



**ALDA**

Association of Local  
Democracy Agencies



EUROPEAN UNION

# Civic Initiatives in Belarus: Promoting public interests at the local level

***REACT. REinforcing ACTions  
of capacity building for civil society***



Non-Governmental  
Organization  
Lev Sapieha Foundation

Minsk, 2010

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## Introduction

The project “*REACT - REinforcing ACTIONS of capacity building for civil society*” is the result of a long-lasting partnership between the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) and Lev Sapieha Foundation, which have been working together in Belarus since 2006 and developed a strong partnership.

ALDA is an international non-governmental organization working actively to foster human rights and local democracy especially in the Western Balkans and in the Eastern Partnership countries and EU neighborhood countries. It was founded in 1999 as an initiative of the Council of Europe’s Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and has developed into one of the biggest NGOs connecting the local authorities and civil society dealing with human rights, democracy and active citizenship at the local level (<http://www.alda-europe.eu/>).

Lev Sapieha Foundation is a non-governmental, non-political, non-profit organization founded in 1992 with the aim of supporting and fostering the development of civil society and self-government at the local level. It also works on the promotion of democratic ideas and practices in the economic, scientific and cultural fields (<http://sapieha.org/index/0-6>).

Following the “*ACOSBE - Acting social rights in Belarus*” project, implemented in Belarus from September 2006 to March 2008 by both partners and supported by the European Commission, a growing number of civil society actors returned with new ideas to continue the activities. These actors developed different ideas of civic initiatives for targeted rural areas in Belarus. The main goal was to implement concrete actions in order to promote participation of civil society in the development of local social and economic strategies.

The ACSOBE project aimed at promoting social and cultural rights and at strengthening dialogue between civil society groups and local governments in Belarus. The partnership building process aimed at involving different types of Non-State Actors in order to promote a rich and profitable exchange between different partners. One of the results of this project was the development of new relationships between different organizations. These new relationships facilitated the development of new Civic Initiatives to support sustainable development in a way that was more understandable for the general population

The present project that was implemented in 2009-2010 facilitates citizens’ active engagement in the local development process, promotes cooperation between local authorities and non-state actors and implements concrete actions in this field. The general focus of the project is supporting civic initiatives in order to foster citizens and civil society organizations action in favor of poverty reduction

We encouraged the participants of the project to develop their own ideas for local social or cultural projects. We paid special attention to the use of best practices in the realization of small cooperation projects with three partners. We encouraged the Belarusian participants to share their experience with colleagues through the promotion of “small” social initiatives locally. The most important point was to convince the participants that any social initiative – small as big – is important and that the size of the initiative isn’t the most important. Eventually, most participants realized that they had already implemented that type of projects. But since they were afraid of using the word “project” we proposed to refer to it as “initiatives”, which enabled us to move forward. Thanks to our participants’ intense activity on social issues, we managed to gather numerous project ideas. The next step consisted in shaping these initiatives and providing its initiator with consultancy and support.

These civic initiatives are basically small pilot projects, designed and implemented by non state actors very active at the local level, in order to strengthen participation of NSA, to promote development processes, to reduce poverty and to foster sustainable development in rural areas of Belarus.

The action took place in Borisov, Smorgon, Polotsk, Gomel, Orsha, Puchovichy, which are considered as rural areas. Some activities were held in Minsk region to give more visibility to the project in Belarus. This publication aims to provide an overview of all the initiatives that were implemented and of the results that were achieved.

## 1. Local self-government in micro district «Volotova».

*Gomel Association of Youth and Children (ASDEMO)*

*<http://asdemo.org/>*

*Period: 01.11.2009 – 30.05.2010*

*Coordinator of the project: Vladimir Kovzelev*

The NGO “ASDEMO” is the Association of Youth and Children in Gomel. This organization unites youth, students, school children and kids (more than 100 registered members) and was created on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1996. The project was implemented in two micro districts of Mozyr’s city – namely “Youth” and “Volotova” - because mostly young and potentially active people live in these neighborhoods. The project «Local self-government in micro district “Volotova”» aimed at creating and developing local initiatives and overcome the passive wait-and-see attitude of inhabitants in this neighborhood of Gomel city. The main goal was to support people’s participation in the decision making process at micro district level with involvement of representatives of the local administration and deputies of the city council.

The starting point consisted in a meeting with The Gomel regional administration’s committee of natural resources and preservation of the environment, as the project focused on citizens’ participation to environmental problem solving by local authorities. On this occasion, ASDEMO submitted proposals on the territorial limitation of the expansion of summer houses from the association “Plesy-2”, as those houses were being built on an environmentally protected area. As a result, a Commission in charge of territory monitoring was created, gathering representatives from local authorities and from the civil society, such as the deputy head of Gomel district inspection and the director of ASDEMO. Following a territorial survey, an agreement was adopted to put a ban on allocation of any new plots of summer houses to “Plesy-2”.

Several events were organized as part of the project. Stands and banners were prepared to provide large-scale information to local people about pollution of the birch woods and infringement of the legislation on nature protection around the Pokaljubichsky water supply point. A video clip about people’s irresponsibility in failing to take action was produced and broadcasted on the local television channel “Nireya”. More than 30 persons took part in an action of waste collection. On the school playground, gar-



bage containers and prohibiting signs were installed on this occasion. An ecological and sport event was organized in Gomel City Park and gathered about 200 people. During the project, more than 250 schoolchildren took part in meetings aiming at spreading consciousness about environmental protection.

On February 27, the seminar «Public - territorial self-government from theory to practice: experience of local self government development in Sweden, Poland and Lithuania» was held in the “road-building” college for students and gathered 28 persons.

Finally, a friendly football match between teachers from “Volotova” and “Youth” micro districts was organized, as a means to enable people to get to know each other and thus foster future cooperation. Exchanges of experience with other initiatives in our area were also carried out in the framework of the project.

The main achievement of the project was the development of favorable conditions and necessary capacities for the creation of local comities of territorial self-government in the micro district “Youth” of Mozyr. In the near future, the project team plans to further develop these conditions and to create self-government bodies in the micro districts.

## 2. Active citizenship in the local neighbourhood.

### *Public association MZHK "Solnechnyi"*

*<https://sites.google.com/site/mzksolnecnyj/Home/istoria-mzk>*

*Period: 01.11.2009 – 30.05.2010*

*Coordinator of the project: Vladimir Makarov*

MZHK "Solnechnyi" is public association of tenants, which attempts to organize itself on the model of condominiums. The ambition of this project was to overcome the lack of interest and apathy of citizens concerning issues of local self government, availability and quality of housing as well as municipal services. The central problem that was addressed was the failure to create a safe and comfortable living environment for apartment tenants in multistoried houses in micro district № 52 in Gomel.

The project goals were reached through a set of activities: Four initiative groups (with a total of 21 persons) interested in the development of housing self-management agencies were established. The main motivation for the creation of a "landlord" association was the desire to have real influence on the level of the rent. The most discouraging elements were the age of the houses, which are 20 years old or older and the fact that so far there is no legal act which specifies that a part of local taxes should be used to cover the costs related to renovations. A specialized program called «Accounting in condominiums. MZHK-1» which aims to facilitate the automation of book keeping in condominiums was developed on the basis of the accounting software "Bookkeeper 1C". Developers of this program ran training sessions for representatives of the four initiative groups, showing them the functioning of the program and the way it should be used. During the project, two MZHK "Solnechnyi" websites were developed. One of them has an informative purpose concerning current issues or history of MZHK "Solnechnyi" and includes, among other things, a communication forum. One website was designed for the local network of MZHK "Solnechnyi" and has thus restricted access, the second one has public access.

The project showed that the habit to rely on the state regarding questions of housing and communal services is stronger than the economic appeal of self-management housing. Moreover, it revealed that the "maturing process" before a landowner association can effectively be created takes more than 6 months. Meanwhile, it has been decided that the following activities should be carried out:

- Creation of a permanent source of information, for example, through the magazine "House manager" and MZHK's web-page,
- Organization of regular trainings for landowners in exemplary houses with real self-management,
- Organization of joint activities in the decision making process on general housing issues like parking for cars, playgrounds and so on.



### 3. I see the bright colors. I see everything.

*International Charity NGO "See by Heart"*

*The period: 01.11.2009 – 30.05.2010*

*Coordinator of the project: Gukasova Ellada*

The international Charity NGO "See by Heart" was created 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2006 and deals with charitable issues related to visually impaired and mentally disabled children and young people. Most of the activities it implements are related to the social rehabilitation of participants through art and educational activities. The project events were realized in Minsk, but participants come from all over Belarus. The project was oriented on social adaptation and integration of visually impaired and mentally disabled children and teenagers, through the participation in actions aiming to disclose the creative potential and develop mental capacities.

Indeed, social adaptation and integration of visually impaired and mentally disabled children and young people are possible through a disclosure of their creative potential and development of their mental capacities during circles, educational seminars and exhibition. The project consisted in carrying out study groups on the basis of the Swedish circles system (i.e. gathering of people sharing an interest, activity, education, etc.), organizing a seminar and a final exhibition. At the exhibition, which took place on May 6 2010, the works made during circles were presented and various workshops were organized by blind people. The purpose of the exhibition was to draw people's attention to the problem of visually impaired young people's social integration. Social videos created by participants of the project were presented, along with a photo-exhibition; a short concert was given on the opening ceremony. The exhibition got high media coverage and gathered many people: target groups of the project, volunteers and participants of the project and pupils of schools, local residents, visitors of library etc. Throughout the project, additional activities led to help participants develop their mental capacities:

- *"Interesting and cheerful cookery"* - Training of participants for independent preparation of various dishes (pancakes, etc.).
- *"All by hands"* - Training of participants to develop their ability to do things which are necessary in daily life.
- *"Art is the possibility to open all talents and to get remarkable friends"* - Familiarization of participants with various art forms (sculpture, stained-glass windows, fabrics painting, drawing, pape-mashe etc.) to show the possibility for everyone to be an artist.
- *"Live paper"* - Familiarization of participants with various kinds of sculpture from paper and origami.
- *"The Art of Dialogue"* - Training of basic skills – speaking, effective communications, self-presentation, etc.



Throughout the project, participants made tremendous progresses and developed greatly their ability to socialize. Further activities are currently being developed to enable them to further develop their social skills.

## **4. «Re-socialization of prisoners»: a pocket book for released persons.**

*NGO "Filon Kmita Center"*

*The period: 01.11.2009 – 30.05.2010*

*Coordinator of the project: Victor Andreev*

The NGO "Filon Kmita Center" provides legal support (advocacy, consulting) for local communities and individuals in Orsha district. The "Re-socialization of prisoners" project was motivated by the fact that in spite of the decision taken in January 2009 to create a re-socialization center for ex-convicts in Orsha «in the nearest future», the building designated for this by local authorities is still empty. The purpose of the project was to provide assistance in the creation of favorable conditions for the re-socialization of prisoners through the development of peoples' tolerance, the protection of social and economic rights of ex-convicts, the creation of "first steps consultation" possibilities and the promotion of a city development program in the field of re-socialization.

In the framework of the project, lawyers Dmitry Shantor and Alexey Sivtsov developed texts for a series of 11 brochures «Your rights» on 11 topics relevant for ex-convicts: «Assistance in the household and labor issues»; «Journey Home»; «Social Assistance»; «Restoration of documents»; «Family issues»; «Property right»; «Damage compensation»; «Registration of pensions»; «Housing issues»; «Rights of disabled»; «Labor issues». Those brochures were offered for distribution to heads of correctional facilities responsible for educational work. However, because of the lack of transparency of those establishments and the necessity to pass a number of agreements with departments (first of all Office of Public Prosecutor), the brochures were also distributed through the social protection fund, job centers, inspection on observation of punishment execution, passport and visa services points and medical services points.

To create further publicity, ex-convicts were interviewed in format of "life story". Five articles were distributed through newsletters of social organizations, among them were "Clean world", "Center of social and legal rehabilitation"; "Society of addicted person".

Thanks to this extensive communication, more than two hundred phone calls from Orsha and other regions were received, mostly from relatives of convicted persons. They were basically concerned about official registration of papers and employment issues. More than 40 percent of the messages related to complaints on violation of prisoners' rights to work, to get social support or restoration of documents; restrictions in the rights on movement. Overall, 89 documents were dealt with, including 43 complaints, 20 inquiries, five petitions, seven claims and 12 statements for early release. More than 80 regulatory legal acts were e-mailed to applicants. The huge mobilization of people showed that the project was answering a real need: the feedback from all those families also enabled the project team to identify more precisely the needs of ex-convicts and will thus enable them to provide people with more efficient services in the future.

## 5. Students Rights: mechanism and consciousness.

### *Students Council*

*<http://studrada.org/>*

*The period: 01.11.2009 – 30.05.2010*

*Coordinator of the project: Ales' Krot*

The Student Council is an initiative that resulted from the identification of a real need to defend students' rights. The idea appeared in the Minsk students' society, but rapidly spread over several regional institutions. Students are the most socially unprotected group with a high range of difficulties in the educational process. This information was collected through a questionnaire made by «Studentskaya Rada» among students in higher and special institutions in Minsk. The results of the questionnaire pointed out that 94% of the interviewed students encountered various difficulties, mostly connected with a violation of their rights. One of the reasons is a lack of knowledge about the mechanisms of rights' protection, the other has to do with the lack of awareness of students about their position in the educational process and in the institution. The main idea of the project was to train students in Minsk in the sphere of rights protection. The other objective was the creation of a students' network able to assist students in the defense of their rights.

In that perspective, the Youth trade union group «Studentskaya Rada» (Student Council) developed a training program entitled «Students Rights: Mechanisms of protection and consciousness». The distinctive feature of the program was the orientation of participants towards a creative and critical approach in the protection of their rights as well as the comprehension of students' place and position in the educational process.

There were five trainings on subjects related to student's rights and a conference on the creation of a students' network. The program was constructed in a way to encourage participants to share their knowledge among their friends and acquaintances. 15 participants who passed the training were offered to become part of the students' network on the students' rights defense. The purpose of the Network is to increase the interaction, information and exchange between the students wishing to protect their rights, to support initiatives on protection of students at local and national levels. During the conference, several issues were discussed, including the quality of higher education in Belarus, the fact that students understand themselves as independent subjects and their ability to be consolidated for the protection of common interests. There were six presentations:

- Alexander Klimashin «The Essence of Students Rights»
- Marat Abramovsky «The Quality of high school education in the eyes of students»
- Maria Suma «Humane education or students' right not to kill»
- Lyudmila Burdachyova «Students and studentship - myth or reality?»
- Victor Terez «Prospects of legal assistance development in the modern student environment in Belarus»
- Michael Matskevich of "Prospects of a development of a student spirit»

The activities that were implemented throughout the project contributed to the team building process and to the structuring of civil initiatives. The project in itself also enabled the student council «Studentskaya Rada» to gain more visibility. Future plans are to keep on providing trainings and assistance to students for the defense of their rights.

## **6. Together against breast cancer.**

*Smorgon' regional branch of public association "Belarus association of young Christian women"*

*The period: 01.11.2009 – 30.05.2010*

*Coordinator of the project: Marina Belevich*

The Smorgon' regional branch of "Belarus association of young Christian women" is running activities in the sphere of public health and are mostly focusing on cancer diseases of women. In 2008 the organization started advocating in favor of its patients' rights. In this context the project "together against breast cancer" was implemented in the cities Mikashevichi (Brest region), Gancevichi (Brest region), Klichev (Mogilev region), Rechica (Gomel' region), Smorgon' (Minsk region) and Minsk.

About 10 years ago breast cancer came out on top among all cancer diseases of women. At the moment, there are up to 25 thousand women who have suffered from breast cancer in Belarus and in the last 20 years the number of patients has doubled. Today the number of persons with the disease reaches 3400 persons per year in Belarus. According to mammalogists' forecasts, mammary gland cancer will threaten 16 percent of all Belarusian women in the near future. For many of us, cancer is associated with death, but early diagnostics make it possible to discover breast cancer at an early stage, when it is still possible to prevent serious consequences of the disease.

Throughout the last years, informational and educational work in Belarus on preventive measures such as early diagnostics of breast cancer was run only by «Belarus association of young Christian women» («BAMHZH»). Despite its activities, the level of awareness and knowledge about this issue in Belarus remains very low. The problem became so important that additional means were made necessary to solve it and that was the purpose of this project.

Within the framework of the project, five initiative groups from the public organization «Belarus organization of working women» («BOTZH») began to work. Throughout the project, coordinators from «BOTZH» organized 11 seminars in order to disseminate the knowledge and experience about cancer diseases of women. These seminars gathered 426 persons; 125 sets of information material and 1000 booklets «For life sake» were distributed. In addition, another 35 complete sets of information material are to be published.

The action «Pink ribbon» aiming to raise awareness about breast cancer was conducted in five regional cities. As result of it, the awareness and knowledge of 1399 persons was improved.

Public attention was also drawn to the problem through mass-media coverage: Luninets' weekly journal "Inform-walking" (articles «We will protect themselves», «Pink ribbon», circulation 7800 copies); Gantsevichy newspaper «Soviet Polesye», (article «Right for life, instead of its prolongation», circulation of the newspaper 4085 copies); Video clip on portal TUT.BY in the section «Look and listen», with a speech of Irina Zhihar, Chairman of «BOTZH»; on-air broadcasting of Molodechno region MKTV (the potential audience is 150000 people).

A round table, «Advocacy of breast cancer issues: changing of understanding» was organized on April 11 in Minsk. Several directions were defined for the further joint activity of «BAMHZH» and «BOTZH», including prophylaxis of breast cancer, training of women on advocacy of breast cancer issues, lobbying mammalogy screening, establishment and development of women's networks and volunteer movements, creation of groups of self-care patients.

## **7. City Ecology: Recycling of mercury containing lamps.**

*Orsha regional branch of NGO «Belarusian Society of Consumers Protection» (BOZP)*

*The period: 01.11.2009 – 30.05.2010*

*Coordinator of the project: Oleg Grablevsky*

The Orsha regional branch of the NGO «Belarusian Society of Consumers Protection» (BOZP) works on promoting consumers' rights in Orsha region. This ecological project focusing on the recycling of mercury containing lamps took place in Orsha town. Recently, the use of energy saving lamps containing mercury became very popular in Belarus, but this practice is creating legal problems. As a matter of fact, citizens are forbidden to dispose mercury containing lamps with other municipal waste. National TV channels periodically broadcast information on the necessity to hand over used lamps to specialized organizations. Meanwhile, no information on maintenance practices for mercury containing lamps can be found in the shops. The first objective of the project was to inform consumers about mercury containing lamps (buying, using, recycling, etc.). The second objective was to work through legal channels to create specialized institutions on safety collecting and recycling of mercury containing lamps.

Firstly, Orsha regional branch of BOZP provided local representatives of the Ministry of natural resources protection with a request to inform about disposal places for mercury containing lamps. The ministry answered that such waste collection points for mercury lamps don't exist in Orsha and that according to existing rules, used mercury containing lamps should be delivered to Vitebsk city, about 90 kilometers from Orsha. As a consequence, people who use luminescent lamps and contribute to saving energy cannot dispose the lamps in a proper way to ensure recycling, since they have to leave them with regular trash in communal containers.

Secondly, within the framework of the project, Orsha regional branch of BOZP took some legal and public actions to promote the creation of specialized institutions on safety collecting and recycling of mercury containing lamps and other products in Orsha.

Thirdly, information material that shows the danger of mercury and the necessity of special handling of mercury containing goods, behavior rules with broken lamps were developed for the purpose of informing consumers:

- Instruction about mercury containing lamps (5000 copies format A4);
- Teaching materials for use by teachers in secondary schools;
- Publications in mass-media.

The information activities aimed at raising people's awareness regarding the problematic aspect of mercury containing lamps recycling. Besides these actions designed for public information, special events were organized for municipal authorities and local administrations.

The project can be considered successful as people's awareness of this critical ecological issue raised dramatically. However, in order for this trend to convert into sustainable change in people's habits, further action will have to be taken in the long run.

## 8. Rational household electricity consumption as an element for sustainable development.

*Puhovichy regional branch of NGO «Belarusian Society of Consumers Protection» (BOZP)*

*The period: 01.11.2009 – 30.05.2010*

*Coordinator of the project: Vasily Volosjuk*

The Puhovichy regional branch of the NGO «Belarusian Society of Consumers Protection» (BOZP) works on promotion of consumers' rights in the Puhovichy region and implemented the current project in Puhovichy district. This project focused on the development of active citizenship and on exchange of best practices in order to ensure suitable conditions for sustainable development as well as reduction of poverty. The project focused on two main axes:

1. informational-educational activities,
2. introduction and implementation of best practices in household electricity consumption.

In the framework of project activities, cooperation was established with State structures, namely the Republican Association on Housing and Communal Services, the Department of Labor and Social Protection, the Educational Department of District Executive Committee and the regional newspapers.



In coordination with the Department of Labor and Social Protection, some lists of the families most in the need and of the families with disabled person were established. Among them, seven families also took part in the project related to the use of energy saving lamps. Prior to the launching of the project, a commission gathering project team members monitored an evaluation of electricity consumption in each of the houses and apartments of participants. A table providing detailed energy consumption of each of the home devices was made and distributed to all participants and other inhabitants. Simultaneously, throughout the project period, informative and educational workshops were held: lectures, individual conversations, hot line consultations.

In the framework of the project two seminars to place:

- Together with Ananichy village council at the local state secondary school on the topic of «Energy saving in everyday life and special marks of electric goods»;
- A seminar at the premises of the "Snowdrop" club - «Rational methods of power resources usage».

We also provided assistance in the creation of posters which were put up in Novosyolkovsky secondary school in order to make energy saving issues more popular among kids. Information of consumers regarding energy saving was developed: in the regional newspaper a special column was dedicated to energy saving and sustainable development «Questions & Answers».

Among the preselected participants, a group of 13 disabled people identified as those most in need and received energy savings lamps. Thanks to the activities throughout the project, the awareness of the population about energy savings technologies increased by 13%. In families with disabled persons, the savings in terms of electric consumption reached 80 percent after energy savings lamps started being used, which represents up to 5000-7000 (1,20-1.70 €) Belarus rubles and 5 to 10% of their monthly rent.

## 9. «Consumer Lawyer»: information and legal centre for consumers.

**Borsov regional branch of NGO «Belarusian Society of Consumers Protection» (BOZP)**

*The period: 01.11.2009 – 30.05.2010*

*Coordinator of the project: Valery Tchistov*

Borsov regional branch of the NGO «Belarusian Society of Consumers Protection» (BOZP) BOZP “Barrier” works on the promotion of consumers’ in Borsov region and implemented this project in Borsov district. The project aimed firstly at strengthening civil activity and public participation in the region regarding the protection of consumers’ rights. The second main aim of the project was to initiate cooperation between local authorities, public organizations and mass media in the Borsov region in the decision making process regarding priority issues for local communities, such as consumers’ rights.

Several activities were implemented to achieve that goal. Four joint meetings with public organizations, local authorities and mass media on the following topics were held:

- Possible ways of cooperation in the sphere of protection of consumer rights.
- Carrying out an information campaign for the region’s consumers.
- Conducting lectures on consumers’ rights in firms and local public institutions.

In addition, four trainings for consumers were organized. A «Hot line» was established for regular phone consultations for consumers. We also organized and published the booklet «Consumer instructions».

In March, we celebrated the *World Consumer Rights Day* with additional and special events. There were actions and meetings with various organizations in order to establish contacts and social partnerships as well as to give more visibility to consumers’ rights protection issues. During April, schools in the Borsov region took part in a knowledge competition on the course “Bases of consumer knowledge”. Regional representatives of Educational Departments monitored this competition to identify best practices regarding consumers’ rights education at school in order to distribute this information in the network of educational institutions in the regions of Krupki, Smolevichi and Berezino.

The final event of the project was organized in May in Borsov city. It consisted of a regional seminar for representatives of public institutions, state organizations, mass-media and other persons interested in the topic of «Social partnership, as a way of actively involving society in the process of solving social problems and overcoming the populations’ felling of being dependant on others to solve problems and to fight against poverty. Throughout the project, several major results were achieved. First, the issue of consumers’ rights gained major visibility and knowledge was spread extensively in the targeted region. The regional structures such as BOZP “Barrier” were identified by citizens for further assistance and social partnerships for involvement in the decision making process were created. In the future, such social partnerships should be further developed and made legal.

**БП** 6 лютага 2010 года

**УЛОЖИЛ ПОТРЕБИТЕЛЯ**

В Год качества – особое внимание качеству товаров, услуг, выполненных работ. А что делать человеку, если все же некачественно? приобрести товар, который не соответствует требованиям, если его заказ выполнен плохо? В целях распространения правдивой информации для потребителей наша газета наладила сотрудничество с Борисовской районной организацией защиты потребителей «Барьер» и открывает рубрику «Уголочек потребителя». С помощью председателя БРОЗП «Барьер» Валерия Владимировича Чистова постараемся дать разъяснения на вопросы, которые чаще всего поступают на «горячую линию» организации (8-177-76-45-51).

**...ДЕЛАЕМ РЕМОНТ**

Грозовичи И. искал бригаду строителей для сделать ремонт в квартире. Был составлен договор о сроках, выполнении работ и оплате. Когда подошел срок пришло работ, но оказалось, что часть работ, указанной в договоре, не выполняли. Как поступить в таком случае?

В статьях 29-30 Закона РБ «О защите прав потребителей» говорится, если исполнителем нарушил сроки выполнения работ (оказавших услуги), отдельных этапов работы, а также иные сроки, предусмотренные договором, или во время выполнения работы, стало очевидным, что она не будет выполнена в срок, потребитель вправе по своему выбору:

- вынуждать исполнителя исполнить работу;
- поручить выполнение работы третьим лицам за согласованную сторонами разумную цену или выполнить ее своими силами и потребовать от исполнителя возмещения понесенных расходов;
- потребовать соразмерно уменьшить установленной

цену за выполненную работу, - расторгнуть договор о выполнении работы.

Потребитель также вправе потребовать полного возмещения убытков, причиненных ему в связи с нарушением сроков выполнения работы.

**ПОКУПАЕМ ОБУВЬ...**

Гражданин И. купил туфли. Не подошли по размеру, но решил подождать. На просьбу о замене этой пары на другую потребительница получила ответ: либо оплатить ремонт, либо оставить туфли. Через несколько дней пришел сам исполнитель. Однако, приехав на рынок и увидев откровенно дешевые варианты туфли, потребительница отказалась их забирать, на что получила ответ: «не хочешь эти, другие не получишь». Прав ли продавец?

На что следует обращать внимание при покупке обуви? Как связаться с продавцом, больше всего нареканий на то, что она некачественная, поменяется подошва.

Иногда, эти дефекты трудно выявить при покупке, однако не стоит спешить, особенно, когда не-сколько раз приглянувшийся туфель или ботинок. Но в первую очередь обратите внимание на документ, подтверждающий факт покупки. С чьей стороны обмен? И качество обуви, если оказалось, что она вдруг не подошла, или же вернуть изделие не выдерживает гарантийных сроков носки. Без чьих же на соответствующую возмещения рассчитывать? тяжелее, так как придется искать свидетелей своей покупки и доказывать продавцу, что товар куплен именно у него.

А в данном случае продавец не прав. Статья 20 Закона РБ «О защите прав потребителей» предусматривает, что покупатель имеет право по своему выбору потребо-

вать:

- замены некачественного товара товаром надлежащего качества;
- соразмерного уменьшения покупной цены товара;
- незамедлительного безвозмездного устранения недостатков товара;
- возмещения расходов по устранению недостатков товара.

Внесет предельно высокие требования, потребитель вправе выдвигать. Продавец должен обеспечить надлежащего качества и по-требовать возврата уплаченной за товар денежной суммы (п. 4 ст. 27 Закона РБ «О защите прав потребителей»).

Валерий ЧИСТОВ,  
председатель БРОЗП.

## **10. Social protection in sphere of public services.**

### *Civil initiative "Palata"*

*The period: 01.11.2009 – 30.05.2010*

*Coordinator of the project: Jury Belsky*

The "Palata" project resulted in two individual citizens' initiatives and tackled the issue of the lack of initiative among beneficiaries of housing and municipal services, especially with respect to the protection of their rights to a safe and comfortable living environment. One of the main reasons for this problem is a lack of legal knowledge among tenants. Moreover, tenants are not able to solve problems on their own because they lack information on the appeals they have the possibility to make.

During the project five seminars were organized, during which all invited persons participated actively. The most interesting thing was to realize that tenants tend to address problems individually when in fact they could gather to defend their interests collectively, since they share common problems. Throughout the project, we were faced with this "private – common interest" dilemma at every meeting.

The guest lecturers were rather effective not only in presentation but also in their participation in the discussion of problems. Unfortunately, representatives of local mass-media, Executive Committee and Local Councils Deputies did not show up despite being invited, which could be related to the fact that Local Council elections were held at that time. In the framework of the seminar to which chairmen of the house building cooperatives participated, the decision to create a public council was taken.

Some figures of project:

- 83 persons were trained on legal methods of consumers' rights protection, including concrete examples of problems that arose from legal decisions.
- Two persons prepared claims to Communal Enterprises of housing and communal services (as a first step towards the problems with humidity and low temperature in their apartments).
- A claim for a case of flooded apartment was prepared and submitted.
- The positive experience of ZHSK and condominiums in Belarus were presented to four chairmen of housing self-government bodies.

One of the most positive results was the team building that took place in the framework of civil initiative «Palata». As for identified shortcomings, we could mention the low impact of our actions to encourage citizens to take active part in seminars as well as the lack of success in involving local authorities actively in the project. Plans for the near future therefore include further consultations of the local population in order to identify the best way to foster active citizenship on those issues.

## 11. Youth video activity as a way of forming active civic positions.

### *Gomel youth organization "Talaka"*

<http://nashkraj.info/>

*The period: 01.11.2009 – 30.05.2010*

*Coordinator of the project: Larissa Shchiryakova*

Gomel youth organization "Talaka" is dedicated to the preservation of historical and cultural heritage. The organization is registered and active in Gomel region. The project focused on the creation of educational films and video materials with the aim of spreading historical and cultural traditions of Gomel and its localities among its inhabitants. As a matter of fact, strengthening civil society and the creation of local communities can only be successful if traditions are well-known and the history of localities and community shared. It is very important to bring knowledge to the people and to inform them about the history of the city and the settlements, street names, traditions and ceremonies (songs, dances) of the old folks. Moreover, sustainable development implies the presence of conscious and socially active citizens, who are able to defend their rights and actively participate in decision making process. The activities implemented throughout the project enabled young participants to develop such competences and skills.

In the framework of Talaka's project, a series of documentary historical films were shot on the theme "Unknown regional countrymen":

- **"Peter Karpovich: Hero or Antihero?"** (45 min.) The film tells about Peter Karpovich, a revolutionary from Gomel. He was one of the founders of political terror in the Russian empire at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The film is rather topical and poses the question if political terror can be considered appropriate and morally justified. Besides, Karpovich unknown to vast majority of Gomel's inhabitants, despite the fact that the central street of the city is named after him.

#### **Reaction of Gomel residents:**

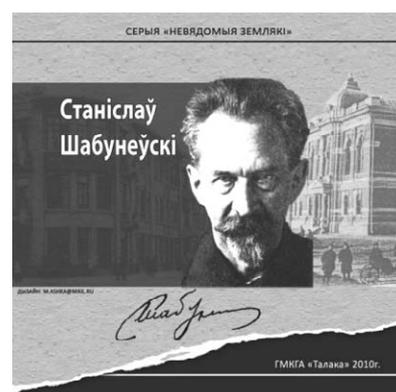
- *"Who,... writer? Yes?"*
- *"I am not interested in it".*
- *"More in detail about Karpovich? I have no idea..."*
- *"He was the revolutionary and even terrorist".*



- **"Paluta Badunova"** (46 min.) is a documentary film about a Gomel resident who was one of the leaders of the Byelorussian party of socialists-revolutionaries. She held position as the Minister of Rada BNR (Council of Belarus Peoples Republic).

- The film **"Stanislau Shabuneuski"** focuses on historical and cultural issues of Gomel's city architecture. The movie tells about the life and creative work of the person who was the general architect of Gomel in the first quarter of the twentieth century. To a great

extent, his work has defined the face of contemporary Gomel. His architectural inheritance has remained in good condition in modern Gomel. The documentary film is devoted to him and his architectural inheritance.



"Talaka" presented the film **"Funeral of Arrow"** from another series "Traditional culture" on 18<sup>th</sup> June. The movie tells about an archaic ceremony which has perpetuated itself only in the Vetka region. Its charm and protected magic has never been interrupted by urban culture. A "Funeral of Arrow" ceremony is unique, it has no equivalent and is still deeply rooted in a number villages of Gomel region. The film consists of two parts: the first one is about a ceremony in Staubuny village, the second one shows ceremonies that take place in Neglubka village, in Vetka region.

10 person, both volunteers, and friends of the organization were involved in the production of this movie.



All video materials can be downloaded and watched at:

**"Peter Karpovich: Hero or Antihero?"** (45 min., Belarusian):

<http://nashkraj.info/content/view/421/1/>

**"Paluta Badunova"** (46 min., Belarusian):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gs3w5ZbfBel>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PBDcxS1XD0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtPeEoNaXz8>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1Zen2eixxk>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mr1YwEJid5I>

**"Stanislau Shabuneuski"** (Belarusian):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kClPeSV5D80>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNDe8v6k2KA>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTUUYs9FNys>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZprMbgal-A>

**"Funeral of Arrow"** (Belarusian):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRGctFsBFnk>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xz0c2gIoRUA>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcX2DgvcJ\\_E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcX2DgvcJ_E)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSm8dRuG1Fw>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITZPj1Gscys>

In the framework of the project, members of the team acquired extensive experience in the shooting of informational movies. These movies were used as educational material in secondary schools and can thus be considered as tools for the dissemination of knowledge about the history of Gomel city, folk traditions and ceremonies. Future plans include the shooting of an additional six movies, two of which are already in an advanced stage.

## Conclusion

*Civil society capacity building* and *local community development* are issues that have been tackled by many European programs in Belarus, but unfortunately until now this hasn't been a success story. This can be explained by a very traditional approach in the dissemination of knowledge and by the shortcomings of the practices, which have been used and are well-developed within European Union member states. Sometimes our Western European colleagues start working in Belarus without considering and knowing enough about certain aspects and peculiarities of Belarusian life and society. The traditional "occidental methods" used with success in Europe can not be applied directly to Belarus. There are too many specificities of the country to allow such strategy to be successful: what is needed is a full support to the development of locally and jointly designed strategies and tools. At first sight, it might appear that in many aspects the state system and social organization in former Soviet Union states have a lot in common with institutions in Europe. However, if they are similar in the formal appearance, they are in fact totally different from one another in practice.

Moreover, during the 1990s many thought it would be possible to replace soviet style institutions with European forms of life and activity without any substantial transformation. From the distance it looks like a game of words when you try to give a new name to old things. Many actors shared the idea that teaching people to work in a slightly different way, acting in their own way, providing them with access to information would be enough for sustainable development. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, some newly independent republics, especially the Baltic ones, got rid of these illusions very quickly. In Belarus they live on. The structure of courts, the police, local administrations, collective farms, schools of all levels and some other institutions remain unchanged.

A lot of energy and creativity of Belarusians goes to the improvement of the functioning of the structures, organizations, and institutions that we got from the Soviet Union. The form of this improvement has not changed since the end of 1980s, and is usually described in simple countable categories: «more glasnost», «more freedom», «more democracy», «more resources», or the other way round — «less bureaucracy and corruption» etc.

Interestingly, many Europeans think the same way while honestly trying to help in solving our problems. However, there cannot be more freedom where it has not been at all. It is impossible to fight corruption if people are not familiar with other ways of solving social problems. We can only pretend to reduce the sums of bribes. Most of these attempts show the obvious and simple principle of human activity: it is always simpler to continue some activity than to change it radically. With our project we attempt to change this attitude. We want to encourage people to take action rather than to wait for external help. We hope this experience will give incentives to local community building and institutional maturation of local actors.

Civil society organizations in Belarus face many difficulties in the dialogue with the government and need to reinforce their capacities in local development actions. Moreover the fact that local authorities do not have relevant autonomy from the central government does not encourage the involvement of grass-roots organizations in local development processes - actually rather the contrary.

Support to Civil Initiatives among local actors will raise awareness about the role of NSA in the definition and implementation of development strategies at the local level. This publication does not limit to the presentation of valuable experiences and best practices: it is also a convenient tool to enable the various stakeholders to develop their networking.

Moreover, the headquarters of the associations involved must be thought of as solid anchor points which will keep on working on the protection and promotion of public interests at the local level and on which future local initiatives will be able to rely.

We hope that this publication will help to promote these initiatives and their continuation in the future and will ensure follow-up and inspiration for others.

*NGO Lev Sapieha Foundation*