

EAMF 2018

Panel Session 4

Trust in Society

Andres Ilves, South Africa based writer and journalist, moderated the fourth panel session, dealing with the recorded fall in the general public's trust in key institutions – government, business, the media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – around the world.

“The media is the least trusted institution of all,” he said, and asked the panellists to reflect on how to solve the problem of trust generally.

Michael Dobbs, British author and politician, agreed that the lack of trust was a problem but argued that it had been much worse in the past, a hundred or even fifty years ago. “But we seem to have the ability to get through the crisis. I’m an optimist, there are challenges but there are solutions,” he said.

Asking how to restore trust in institutions was the wrong question. The question should be: ‘how can the people be once again trusted by the institutions’?

The rise of social media meant that people only listened to their own prejudices. “They live in echo chambers, hearing only their own views,” Lord Dobbs said.

Khatia Dekanoidze, Georgian official and politician, said that in her experience the reason for the crisis of public confidence in institutions was entirely due to corruption. The solution was to impose the rule of law.

In the case of the police, in which she had been personally involved in both Georgia and the Ukraine, there had been the added problem of violation of human rights. Reforms had included mass dismissals and the introduction of literally ‘transparent’ police stations, in place of ‘black’ prison-like buildings.

“I believe in the rule of law,” she said. “Trust is a social contract between government and the people. We need social contracts to achieve the highest standards of the rule of law.”

Clark Plexico, American, President of International Strategies Inc and a former Senator from Carolina, said the main problem was when the authorities did not trust the people to be able to cope with difficult decisions that required sacrifices. “Then they start dancing around the truth, not telling everybody everything,” he said.

There were two solutions in American politics: campaign finance reform and ‘redistricting’ – changing the electoral landscape to make it fairer for the voters.

Emmanuel Dupuy, President of Institut Prospective et Sécurité en Europe, France, said it was not necessarily a case of mistrust, but people needed time to get use to some of the new breed of politicians.

“ We don’t know where we’re going. We need to know if a politician is efficient, if he can do his job. People may mistrust parties and institutions but they are looking for leadership. And less corruption in politics.”

In France there was a social pact, with rights and duties on both sides, he said.

Ms **Saule Mektepbayeva**, human rights activist from Kazakhstan, attributed the fall in public trust to people’s sometimes unreasonably high expectations of what they wanted from the authorities.

“There is no guaranteed right to happiness but we are requiring the state to supply this,” she said. “We expect totally different things now, we expect them to smile at us while providing service. If they don’t, the level of trust changes.”

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