

Editorial

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This issue of *Nonprofit Policy Forum* leads off with a mini-symposium on public policy and the nonprofit sector in Central and Eastern Europe. The symposium is introduced by Professor Jon Van Til, a distinguished scholar of civil society for the past five decades. Recently Professor Van Til has turned his attention to Central Europe where several countries have struggled with the transition from communism to democracy and the market economy. At the heart of these transitions is the status of civil society organizations and governments' policies towards them. At Van Til's initiative we asked three outstanding scholars from this region to report on the government/civil society relationship in their own countries. Thus, following Van Til's introductory essay, Anna Leskinen analyzes the contemporary situation in Russia, Svitlana Krasynska studies Ukraine, and Agnes Kover examines Hungary. The status of civil society/governmental relationships in these three countries varies considerably for historical, cultural, political and economic reasons, and their situations are nuanced, complex and dynamic, not easily summarized by any simple pattern or trend. Nonetheless, viewed from afar, the picture is disturbing because in all three cases governments have become more antagonistic or hostile to civil society organizations as they try to repress criticism and consolidate or extend their authority. Even more disturbing is the notion that perhaps the developments in Eastern and Central Europe are canaries in the proverbial coal mine, reflecting if not signaling developments in other parts of the world – including the Middle East following the Arab Spring, in China, and elsewhere – where repressive regimes have been toppled or loosened only to rebound or reemerge rather than permit civil society and democracy to gain a firm footing. In 2016 *Nonprofit Policy Forum* will publish another special international comparative issue to take a wider scan of nonprofit policy in countries around the world, including selected nations in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas where a retreat from democracy may be taking place. For the present, it is important for anyone concerned about the future of democracy to understand what is happening in the cauldrons that are now alight in Russia, Ukraine and Hungary.

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After the symposium articles we offer two additional papers with related themes. In the fourth paper here Silvia Ferreira describes how in a time of economic and social crisis the third sector in Portugal is coalescing around the concept of the social economy, bringing together diverse elements of the sector and a political consensus reflected in new public policies and umbrella structures.

Finally, our fifth article by Teresa Derrick-Mills links the themes of this issue with that of our last special issue on nonprofit competition (volume 5, issue 2) by analyzing nonprofit competition policy through the lens of a general framework for understanding nonprofit-government relations. This is a broad conceptual piece that identifies the numerous ways in which nonprofits compete and collaborate with other nonprofits, business and government for services, resources and policy changes. Derrick-Mills argues that studying nonprofit competition in the context of nonprofit-government relations allows us to search for those competition-related policies and arrangements that will best serve the general interests of society.

We conclude this issue with a penetrating review by Bruce Sievers of Roger Lohmann's new book, *Voluntary Action in New Commons*, an update and extension of the author's well received *The Commons* written in 1992. As Sievers notes, the new work connects the concepts of voluntary action and the commons to "... the essential character of democracy ... in its present manifestation and possible future evolution ...". While challenging some of its arguments, Sievers finds that this ambitious book succeeds "... in presenting new thought-provoking insights" on this most fundamental of subjects related to the nonprofit sector and public policy.

Enjoy this new issue and thank you for your interest in *Nonprofit Policy Forum*.