. The great multiplicity of so-called "own-ethnic" associations and networks offering contacts and mutual support within an ethnic group, constitute a part of Germany's civil society which is largely unknown. Linking men and women migrant's self-organisations with integration, inter-cultural solidarity and the responsibility of the welfare state, is a central task for Germany as a country of immigration and a viable society.

An activating state can choose between different approaches. It can strengthen the willingness of the individual to assume responsibility along the lines of current local government social policies, but needs also to reinforce the social capital of collective structures and networks. Achieving the objective of integrating people into the community can be achieved above all through rebuilding the institution of the welfare state, such as child-care facilities, youth centres, schools and social services for senior citizens so that each user group can take an active part in designing the facility and its services.

# Civil Society as a Reforming Project: Education Policies as an Example

The full potential of the civil society for reform becomes clear when applying it to concrete areas of politics, e.g. education. In the context of the civil society as a reforming project, education assumes a special, dual importance: a civil society-oriented education policy advocates the opening up of educational facilities, particularly schools, for community engagement. On the other hand, this requires specific competence, a special syllabus as to content and structure. Terms such as *civic education,* or social, if not civil society-oriented learning, civic competence, learning to be capable of membership in a community, political education illustrates the wide field which involved.

The age of self-sufficiency of education facilities in schools with a closed curriculum is over. Schools and universities, vocational schools and kindergartens need partners within society at large in order to implement innovations (e.g.: media competence, cultural projects, social work etc.), or to offer additional activities in sports, leisure time, or improvements in reading and language skills in socially challenging areas, material and other support (e.g. special instruction structures), or to intensify international exchange programmes for schools and universities and, last but not least to help prepare people for the job market, partly on the basis of increased co-operation with businesses and service sector organisations, or through helping to find targeted internship opportunities.

Possible socially responsible partners for education facilities are businesses which show community-oriented engagement in education in the form of corporate citizenship projects. Tertiary sector organisations are just as important, though, as are non-governmental organisations and others who provide engagement as well as, increas-ingly, employment opportunities. Other possible partners are associations, projects and initiatives in the local environment. For schools in particular, this opening towards civic engagement serves to further blur the dividing lines between those learning and those in charge. Until recently, the German school system kept to a pedagogical mandate which focuses on education and the dissemination of knowledge, but more or less ignores the need to look after the students. **The current debate on education policy puts a significantly higher value on the care-giving function of schools, partly because families need increasingly to balance family and job, partly in order to contribute to equal opportunities for all schoolchildren.**

**This re-evaluation of the care-giving function offers new opportunities for civic engagement:** covering facilities from youth work, sports clubs, cultural events, environmental or corporate citizenship projects, and integrating parents and support groups among others**. Promoting day-care should accordingly be emphasized as supporting schools to open up to civic engagement.**

The second element of a civil society-oriented education policy is aimed at providing civic competence. Community commitment, the willingness to embrace democratic participation as well as the ability to assume responsibility for oneself and others, are taught by providing role models and by giving targeted instruction. Young people need to be educationally prepared for living as citizens, while adults need help in discovering opportunities for participation**. Community participation requires increasingly complex competencies: political knowledge about democratic structures and processes, orientation guidelines and practical knowledge of civil so-**

**ciety networks in general, and of differentiated practical fields in particular, as well as social competence in people skills, practical capacities for participation and management etc.**

In addition to the content angle, there is a methodical/didactical aspect to teaching the relevant skills and abilities, namely: practicing independence, self-responsibility and solidarity. Looking at Finland, the "PISA" study winner, shows how a culture of learning, which relies a great deal more than the German system on independence, self-responsibility and cooperation among schoolchildren, strengthens civil society as well as improving academic performance as a result of focusing on these skills. Adults in their turn acquire more knowledge and skills through civic engagement which will also benefit them in the labour market. **Performance-orientation and a sense of civic responsibility are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, em-**

**pirical studies as well as life experience furnish evidence for the synchronicity between being ready to perform well and being willing to become involved.** Learning for and through civic engagement is an integral part of a culture of lifelong learning.

In this sense, the erroneous contradiction between performance-orientation and learning civil society solidarity which is still frequently postulated in the educational debate, should finally be abandoned. On the contrary, the debate on education reform could be enriched by elements of civic engagement. We need more places, where civic engagement can be learned and practiced and we need educational institutions, child care facilities, schools, youth centres, even universities which will develop innovative approaches to communicating public spirit, a willingness to be responsible and show solidarity.

# Outlook: Civil Society 2020

Civic engagement offers an opportunity to virtually reinvent democracy and the welfare state in Germany. This vision of the maximum degree of active citizen self-determination and ability to shape their own polity according to rules of cooperation and democracy demands a comprehensive democratisation of all areas of society on the basis of civic engagement in order to become the **foundation of a new social contract**. Civil society serves as a model and gives guidelines for the necessary reforms we are facing in both state and society.

With civic engagement as a model for the coming years, in 15 years from now Germany might be characterised by:

- Citizens who use their abilities and experience to contribute to resolving societal problems

- An activating state which finds appropriate ways to support, promote and enable civic engagement

- Businesses which are willing to show corporate social responsibility not merely by doing good by means of donations and sponsoring, but by working in a targeted way with both government and society to the benefit of all.

The most important way to promote civic engagement is to grant it comprehensive recognition. Within civil society, however, recognition is not fully utilised in awarding individual recognition and rewards or in celebrating the "International Volunteer Day" on 5 December. The real objective is to engender a general **culture of recognition** which contributes to a sustainable appreciation of and encouragement of civic en-

gagement and helps to give it greater recognition in society at large.

Opportunities for participation and decision-making powers for the citizens regarding their engagement are also integral parts of such a culture of recognition, as are services like advice, further education and skilling.

In this sense, a culture of recognition is an essential new socio-political element in the new division of responsibility between government, business and society.

## About the Author

**Dr. Michael Bürsch**, member of the Social-democratic parliamentary party in the German Bundestag. During the 14th parliamentary term, he chaired the Study Commission on the "Future of Civic Engagement". He is the head of the working group 'civil society and activating state' of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation. In Parliament he heads the sub-committee "civic engagement".

# Working group "Civic Engagement and Activating State" of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation

Promoting civil society remains a central issue in the current reform debate. The working group "Civic Engagement and Activating State" has long been a forum for this topic, studying and analysing issues relevant to reform policy and taking a stand in the political debate. This is intended to contribute to the establishment of a network for political consulting on reform and to advise politicians of its conclusions. In this sense, the working group considers itself a generator of momentum for the public debate on reforms.

The motive behind this and the point of departure is our interest in bringing together strengthened civic engagement, with its inherent potential for democratisation and state modernization efforts, aiming at the creation of an activating state. Top of the working group's agenda is the strengthening of civil society and concomitant opportunities for participation: it is this angle which determines the demands for the direction of modernization for state institutions and representatives.

Membership of the working group is by invitation and its composition reflects the interdisciplinary approach taken. The Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation was able to attract representatives from the fields of politics, administration, academia, business, the media, associations and other societal organisations to make their professional and personal experience available to the working group. Apart from these permanent members, experts on specific subjects to be discussed are invited for special occasions.

In its regular meetings, the working group debates issues helpful for implementing civic engagement in practical terms, as well as for the recommendations for action issued by the Study Commission of the 14th German Parliament on the "Future of Civic Engagement". The latter are also discussed at expert meetings public events or addressed in analyses or expert reports, all of which the working group studies attentively. This range of activities facilitates an exchange of information and experience and helps to establish networks between its members and their different areas of practical experience.

The working group is chaired by Dr. Michael Bürsch, Member of the Bundestag (chairman of the Study Commission of the 14th German Parliament) and the coordinator is Albrecht Koschützke of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation.

Detailed information, contact persons, conceptual information, progress reports, outcome of parliamentary debates and working group meetings, can be found on the working group's website which is: www.fes.de/buergergesellschaft – „Analysen" – „Analysen des Arbeitskreises" or even on http://www.fes.de/library/ask_digbib.html

# Publikationen des Arbeitskreises
# Bürgergesellschaft und Aktivierender Staat

## Analyse-Reihe „betrifft: Bürgergesellschaft"

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**22/Die Planungszelle. Zur Praxis der Bürgerbeteiligung**, Peter C. Dienel

**21/Das soziale Engagement der Unternehmen im Handwerk**, Otto Kentzler

**20/Bürgerschaftliches Engagement und die Zukunft der Wohlfahrtsverbände**, Rudolf Seiters

**19/Die soziale Bedingtheit bürgerschaftlicher Teilhabe**, Barbara Stolterfoht

**18 / Corporate Social Responsibility. Das gesellschaftliche Engagement von Unternehmen**, Dieter Hundt

**17 / Das Dilemma von Tugend und Freiheit. Die Notwendigkeit von Eigenverantwortung in einer funktionierenden Bürgergesellschaft**, Herfried Münkler und Anna Loll

**16 / Auf dem Weg zur Bürgerkommune. Bürgerschaftliches Engagement in Heidelberg**, Beate Weber

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**01 / Leitbild Lebendige Bürgergesellschaft – Plädoyer für einen neuen Gesellschaftsvertrag zwischen Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft**, Michael Bürsch, MdB, englische Version: **Towards a New Social Contract – Civil Society, Civic Engagement and Participation**

## Sonstige Publikationen des Arbeitskreises

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