



Belarus



SPREAD
SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP
FOR REINFORCEMENT
OF ACTIVE
DEVELOPMENT

2014



ALDA
European Association
for Local Democracy





European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)
Brussels Headquarters
Rue de la Science 14b
B-1000 Brussels
Belgium
Tel: +32 2 880 37 28
E-mail: aldabrussels@aldaintranet.org
www.alda-europe.eu

NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation”
1a V. Kharuzhay St., office 405,
220005, Minsk, Belarus
Tel: +375 17 286 32 44
E-mail: levsapieha@gmail.com
www.sapieha.org



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About the initiators of the project

The European Association for Local Democracy is a non-governmental organization dedicated to the promotion of good governance and citizen participation at the local level. ALDA in particular focuses on activities that facilitate cooperation between local authorities and civil society.

ALDA was established in 1999 at the initiative of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to coordinate and support a network of Local Democracy Agencies which was established in the early 1990's. It remains one of its supporting programmes. It is the umbrella organization of the Local Democracy Agencies which are self-sustainable, locally registered NGO's that act as promoters of good governance and local self-government.

ALDA is a membership based organization gathering more than 160 members (including Local Authorities, Associations of Local Authorities and non-governmental organizations) coming from more than 30 countries. ALDA is funded through membership fees and project funding from the European Commission, the Council of Europe and other public and private donors.

What is unique about ALDA?

Most of ALDA's work is based on the method of multilateral decentralized cooperation. This method involves a multi-stakeholder approach which focuses on strong partnerships between Local Authorities and non-governmental organizations. These partnerships create positive synergy and ensure that common goals are reached in a successful way.

What we do?

In the framework of promoting good governance and citizen participation at the local level ALDA focuses on various themes, such as European integration, decentralization, civic initiatives and volunteering, human rights and sustainable economic development.

ALDA conducts its activities through different forms of action:

- Coordinating and supporting the 13 Local Democracy Agencies in their activities.
- Conducting its own projects in the field of good governance and citizen participation at the local level.
- Supporting other local stakeholders' initiatives - like Local Authorities - by providing expertise gained through ALDA's knowledge and experience in the regions where ALDA and the Local Democracy Agencies are working.

Where we work?

ALDA works in most of Europe and the European neighborhood countries. Activities in the European Union focus in particular on the promotion of Active European Citizenship. Activities in the Western Balkans and European Neighborhood focus on good governance, citizen participation, European integration and decentralization.

Most of the Local Democracy Agencies are located in the Western Balkans, which gives a natural focus on that area. But ALDA is also becoming more and more active in the European neighborhood. In 2006 a Local Democracy Agency was established in Kutaisi in Georgia and in 2011 a Local Democracy Agency was opened in Gyumri in Armenia. ALDA is also actively working on establishing a Local Democracy Agency in the Ukraine in Spring 2015. ALDA is also leading several other projects and developing partnerships in other European neighborhood countries, such as Belarus, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey.

For further information about ALDA please visit our web-site:

<http://www.alda-europe.eu>



NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation”

In 1991 the deputies of the local councils of Belarus, specialists in the field of law, economics, political science and culture, inspired by local democracy and local self-government principals, realized the need to establish a Foundation for Democratic Reforms Support named after Lev Sapieha. It was established on 26th June 1992 and was registered by the Ministry of Justice on 11th August the same year as a public non-political non-profit organisation. NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” has currently over 150 registered members across Belarus and its regional offices in every region of Belarus.

NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” enjoys vast international contacts and since 2001 it has been participating in the work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe as an observer.

The main purpose of NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” activity is to assist the process of gradual democratic reforms in the Republic of Belarus, foremost in the fields of local self-government and democracy as well as in the field of economy, science, culture, human rights and ecology.

Principal goals of the organisation are therefore, the:

support for preparation and reform of local self-government,

- support for establishment of NGOs and associated networks at the regional level,
- protection of human rights and freedoms in local communities,
- development and support for civic initiatives in local communities.

The Informational Educational Centre for Local Self-Government Problems within Lev Sapieha highlighted the European Charter of Local Self-Government to Belarusian experts and stakeholders for the first time in the mid-90’s of the XX century. Much attention is paid to studying the legislation and practical experience of municipalities of Central and Eastern European countries. There is knowledge sharing with municipal, scientific, and public organisations from other countries of the region such as Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Poland, Czech Republic, Germany Sweden, Georgia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Russia. Such knowledge exchanges take place in the form of seminars, round tables and conferences held in the Republic of Belarus, and in the form of foreign expert visits and study visits of Belarusian experts.

Throughout the entire period of its activity experts and coordinators NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” have been actively cooperating with the Parliament and local authorities of the Republic of Belarus and deputies of the Parliament and local Councils have been taking an active part in numerous seminars arranged by the NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation”. The representatives of the NGO’s have an observer status in the Standing Commission for study the experience of the State Building and Local Self-Government of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The Bureau on Non-governmental Organizations within NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” is focusing on the investigation of legal and socio-psychological aspects of establishing of NGO’s in Belarus and their activities, as well as analysing current legal frameworks, and further developing of NGO’s and their networks.

More than 50 NGO's were established in different regions of Belarus with the support of the NGO "Lev Sapieha Foundation" during its operations. Civil initiatives in the field of social welfare, culture, environment, education, youth and sports are actively supported on a local level through the implementation of joint projects and consultations.

In its activities the NGO "Lev Sapieha Foundation" has built partnerships with foreign and international organizations, funds and initiatives aimed at the promotion of local government and civil society development as well as citizen participation at the local level.

The NGO "Lev Sapieha Foundation" is continually developing partnerships with leading organisations such as the European Association Local Democracy (ALDA), Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (FRDL) (Poland), Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania and others.

In cooperation with its partners, NGO "Lev Sapieha Foundation" has been successful in delivering projects supported by the European Commission, UNDP, the Open Society Institute (Soros' Foundation), and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, PHARE-TACIS, MATRA, USAID programs and others.

NGO "Lev Sapieha Foundation" offices operating in all the regions of Belarus enjoy a vast array of experience in the area of local citizen participation and local self-government. They plan and tailor their activities to the specific needs of the localities with the support of local NGO's.

The regional offices offer to all stakeholders educational seminars and support to civil society initiatives. They cooperate with delegates of local councils and NGO leaders, acting as resources centres for citizens. Thanks to these activities over the past 20 year of its operations more than 6500 representatives of public organisations and local government have had the opportunity to raise their professional and educational levels.

Throughout its history the NGO "Lev Sapieha Foundation" has been engaged in publishing aimed at disseminating knowledge and best practices in local self-government, civil participation and local initiatives, NGO development activities, review of current Belarusian and international legislation, showcase of projects and programs of the Belarusian experts for the promotion of local self-government reform in the Republic of Belarus.

The NGO "Lev Sapieha Foundation" has published over 70 books, publications, periodicals, scientific reviews, journals, guides and reference books for experts in the field of local self-government, NGO and civil initiatives leaders, researchers, academia and students including the following major publications:

- the European Charter of Local Self-Government translated into the Belarusian language;
- the first and currently the only fundamental scientific and practical guide in the country "Local Self-Government in Belarus";
- quarterly journal "Bulletin of Self-Government" (27 editions);
- review of the major legal acts in the field of local self-government (a set of publications for 2006-2011);
- a number of publications outlining Lev Sapieha's role and significance;
- reference book for the deputies of local Councils of the Republic of Belarus (2 editions);
- reference book for teachers of secondary and secondary specialized schools on democracy and civil society development challenges (a series of 10 publications);
- scientific and practical guide "Local Self-Government Associations";
- a number of publications about some relevant local challenges (in the area of housing and land management, delivery of housing and utility services, environmental security, access to environmental and other information of public interest, guarantee of social rights and freedoms of citizens);
- reference book "Local Self-Government in Belarus and Foreign Countries (questions and answers)", etc.

For further information about the NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” please visit our web-site:
<http://www.sapieha.org>

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About the Project

SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP FOR REINFORCEMENT OF ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT (SPREAD)

The European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) and the NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” from November 1, 2012 to June 30, 2014 implemented a joint project ‘Sustainable Partnership for Reinforcement of Active Development’.

Project Objectives:

1. Aiding citizens and civil society organizations in their cooperation with local authorities, defence of their legitimate rights and interests, as well as implementation of civil initiatives;
1. Awareness raising and capacity building of citizens to enhance their participation in local decision making process.

The project aimed to achieve the following results:

- Increased capacity of non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations at the regional level to have continuous communication with local authorities.
- Increased cooperation between local authorities and civil society organizations through common projects implemented in targeted regions.
- Greater transparency in the operations of local authorities to enhance confidence from citizens in authorities.
- Increased capacity of citizens in the defence of their rights and participation in public debates and hearings, especially at the local level.

Key Activities carried out through the project

In the context of the project there were 3 Citizen Centers created in three towns of Belarus through the efforts taken by the NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” and ALDA and the support provided by local NGO and activists:

- Beloozersk (Brest region);
- Verkhnedvinsk (Vitebsk region);
- Gomel (the center of Gomel region).

Each Citizen Center was assigned a complex task which comprised the following elements:

- 1) Creation of material and technical infrastructure for the continuous and efficient operations of the citizen center;
- 2) Creation of a library and a database of information and documents on civil society organization and citizen participation in community initiatives;
- 3) Support to the efficient work of local NGO's, civil society organizations and active citizens to participate in local decision making processes and civil society formation;
- 4) Holding of a series of trainings on civil participation in local decision making processes and civil society development;
- 5) Organization and monitoring of citizen participation at the local level, as well as current operations of local authorities and their cooperation and interaction with citizens;
- 6) Preparation and publication of a series of booklets on topics that the citizens believe to be the matters of local concern;
- 7) Selecting small civil initiatives for support;
- 8) Cooperation with the Civil Society in implementing their initiatives;

- 9) Conduct of a series of briefings to highlight the center's activities and operations as well as the progress of mini- projects;
- 10) Organization and holding of international conferences to sum up the outcomes of the activities carried out by the citizen center for the year, deliver the outcomes reached through the mini projects as well as assess trends, challenges and prospects of future activities to support citizen participation at the local level.

The organization and outreach meetings held in the above mentioned regions aimed to showcase the opening of citizen centers and the launch of their activities and operations in the project "Sustainable Partnership for Reinforcement of Active Development".

Each meeting was attended by 25-30 people that represented a wide range of local civil, political, cultural, economic and information societies. In particular they included representatives of local NGO, deputies and experts of local authorities, local entrepreneurs, secondary school teachers, VET teachers, University academia, and local media journalists. The meeting participants got to know about the launch of the project "Sustainable Partnership for Reinforcement of Active Development", its objectives and means.

Library and Database Creation

Each citizen center supported and guided by ALDA and NGO "Lev Sapieha Foundation" (Minsk) carried out the work to establish a library and regularly updated database of information and documents on civil society organization and citizens' participation in civil initiatives.

The need to establish such centralized libraries and databases was due to a limited access of local NGOs and socially active citizens to resources and information needed for effective social activities to promote and deliver local initiatives and citizen participation at the local level.

Libraries of the citizen centers have a collection of legal and regulatory acts in force in the Republic of Belarus and other literature and publications on the following topics:

- local self-government;
- government activities;
- citizens' complaints and other forms of direct participation in local decision-making;
- provision of social services and social protection of citizens;
- environmental protection and environmental safety;
- conservation and protection of cultural heritage and historic buildings;
- land use and management, housing and utilities;
- operations and activities of public associations and political parties;

The database of each Citizen Centers includes contact telephone numbers and details of the services and departments of local governments and authorities which can be addressed by the citizens to submit their complaints and queries. This information is available with regard to authorities at both local and regional levels.

Furthermore, each Citizen Centers has information on foreign experience of citizen participation in decision-making at local level. They also have a collection of literature and publications on civil society development, sustainable development and non-formal education for adults in Belarus and overseas. For the convenience of work with such information resources every citizen center has arranged and equipped (with a computer, printer, copier and scanner) a special room set a schedule of its working hours.

The services of the libraries and databases of each citizen center were monthly used by up to 50 people, and representatives of local NGO's and civil society organizations have an opportunity to use the premises and the equipment to carry out their organization activities.

Organization and Holding of Trainings

Each citizen center supported and guided by the NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” (Minsk) organized and held two trainings on the following topics:

- 1) citizen participation in local decision making and ways of cooperation with local authorities;
- 2) organizational development of non-governmental organizations and efficient management of their project activities.

Each training was attended by 20-25 people that represented a wide range of local civil, political, cultural, economic and information societies. In particular they included representatives of local NGO, deputies and experts of local authorities, local entrepreneurs, secondary school teachers, VET teachers, University academia, and local media journalists. In a number of cases members of the NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” (Minsk) took part in such trainings.

Trainings on civil participation in local decision making and methods of cooperation with local authorities addressed the following questions:

- 1) legislation of the Republic of Belarus on the citizen participation in local decision making;
- 2) legal basics of the operations carried out by local authorities and other local government agencies in the Republic of Belarus;
- 3) procedure for citizens’ filing of their complaints to local authorities to exercise their rights and legitimate interests;
- 4) methods for efficient interaction and collaboration between citizens and local authorities in local decision making and problem solving;
- 5) opportunities and challenges of public control and supervision over local authorities operations in the Republic of Belarus.

Trainings on organizational development of non-governmental organizations and efficient management of their project activities addressed the following topics:

- 1) organization analysis and evaluation criteria;
- 2) organization mission and strategy;
- 3) operations of systems in the organization;
- 4) management style and organization culture;
- 5) resources of the organization;
- 6) impact of external and internal factors;
- 7) institutional development and organization enhancement;
- 8) change management tools;
- 9) project proposal evaluation criteria.

Exploring of a number of issues was complemented by interactive forms of presenting and delivery of new information, as well as practical exercises arranged for the training participants.

Organization and Holding of the Bidding for Mini-Projects

Each citizen center supported and guided by the NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” (Minsk) organized and held a selection for mini-projects for local civil initiatives of local NGO’s.

5 project proposals were received from Beloozersk, 9 project proposals from Verkhnedvinsk and 7 from Gomel.

Out of those the following were selected:

- 1) Beloozersk - 3 projects;
 - “Economical consumption”;
 - “Involvement of elderly people in activities of local communities”;
 - “Youth - for a healthy lifestyle”.

- 2) Verkhnedvinsk - 4 projects;
 - “Development of creative abilities of children, cultural and aesthetic skills”;
 - “Where the heart is warm and melodious”;
 - Creative Workshop “On the Waves of Inspiration”;
 - Volunteer eco -regional travel “On the way from the Vikings to the Greeks”.

- 3) Gomel - 3 projects;
 - “Regional School of Law”;
 - “Local promotion of the idea of local self-government”;
 - “Sustainable partnership for sustainable development”.

These mini projects were successfully implemented between May 2013 and April 2014.

Publication of a Series of Booklets on Local Problems

The citizen centers supported and guided by the NGO “Lev Sapiiha Foundation” (Minsk) prepared and published 5 booklets on matters of local concern

1) For the Citizens about the Land Use and Housing (by **Sergei Shavrov**, Doctor of Science, and assistant professor).

Land use, home construction and home ownership have significant relevance for most citizens of the Republic of Belarus. However, there is a continuous lack of practical guides that in a simple way detail and inform all the citizens concerned about the legal frameworks governing these sectors.

This publication offers a reader basic knowledge on land use, home construction, alienation, inheritance, rights registration, real estate lending. The publication contains recommendations for the implementation of citizens’ rights and freedoms in the field of the land use and housing.

2) On Measures of Sanitary Safety in Areas Affected By Radioactive Contamination (by **Peter Philon**, Master in Advanced Physics and Mathematics, Chairman of the Contaminated Land Problems Committee of the Belarusian Party “The Greens”).

The Chernobyl disaster consequences will continue to trouble and impact the entire life cycle the citizens, threat their lives and health in vast expenses of areas of the Republic of Belarus affected by radioactive contamination. Nevertheless, citizens lack basic knowledge about the rules of their behavior and conduct on the affected areas.

The publication offers detailed recommendations to citizens living, working or visiting the contaminated areas for the most urgent and priority purposes to protect their health and safety in the woods, when working outdoors, in rural settlements, when eating food of animal and plant origin, water and land use, etc.

3) Social Guarantees of the Rights and Freedoms of Citizens (by **Irina Sydorchuk**, Doctor of legal sciences).

Out of various guarantees of the rights and freedoms of citizens at the local level, alongside the political, economic, organizational and legal guarantees there are as well social guarantees of the rights and freedoms of citizens. These are those tools which prevent the social rights and freedoms of citizens from becoming purely idle talk. Besides, the citizens themselves often confuse their constitutional rights and freedoms and guarantees for their implementation.

The publication is an attempt to review the links between the specific social rights and freedoms of citizens

with the guarantees of their implementation. It makes recommendations for the protection of social rights and freedoms on the basis of the application of the guarantees of their implementation.

4) Provision of Housing and Utility Services - Ways of Interaction between Citizens and Local Authorities (by **Edward Latushko**, Chairman of the Board of NGO “Joint Homeownership”),

The assortment, quality and prices of utility services provided to citizens are the matters most citizens have great concerns about and that cause a lot of troubles for the citizens when collaborating with local authorities. At present, there is hardly any information and legal publications that enable citizens to evaluate equitably the existing level of utility services and in an efficient way defend their basic rights and interests in this area. The publication is a practical guide for the protection of the primary rights and freedoms of citizens in housing and utility sector that enable citizen to build evidence and legislation based relationships with the housing and utility companies, thereby diversifying the number of services and improving the quality of water use and sanitation, waste disposal and land use, energy-, heat and gas supply to residential buildings and premises.

5) Exercise by the Citizens of their Right to Favorable Environment (by **Maryna Dubina** from Green Network Association, **Andrew Romantsov**, Green Network Association, **Grigory Fedorov**, NGO “Eco House”, **Sergey Magonov**, NGO “Eco House”). 15 years ago the Republic of Belarus joined the Aarhus Convention of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. Nevertheless, most people are not familiar with the fundamental provisions of the Convention, but they do not even know about the existence of the Convention. That is a blatant error made especially with reference to the construction in Ostrovets of the first Belarusian nuclear power plant. The publication expands upon the content of the Aarhus Convention and details the basic rights of citizens to have access to environmentally relevant information, participate in environmental decision-making and have access to justice in environmental matters, as well as makes recommendations for the practical implementation of key provisions of the Convention. The publications are targeted to a wide range of citizens, social activists, members and employees of local authorities, deputies, teachers and students.

The circulations of the publications were distributed between citizen centers (in accordance with their requests) and the Lev Sapieha Foundation for further distribution during activities and events carried out by the Foundation, as well as the work of citizens in the citizen centers the Lev Sapieha Foundation.

Organization and Holding of Briefings

The heads of regional citizen centers supported and guided by the NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” (Minsk) organized and held two briefings each on the operations and activities of the citizen centers and the progress of civic engagement mini-grant projects. Every briefing was attended by 15 - 25 people including representatives of local NGO, mini-projects managers, members of local governments and experts from state organizations and institutions, entrepreneurs and journalists. A number of briefings were attended by experts of the NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” (Minsk). Questions raised at the briefings and the discussion of the information provided by the heads of the Citizen Centers tackled the role of the work undertaken by the citizen centers, relevance and effectiveness of the projects, as well as ways to encourage interaction between local authorities and citizens and civil society organizations in local problem solving.

Holding of international conferences by the information centers

The NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” representatives took part in the International Conferences held by the citizen centers to sum up the outcomes of the activities carried out by the Centers within the project, as well as the results of the mini- project implemented by local NGOs as part of the project.

Organization and the Conduct of Monitoring Missions

Every citizen center established a group of 3 - 5 people consisting of representatives of local NGO to monitor the activities of local authorities, forms of interaction between local authorities and citizens in local problem solving and the progress of effective safeguarding of the legitimate rights and interests of citizens. The NGO "Lev Sapieha Foundation (Minsk) guided the conduct of such monitorings.

Within a period from April 1 to June 30, 2013 every citizen center organized and carried out **the first monitoring** of citizens' participation in local decision making and their interaction with local authorities.

Within a period from August 1 to September 30, 2013 every citizen center organized and carried out **the second monitoring**.

Within a period from October 1 to December 31, 2013 every citizen center organized and carried out **the third monitoring** of citizens' participation in local decision making and their interaction with local authorities.

The information received in the result of the monitoring missions was studied and explored by the citizen center specialists and was used as the basis for the conclusions and recommendations made regarding encouragement of citizen participation in local decision-making processes.

Results of the Monitoring Missions

What follows are some of the conclusions and results of the monitoring missions to local authorities which were conducted in the three regions.

BELOOZERSK (BEREZA DISTRICT, BREST REGION).

Information and materials received from the Monitoring Mission Beloozersk mostly reveal the existence of the rigid bureaucratic model of interactions between local authorities and citizens. For example, citizens can meet officials solely during their visiting hours. The media publishes interviews and reports made by the officials of their activities and issues solved. There is information (official) on the activities and operations of businesses and non-governmental organizations (to the extent local governments are satisfied with). But practical engagement and participation of citizens is lacking. Those problems citizens are really concerned about are not recognized and brought to the attention of the authorities.

Monitorings in April – June 2013

The monitoring was tracking the information provision to the citizens by Bereza District Council of deputies and the executive committee, Beloozersk City and Rural Councils of deputies and executive committees and their structural departments.

The communication between local authorities and citizens takes place predominantly by means of informing the citizens of the decisions made by local representative and executive authorities and activities undertaken by such authorities, their structural departments and other government organizations.

It should be noted that the information received from local authorities is placed in accessible locations for its review. Although the relevance and usefulness of such information for the citizens are rather disputable.

Examples of making citizens informed of the activities of local authorities and local concerns in Bereza district and Beloozersk:

- 1. Information on the decisions and resolutions of the District Council of Deputies and the Executive Committee**
Notification of changes made to the administrative and territorial mapping of Bereza District

For the purposes of optimization of the number of village councils in Bereza district based on the existing boundaries of the agricultural organizations Bereza District Council of Deputies jointly with Bereza district executive committee makes a proposal to eliminate:

- Beloozersk Rural Councils and change the boundaries of the Peski Rural Councils with the inclusion of Beloozersk Rural Councils, including the following settlements: Olshevo, Lisichitsy, Manevichy, Niva, Nyvky, Chrisy villages;

- Borki Rural Councils and change the boundaries of the Signevichy Rural Councils with the inclusion of the Borki Rural Councils, including the following settlements: Borki agro town, Leskovichy, Koshelevo, Mikhalki, Peshki, Chernyakova villages;

- Narutovichy Rural Councils and change the boundaries of the Seletsk Rural Councils with the inclusion to its territory of the Narutovichy Rural Councils, including the following settlements: Narutowichy agro town, Onitsevichy, Osoverts, Vorozhbity, Mikhnovichy, Plyahovschina villages.

This notification is complemented by the note of the rights of citizens in accordance with Article 17 of the Law of the Republic of Belarus of May 5, 1998 "On the Administrative and Territorial Mapping of the Republic of Belarus" to share their opinions on the above changes in the administrative and territorial mapping within one month after this notification is published:

- on the website of Bereza District Executive Committee official site of Brest region Executive Committee:

<http://bereza.brest-region.by>

in writing to the following address: 225209, Bereza. 27, Krasnoarmeyskaya St., office No. 36, Bereza executive committee.

through e-mail: e-mail: ideo_brz@open.by, land management office of Bereza executive committee.

At the same time there is a note attached that the opinions of citizens submitted in violation of the form and timing will be rejected.

2. Information on the meeting of the Chairman of the District Council with Voters Constructive dialogue

The Beloozersk City executive committee organized a meeting of the chairman of the Bereza District Council of Deputies Mr. Chyzh with the representatives of the citizenry living in Beloozersk that on May 31, 2013 submitted to the Bereza district council of deputies and executive committee as well as to the Beloozersk City council of deputies and the Beloozersk City executive committee a collective request to be provided with a copy of the decisions of the district and city councils of deputies on approval of the relevant district and municipal budgets for 2013 (in accordance with Article 22 of the Law of November 10, 2008 "On Information, Informatization and Information Protection").

3. Information on the international contacts of regional authorities "Learning a bit from You"

On May 2-4 a group of teachers from Gulbene municipality in Latvia visited Bereza district to share experiences and establish working contacts with Belarussian teachers. The Invitation and reception was organized by Bereza District Executive Committee with the support of the Center for development and entrepreneurship promotion of Beloozersk City executive committee.

4. Information on the consideration by the City executive committee of issues of territory improvement and landscaping and public safety To have a good rest of the summer

Organization of summer rest, water safety and improvement of city beaches and public recreation areas were discussed at the meeting of Beloozersk executive committee (May 2013).

5. Information on the capacity building of specialists of local authorities

Bereza reported

workshop for the specialists of the personnel departments of the city executive committees in Brest region was held in the territory of Bereza district.

6. Information on the implementation of in the district of the social welfare development program

Priority is given to the social welfare services

On June 25 at a meeting of the Presidium of the regional council of deputies there was a review “Of the progress of the implementation by Signevichy and Zditov village councils of the comprehensive program of social welfare service development for 2011-2015”. This program was the basis for the development by Bereza executive committee of the action plan for its implementation. It primarily applies to veterans, pensioners and the disabled.

Monitorings results: July – September 2013.

7. Information on the meeting of the youth activists with the Member of the Parliament

Excursion to the Parliament House

The House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus hosted an informational meeting of a team of the working youth from Beryoza district with the Deputy Chairman of the Standing Committee of the House of Representatives on Housing Policy and Construction, Mr. Kavalevich (Ivatsevichy constituency No. 11). This meeting was initiated by Mr. Kavalevich himself and the ideology department of the district executive committee and the district committee of the public association “Belarusian Republican Youth Union”.



8. Information on the reception of citizens by the Member of the Parliament

Respect and attention to the needs of citizens

On July 24, in the administrative building of Bereza Motor Repair Plant citizens were received by the member of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Jurkewich. An elderly resident of Bereza district met the deputy to raise a matter of personal concern.

She lives in a semi-detached house that is not connected to the water supply, sewage and gas networks. Her continuous conflicts with the neighbors who illegally dispose of outbuildings and completely ignore the interests and opinions of their neighbor together with the passive behaviour of building operations company “Berezahilservis” greatly complicate the life of the pensioner living alone. Continuous calls to the police and address to the executive committee have not yielded any results yet.

After examination of the elderly woman’s situation, A. Jurkewich advised her not to start verbal skirmishes with her neighbours and promised to activate the work of the utilities.

A Chairman of one of the city’s condominiums met the deputy to raise an issue of improvement of the access roads to two cooperative residential buildings in Lenin street.

The tenants coped with their part of the work, the utilities department of the district executive committee promised them to do the remaining part of the work themselves even before the regional event “Dozhynki 2011” but things haven’t budged an inch so far. The deputy asked to see the copies of the responses given by the utilities department and promised to assist in resolving the matter.

The visit to the deputy by two chairmen of the condominiums was caused by the prices of Bereza Utilities for hydraulic testing of residential buildings for their preparation for the heating season which in the opinion of the tenants were unreasonably high. At the same time this utility company tries to act as a monopolist in this work by preventing the engagement of private firms in provision of such service. In one instance the complaint has even been brought before the court. Alexander Jurkewich promised to explore this situation in detail and send replies to the citizens that addressed him.



9. Information about the responses given by local authorities to questions posted by citizens Hotline

On Friday, August 16, 2013, from 14:00 to 17:00 the department for trade and services of Brest region Executive Committee is holding a “thematic hotline” for citizens on the provision of trade spaces in the markets of Brest region for selling products harvested in private greenhouses.

‘In case you have information about the rejections or misconduct of officials of the markets when providing trade spaces for selling products harvested in private greenhouses, please, contact from 14:00 to 17:00 by making calls to (0162) 21 78 63 23 93 59. 11.’

10. Information about the visits of the region’s officials to the district Brest region governor visited Bereza district.

On August 16 the governor of Brest region **Mr. Sumar** arrived on a working visit in Bereza district.



Mr. Sumar interviews citizens of Bereza.

11. Information about the responses given by the Parliament deputies to questions posted by citizens

Citizens are interested in negotiating a solution to most pressing problems

Beloozersk executive committee launched a hotline on September 12 for the citizens who wanted to talk to the deputy of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the fifth convocation Leonid Kavalevich. The deputy assistant Mr. Deyneko said that Mr. Kavalevich received eight calls mostly from pensioners, veterans of the World War II and labour.



12. Information about the off-site meeting held by the City Council deputies

Constructive dialogue of deputies

During the regular session (August 2013) of Beloozersk City Council, deputies headed by the Acting Chairman of Executive Committee Mr. Prokopchuk had a bus tour around the city to jointly assess the state of work for the city improvement and landscaping. The goal was not only to showcase those things that are to be done, but also to outline the range of issues that hinder the work.

A group of deputies and other people invited visited educational institutions of the city - School No. 3, gymnasium and secondary school No. 1. The participants of the session brought their special attention to the renovated physics classroom which was almost ready to accept new modern training equipment purchased at the expense of the republican budget according to the resolution of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus. Then they visited a city hospital, where the chief doctor Mr. Vasilevsky told them about the reconstruction, capital and current repairs according to the program of actions for Beloozersk City improvement for 2011-2015, and acquisitions of medical equipment. The neurology department of the hospital will open in the first decade of September.

At the City Council meeting itself the deputies addressed a number of problems of home improvement and landscaping. The deputy chairman of the City executive committee Ms. Myalik in her report stated that meetings of the executive committee and the city council of deputies annually review the issues relating to sanitation and beautification of the city.

From the start of 2013 to date there were 33 incidents of administrative penalties imposed against the responsible persons for unsatisfactory state of the territories assigned to organizations. There are specific complaints against a number of enterprises and organizations of the city with regard to the cleaning of territories assigned to them (the list is attached). There are complains about the sanitary condition of the garage cooperatives. Acting head of the department of hygiene of Bereza district center of hygiene and epidemiology Mr. Stoyko shared his opinion about this. Mr. Vasilevsky expanded upon the second issue relating to the operations of branch No. 1 of Bereza district central hospital "Beloozersk city hospital" outlining the improvement of the quality of medical care and actions for its further enhancement.

In his report, he paid special attention to personnel matters, treatment of patients by medical personnel.

Relevant decisions were taken on all these matters.

The City of Gomel

Information and materials received from Gomel are the most complete and interesting. There is the statistics of various forms of citizen participation at the local level and their attempts to interact with local authorities.

One can trace the dynamics of the process of citizen participation throughout 2013, as well as the history of activities carried out with regard to specific measures, campaigns, events. In many cases they illustrate the position of both citizens and policy makers of local governments in solving or not-solving of issues of citizen concern or that are currently of great relevance.

Monitorings in July – September 2013.

1. Information about the results of handling citizen complaints in Gomel city executive committee within 9 months of 2013.

Within the first 9 months of 2013 Gomel city executive committee received 2,527 complaints, including those posted in writing – 1401, electronically - 463 and verbally - 663. Compared to the corresponding period of 2012, the total number of queries increased by 42 or 1.6%. Meanwhile the number of written queries decreased by 9.2%, but the number of electronic queries increased by 39.8%, verbal ones - by 8.5%.

Queries posted	January-September		
	2013	2012	difference
written	1401	1543	-142
electronic	463	331	132
verbal	663	611	52
TOTAL	2527	2485	42

January-September this year there were 247 e-mails sent directly to the website of Gomel city executive committee; the websites of the superior state authorities and other organizations forwarded to the city executive committee 216 e-mails to be addressed. Thus, within the first 9 months of 2013 there were 463 electronic queries reviewed which made up 18.3% (in 2012.- 13.3%) of the total number of queries received.

Of the total number of the queries posted there were 163 collective complaints (in 2012.-223); 23 repeated complaints (in 2012.-20). Collective queries deal with improving home conditions, increasing the cost of residential building construction and the postponement of its commissioning, capital repairs of residential buildings, improving yard areas, disagreements with tight urban planning, transport and trade supply to new residential areas. Repeated queries deal with land disputes of neighbors or joint owners of homes, housing services.

The share of queries by their type is as follows: applications - 2,454 or 97% (in 2012.-1723; 92%); complaints - 48% or 2% (in 2012 - 123; 6.5%); proposals - 25 or 1% (in 2012 - 28; 1.5%).

The number of queries received from the superior state authorities since the beginning of the year increased by 61 or 9.6% compared to last year.

State Authority	January-September		
	2013	2012	difference
Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus	244	181	63
Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus through Region Executive Committee	29	23	6
State Control Committee of the Republic of Belarus	28	23	5
State Control Committee of Gomel Region	104	99	5
Oblast Executive Committee	248	178	70
Other state authorities	37	125	-88
TOTAL	690	629	61

An increase in the number of queries received from the superior state authorities is caused by an increase in the number of clarification questions about the prospects of living conditions improvement, changes in housing construction loans and privatization, prices and timing of construction.

In January-September 2013 there were 654 queries received from the superior state authorities (2012 - 631). Leaders of the executive committee within the first 9 months of 2013 held 163 personal receptions receiving 662 applicants (in 2012 - 201; 611). The Chairman and the acting chairman of the executive committee within the period held 19 receptions receiving 141 applicants (in 2012 - 20; 170). Review of the issues raised in written, electronic and verbal queries illustrates that compared to 2012 there is an increase in the number of questions dealing with environment protection, health care, social welfare and lease; there is a decrease in the number of queries dealing with transport, trade and consumer services, education and training, law and order.

ISSUES	Total		
	2013	2012	difference
trade and consumer services	99	111	-12
labour	73	69	4
culture, sports	71	53	18
transport	57	70	-13
law and order	54	58	-4
social security	48	43	5
education and training	43	55	-12
environment protection	38	15	23
health care	33	27	6
commercial property for rent	62	50	12

Compared to the same period in 2012 this year saw a decrease in the number of queries dealing with housing by 5.6%. Meanwhile there was an increase in the number of queries dealing with the provision of housing and subsidies and a slight increase –with regard to the housing overhaul and roof repairs. There is a reduction in the number of queries dealing with the development of the design and estimate documentation, correction of construction defects, construction of individual houses and house demolition.

ISSUES	Total		
	2013	2012	difference
Residential sector, including:	1066	1130	-64
maintenance	145	149	-4
construction defects	139	170	-31
individual housing construction	107	119	-12
demolition of residential buildings	88	100	-12
provision of housing	87	59	28
housing cooperatives and loans	70	91	-21
price and terms of construction	54	101	-47
overhaul	36	30	6
development of design and estimate documents	36	50	-14
roof repairs	28	24	4
provision of social housing	16	17	-1
grants	13	5	8
housing privatization	69	13	56

The number of queries with regard to utilities and road infrastructure in total grew by 2.3%, excluding issues of garage-building cooperatives, land rental and reregistration.

ISSUES	Total		
	2013	2012	difference
utilities and road infrastructure, including:	844	825	19
garages	56	47	9
road construction and maintenance	84	84	0
landscaping	91	113	-22
utility payments	41	75	-34
heating	55	58	-3
gasification	9	13	-4
water supply	5	12	-7
transfer of land plots into life use	29	32	-3
land disputes, breach of sanitary regulations and standards (construction standards and regulations)	2	2	0
land rental and reregistration	144	159	-15
land rental and reregistration	106	58	48

Within the first 9 months of 2013 there were 2318 queries and applications under control of the superior organizations (in 2012 - 1582), an increase of 46% compared to 2012. The issues of timely preparation, completeness and quality of the responses, identification of the appeal procedures and others are kept under the regular control. Within the first 9 months of 2013 disciplinary penalties were imposed against 13 officials of the city executive committee for the bureaucracy and red tape (in 2012 - 9).

Within the reporting period 283 queries were resolved in a positive way. There is an additional control over another 333 queries.

2. Handling of public complaints by local authorities.

Local authorities continue to use standard methods of communication with citizens: visiting hours, hot lines, letter exchange on a complaint–reply basis, electronic complaints, days of informing and reporting. Often for specific target groups.

Political Campaigns

Like in the first half of the year local authorities failed to address requests and proposals made by the citizens, activists, parties and public organizations with regard to various political matters.

Conclusions

In the reporting period there was a decrease in civil engagement due to a holiday season and lack of significant political events. Citizen engagement was mainly displayed through landscaping and utility service problem solving. Authorities kept being non-constructive in their attitudes toward those citizens who tried to exercise their Constitutional right to peaceful gatherings. Citizens participated in the discussion of the challenges of landscaping and city improvement at the meetings initiated by authorities. A local referendum, as a form of local democracy was not used in the reporting period as well. The most active non-governmental organizations of those operating in Gomel and Gomel oblast included “Nash Dom” and “Tell the truth”.

Monitorings in October – December 2013.

1. Information about the results of handling citizen and legal entity complaints in Gomel city executive committee in 2013.

In 2013 Gomel city executive committee received 3374 complaints from citizens and legal entities, including those posted in writing – 1869 (55,5% of the total number), electronically - 625 (18,5%) and verbally – 880 (26,1%). Compared to 2012, the total number of queries remained practically the same. Meanwhile the number of written queries decreased by 9.2%, but the number of electronic queries increased by 39.8%, verbal ones - by 8.5%.

Queries posted	January - December		
	2013	2012	difference
written	1869	2085	-216
electronic	880	816	64
verbal	625	474	151
TOTAL	3374	3375	-1

Of the total number of queries posted there were 199 collective complaints (in 2012.-208); 30 repeated complaints (in 2012.-30). Collective queries deal with disagreements with tight urban planning, construction of selling outlets and other facilities in yard spaces and ground floors of residential buildings, residential building overhaul, transport and trade supply to new residential areas. 27 collective queries were resolved in a positive way.

There is an additional control over queries dealing with residential building overhaul and repairs, yard landscaping, correction of construction defects, installation of the water supply system as part of the project "Clean Water", removal of the causes of flooding, road repairs and others. Repeated queries deal with housing and utility services, land disputes, improving home conditions, receipt of state support for home construction. The main reason for repeated queries posted by citizens is their disagreement with the decisions taken in accordance with applicable law.

Out of the total number of queries posted there were 2497 or 74% of the total number submitted directly to the Executive Committee; 877 or 25.9% - through the superior state authorities. Since the beginning of the year the number of complaints submitted through the superior state decreased by 10 or 1.1%.

Review of the issues raised in queries submitted illustrates that compared with 2012 housing and utility services are of most relevance to the residents of the city of Gomel (40.6% of the total number). Reduction in the number of queries with regard to roof maintenance and repairs, prices and construction terms, construction credits, correction of construction defects resulted in an overall decrease in the number of housing and utility service complaints by 3.8%.

Meanwhile there is a notable growth in the number of complaints raised with regard to the improvement of home conditions, construction lending and overhaul. This year there was a significant increase in the number of queries dealing with housing privatization.

ISSUES	2013	2012	difference
Residential sector, including:	1449	1506	-57
construction defects	213	231	-18
maintenance	194	215	-21
individual housing construction	159	149	10
housing cooperatives and loans	120	106	14
demolition of residential buildings	108	138	-30
provision of housing	107	90	17
housing privatization	102	21	81
price and terms of construction	76	115	-39
overhaul	48	41	7
development of design and estimate documents	41	54	-13
roof repairs	35	41	-6
provision of social housing	18	21	-3
grants	17	5	12

The utility services and road infrastructure account for 33.2% of the total number of queries received. Compared to 2012 such queries increased by 5.5% due to the increase of in the number of applications for land reregistration and lease, garage-building cooperatives maintenance and road repairs.

ISSUES	2013	2012	difference
utilities and road infrastructure, including:	1185	1123	62
land disputes, breach of sanitary regulations and standards (construction standards and regulations)	208	207	1
Land rental and reregistration	184	81	103
landscaping	126	144	-18
Road construction and maintenance	110	105	5
garages	67	60	7
utility payments	65	79	-14
sanitary condition, landscape gardening, power supply	57	102	-45
water supply	47	52	-5
heating	36	46	-10
gasification	9	18	-9

Compared to 2012 there is a notable decrease in the number of queries with regard to labor, transport, raising and training and social welfare. Meanwhile there is an increase in queries with regard to health care and environment protection. The number of queries with regard to trade and consumer services increased due to the need to protect the rights of consumers when buying low-quality goods.

This year, it was quite abnormal to get queries with regard to awarding the status of historical and cultural value to wooden buildings, renaming the road network of the city. There was an increase in the queries from entrepreneurs and businessmen with regard to changing the rent.

An increase in the number of queries with regard to communication was caused by the performance in 2013 of the work on modernization of telephone lines and their replacement with fiber optics.

ISSUES	2013	2012	difference
trade and consumer services	139	136	3
labour	94	105	-11
culture and ideology	91	81	10
law and order	73	88	-15
transport	73	81	-8
privatization and non-residential premises rent	68	24	44
education and training	59	67	-8
social welfare	52	65	-13
environmental protection	41	27	14
health care	36	32	4
communication	11	0	11

In 2013 in Gomel City Executive Committee the officials received 880 people (in 2012 - 816) at the personal receptions, including the chairman of the executive committee who accepted 169 people (in 2012 - 177). Examination and exploration of the queries at the stage of preappointments and preparation for the chairman's receptions enabled to solve 55 issues before the reception.

There were 31 entries input into the customer comment book of the city executive committee including 30 complaints and 1 appreciation. Complaints about snow removal, transport operation and personal reception holding were handled and reviewed and the applicants received responses, appreciation letter was taken into account.

In 2013 the department of citizen and legal entity complaint handling of the City executive committee took under its control 3084 queries and assignments of the superior authorities (72.2% of the total number). There is supervision over the quality and timing of handling complaints, applications and proposals in accordance with the legal requirements.

In 2013 there were 15 incidents of administrative penalties imposed against the responsible persons for violation of the complaint handling procedure (in 2012 – 14). Administrative procedures were launched against 2 officials of UKS of Gomel City Executive Committee according to Article 9.13 of the Code of Administrative Misconduct of the Republic of Belarus (in 2012 – 4).

Within the reporting period there was positive resolution of 451 questions raised or 13.3% of the total number of those handled. There were 63 requests rejected. The applicants received clarifications with regard to 2384 queries, another 282 queries are under the additional control.

2. Handling of public complaints by local authorities

In the reporting period, local authorities used standard methods of communication with citizens: visiting hours, hot lines, letter exchange on a complaint – reply basis, electronic complaints, days and informing and reporting.

Political campaigns.

Like in the first half of the year local authorities failed to address requests and proposals made by the citizens, activists, parties and public organizations with regard to various political matters.

Conclusions.

In the reporting period there was an increase in civil engagement due to Christmas and New Year holidays and celebrations. Citizen engagement was mainly backed by a citizens' charitable and philanthropic spirit focused on aiding children's homes, orphanages and other similar institutions.

Authorities kept being inadequately stiff and rude toward those citizens who tried to exercise their Constitutional right to peaceful gatherings.

A local referendum, as a form of local democracy was not used in the reporting period as well.

The most active non-governmental organizations of those operating in Gomel and Gomel region included USP, public campaigns such as "Nash Dom", "Stop Drinking - You Need to Live", "Our Alternative" and "Tell the truth".

The Town of Verkhnedvinsk (Vitebsk region).

Materials from Verkhnedvinsk illustrate that citizens are doing their best to engage in local decision making. In some cases they succeed but in some other cases they fail. What follows is a brief analysis of the reasons why this happens - what hinders and what promotes public involvement in the life of its local community.

Results of the Monitoring in April-June 2013

Some principles of local self-government and citizens participation in local decision-making

Along side the local council of deputies as the most important element of local self-government, the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus proclaims another form of citizen participation in local self-government represented by the bodies of public territorial self-government. This envisions voluntary self-organizations of citizens within appropriate parts of administrative territorial units for the implementation of their own (citizens) initiatives either directly by themselves or by creating territorial organs of citizen self-government.

The most common forms of self-government organizations include house, street and neighborhood committees in urban areas; rural committees in villages; parents' committees in schools; women's councils; voluntary people's guards for the protection of public order; various public boards in culture and healthcare institutions, associations of rural settlements, cities (paragraph 3 Article 2 of the Law), etc.

But the establishment of such self-government bodies is far away from the truly democratic procedure: in every case executive committees themselves decide on the establishment of specific self-government organizations, and in case the population itself initiates the creation of such organizations, executive committees will provide the reasonable grounds to reject and block such organizations. Moreover, the executive committees have the right to approve the personal composition of the public committee and its registration.

What is the practice of exercising in Verkhnedvinsk District Executive Committee of one of the principles of cooperation between local authorities and citizens - the principle of subsidiarity and account for public opinion, access to information to the citizens to exercise their rights and defend their legitimate interests.

Successful and Less Successful Stories from Verkhnedvinsk

Successful stories

THE FIRST STORY Geyzenovo residential area in Verkhnedvin

The Residents' committee of house No. 25 in Pervomayskaya street was formed spontaneously. It was due to the improper performance by the city utilities of their responsibilities for the timely installation of water meters. The residents of the house, who for two years received solemn promises on the utilities, wrote a letter to the deputy and then to the executive authorities but the authorities had various grounds to delay the process. The most active citizens decided to hold a general meeting of the residents of the residential area, they made local authorities informed about this and elected as the chairman of the residents' committee an active participant of the social and political life of the region Valentina Minchuk. The Government was forced to listen to the demands of the citizens. It took two months to resolve the problem which was delayed for about two years.

There is a question what role the deputies play in such situations because the people's representatives in their activities should be guided by the interests of their voters.

But in the context of present electoral system, or more precisely a system of selection of deputies at various levels it is practically impossible to achieve this: if the authorities were elected by the citizens themselves, top officials of the region would treat the citizens of the region in a totally different way.

One of the major conclusions that can be made is that the residents of the regions themselves are very passive in solving a lot of problems that need to be solved.

The experience gained by non-governmental organizations during their active work in the region gives solid reasons to believe that it is a really hard job to achieve a more active participation of the people in local decision making.

THE SECOND STORY. Better infrastructure for Geyzenovo residential area.

Geyzenovo residential area is a part of the city which is mostly populated by the Chernobyl-migrants. It used to be the most problematic area of the city due to the lack of public transport (the residential area is located across the Drissa river), broken streets and the lack of lighting, lack of hot water supply and poor quality water. The residents' attempts to solve their problems by addressing various authorities ended with formal replies from local authorities on the "lack of financial resources". A team of citizens headed by Valentina Minchuk decided to resolve the problems and went to have a meeting with the Vice-Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus bringing an applications signed by hundreds of citizens. As a result the streets were paved, a new water pumping station was put into operation, and there was a renovation of the boiler house which serves Geyzenovo residential area. The voice of the people was heard, but it took time and active work of a small group of not indifferent residents of the neighborhood.

THE THIRD STORY. Apartment repair works in one of the residential areas.

The residential area had one of the houses under repairs. The repairs were carried out by one of the regional organizations. After their completion the residents started hearing the alarm: the glass in the double glazed windows started cracking, one of the apartments had cracks in the slabs. The builders tried to address the problem by installing in the apartment and the entrance the bearing posts trying to shore the ceilings but the real problem was solved. The local policy officer who lived in this apartment tried to raise the issue at the top officials. But during one of the visits he was threatened that in case he would complain there would be a risk of losing his position in anticipation of his retirement. But he and his wife did not give up - and demonstrated that instead of using very light insulation materials the builders filled the attic with huge masses of wet sand. All the information was communicated to the chairman of the city

executive committee and the problem was solved.

Authorities are often eager to solve those problems that do not require taking much effort, but in cases there are real issues, they start to pressure applicants, convince and promise to “fix everything in the near future”.

Less Successful Stories

THE FIRST STORY. An attempt to hold public hearings.

The Belarussian legislation provides for the opportunity given to its residents to discuss decisions taken by authorities when it is not in line with the interests of the residents of a particular territory. Cheremushky residential area began to build up rather actively with the possibility of obtaining preferential loans. But the construction of each housing and building cooperative caused additional costs of utility distribution lines. The local authorities decided to make the construction planning tight and got rid of the losses for the construction of the utility distribution systems. Such a decision led to a disappearance of the playground in Kobzun street. The local authorities failed to inform the residents of the residential area of their decision through the local media. And in this case the Goncharovs and the Vasilenkos became the “troublemaker”, these families met all the inhabitants of the nearby houses and talked to them and then confirmed their disagreement with the decision taken by the authorities through a letter of application to conduct a public hearing on the matter. The authorities tried to ignore the proposal, but they still met the applicants. Not all the wishes of the residents of the residential area were taken into account, but the public discussion of such a design resulted into the changes made to design documentation for the house under construction in favor of the requirements of the residential area’s residents and repairs and equipment of the children’s playground in this residential area as a payoff fee.

THE SECOND STORY. Cheremushky residential area.

Construction of several housing cooperatives in the residential area of Cheremushky enabled citizens to establish a condominium. The idea was supported by the chairman of several housing cooperatives Mr. Shulga, one of the founders of the NGO “Sobstvenoye Domovladienie”. The city hosted several training workshops attended by the representatives of housing and utility services of the town, the department for the town’s affairs of the town executive committee, the inhabitants of the residential area houses. They had several visits to condominiums in Vitebsk, Minsk and other towns and cities.

The residential area has one topic which local authorities seem to be very uncomfortable with – that is chemical waste dump in Sarya village. It is one of the 6th largest in the country. Thanks to the active work of the public sector of the region and cooperation with activists of the “Green Network”, in the framework of one international annuals which was attended by 8 representatives from Verkhnedvinsk district region it was planned to visit this dump together with environmental scientists. During the campaign, members of the expedition distributed in the town and in Sarya village over 2 thousand leaflets about the dangers of pesticides. A “round table” was held in the office of one of the public organizations which was attended by the doctors of the epidemiology center, Inspection for Nature Protection, the executive committee experts with the participation of their colleagues from neighboring Latvia which sounded the alarm: the Dvina river had hazardous substances.

The Government was forced to take some steps to resolve the problem, but local activists were told not to “make a big fuss out of this problem, because the district has no money to solve it”.

Due to the engagement in the process of the “Green Network” that managed to arrange a meeting in the Ministry of Nature and Environment since the “Green Network” has been cooperating and still cooperates with it, this meeting was attended by the district authorities and the environmental organization representatives at which they came to an agreement to isolate the toxic wastes in the dump.

But in the end it finished with an empty talk and the district administration was changed and the problem still remains.

The above examples illustrate that the problems are twofold: lack of effective responses from the authorities to the local issues and the lack of active participation of the citizens themselves to make their living environment more comfortable, convenient and practical to live in.

This is also a challenge of building public awareness about the ways to solve various problems. Governments and local authorities are not interested in building the capacity and awareness of the region's residents for active citizenship and do not take the initiative and do not always support the residents in their desire to resolve the problem. Monitoring suggests that the District Council deputies are not committed in addressing the problems of the residents of their districts and do not take an active part in the resolution of the issues.

10 years ago a number of deputies and public activists made proposals to discuss the most serious and problematic issues at the meetings of the discussion club, an idea that was supported by deputies and governments. This initiative was a chance to discuss with the public, NGOs, activists, political parties, members of the Council committees, members of the internal affairs authorities and other institutes the most serious and hot problems and prepare and develop decisions of the Council that were really needed. Thus, in particular, they explored the operations and activities carried out by the Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Center and the meeting took a decision to strengthen the activities of this center by providing finances from the local budget. Similarly, the meeting explored the problem of the home-made alcohol production and alcohol selling outlets and took the decision that resulted in a more successful tackle of these problems. But at present all these tryings remained in the past.

And the present deputies of the Verkhnevinsk District Council of Deputies "invented" a new form of a reporting to the voters – reporting from their offices. It is an announcement posted by the regional council of deputies that listed the deputies of the District Council and specified the venues the voters can arrive in to hear a report on the work in the district. The media has no materials about the work with voters carried out by the deputies of the District Council. Therefore it is not a surprise that citizens do not address them to get help and assistance, their letters are therefore directly addressed to the chairman of the executive committee.

Public organizations such as residents' committees, rural committees, village elders, senior tenants are all formality. There is a practice of electing as village elders the people with a good general and military background. These people are far over 70. This post is an honorary position to appreciate past achievements since their old age, level of education, knowledge of the law in this field and other factors make these people not capable to organize the work of public self-governing body.

There is much wider information provided with regard to implementation of the "Law on Citizens' Complaints Handling". The regional newspaper every month published the schedules of hotlines with senior government and self-government officials specifying the time, date and the phone number to call the hotline. Moreover such announcements are regularly posted in the regional newspaper sharply at the edge of the hotlines with the authorized officials of local governments, healthcare and educational institutions, utility and tax services, police forces and prosecutor's office, customs, communications and telecommunications, power supervision agencies, transportation. There are regular receptions of the citizens by the officials of the regional services and departments of which the regional newspaper informs the citizens on a regular basis. Once a month the hotline is held by the chairman of the executive committee Mr. Markovich assisted by the representatives of all the sectors of the national economy and the materials about the questions raised and in particular their solutions are published in the local newspaper whose representative also takes part in the event.

However, the information on whether and how the problems have been solved is not communicated neither to the media nor the citizens. The official website of the executive committee is of little use yet, although it is possible to send e-mail about any problem. The hotline daily receives about 9 or more calls from the district residents. If a resident writes a letter to the newspaper, the local newspaper informs him of what measures have been taken to solve the problem and publishes the material.

There is a practice to post in the local newspaper the interviews given by managers of various services and departments in the district.

The "Reception of Citizens" section regularly provides information on law enforcement issues informing residents of the time, date and venue of citizen receptions by the competent officers of the regional internal affairs offices.

On a regular basis, once a month, there are publications in the "In the District Executive Committee" section covering the progress of the meetings of the executive committee and the issues discussed.

The problem of utilities is the most widely voiced problems citizens address when meeting local authorities: the state of housing and roads, building repairs, lack of hot and cold water, conditions of the basements, waste removal and disposal; while in winter they are the problems of heating, leaks in water supply systems, low level of expertise of the specialists, personnel drain due to low salaries and wages.

There are a lot of complaints about the operations of healthcare institutions of the district: personnel, queues in hospitals, poor quality of patients' care and treatment in hospitals, rudeness of doctors, poor equipment infrastructure in hospitals and others. These reasons force a significant number of residents of the district to seek treatment in health care institutions in other regions.

In May 2013, the ideology department of the regional executive committee held a sociological survey of urban and rural residents on the topic "Social Well-Being of the Population". What most people care about? The results of this survey were published in the regional newspaper of June 4, 2013 in the article called "Solving Hot Issues Together" that covers the most sensitive topics including spread of alcoholism, road conditions, the situation in the sphere of housing and utilities and drinking water.

The monitoring explored the question of pickets in the region and how the authorities responded to such a phenomenon. At the time when first attempts were made to hold pickets, the executive committee took a decision to determine specific venues for holding rallies. The designated venues include the park and the stadium, located outside of the town. Attempts to challenge this decision were unsuccessful. Low social and political engagement of citizens, as well as the small number of existing civil society organizations and political parties is an issue. Only two registered political parties operate in the region.

The primary structures of the once active organizations such as "the Belarusian Women's League", "Belarusian organization of Working Women", NGO "Association of Belarusian Language", "Children's Diabetes" Foundation, NGO "InitsyYa + Tyva", "Belarusian Helsinki Committee", etc. have lost their legal addresses after a legislation change. Their attempts to obtain permission from the local authorities for the placement of legal addresses turned out to be unsuccessful. The reason for introducing new, restrictive legislation for Civil Society Organizations might be the active engagement of civil society in the issues of local importance since the mid-90s.



