



**Dialogues on Democracy featuring IFES Regional Director, Europe and Eurasia,
Dr. Beata Martin- Rozumilowicz transcript**

Host: Welcome to IFES' Dialogues on Democracy. I'm Lawrence Green Multimedia Officer at IFES. I would like to welcome Dr. Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz. Dr. Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz is Regional Director for Europe and Eurasia at IFES. So let's get started. Can you share a personal experience or encounter in the field of democracy and governance that has inspired or marked your work?

Dr. Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz: Absolutely. I think one of the first things that got me interested and involved in this area of development is the fact that my parents are immigrants from Eastern Europe from Poland in particular and one of the reasons why they eventually left their country of origin is the fact that they felt that they had little say in the decisions being made, in the policies being implemented and in the effect that they had on their family, on their personal lives, on their ability to pursue the kinds of lives that they wanted to have. So I think you know with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990, with the fact that I grew up speaking Polish it sort transitions to democracy, to look at ways in which I personally could be more involved and help individuals in those countries express themselves, express their voice, have more of a say and hopefully lead to a process which would lead to a country where people wanted to stay, wanted to see develop and wanted to live in in the longer term and I think in many of the countries that is happening. I personally have just returned back from six years in Warsaw and I can say it's probably the most vibrant period in that country in the last maybe a hundred and fifty years and you really see the impact that those kinds of changes make in people's everyday lives.

Host: How do you define a healthy and sustainable democracy and what role do elections play in ensuring democracy is thriving and alive?

Dr. Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz: Now I think one of the key elements is that element of voice it's the ability of people to be heard, people to be able to express how they feel about the things that are going on in their country and do that in an informed way and I think that really is the sort of hallmark of a healthy democracy that every individual has an equal right to be heard in the same way to influence the politics of that country in the same way and also to receive the same level of information to be able to make the choices in an intelligent and informed manner. I think in many of the countries in around the world there still is a problem that either many groups are disenfranchised they don't have the same rights effectively that other people do. There's also varying levels of information that's provided to citizens in many countries and so even if you have a circumstance where there could be a relative equality in terms of access to an election process, many of those people have very limited information are very limited



knowledge of the choices within which they're making those elected choices and I think elections really are that institution or that vehicle that gives expression to those viewpoints, that gives expression to people's choices in a real way and leads to a representation of those interests at a higher level which hopefully is transparent in the way that it's conducted and also accountable to those people who initially made those choices.

Host: Speaking of elections, can you comment on the importance of persons with disabilities participating in the electoral process and also of course women participating in the electoral process as well getting involved in politics and making their voices heard?

Dr. Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz: I think all of these groups are crucial to a credible and trustworthy election process. I think you know my background I come to elections very much as a human rights-based principle that every human being by the fact that they're human being has the right to express themselves through elections and so that should not be limited by any other factors, should not be limited by education. It should not be limited by income. It should not be limited by things like the person's gender or their ability to physically participate in the same way as others. Everyone should have rights which are equal across the board and the role of an election administration is to be able to facilitate those individuals to express that right in an equal way on the same basis so I think it's really crucial that marginalized groups, women, persons with disabilities, other groups as well, minority groups or indigenous groups are given the same rights and that an election administration focuses on those elements to try to ensure that individuals can vote in the same way to have their vote respected in the same way.

Host: Well thank you very much for being a part of this podcast.

Dr. Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz: Thank you very much.