



ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENCIES

with support



REPORT ON THE FIRST TRAINING SESSION

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

Programme supported by the European Commission



**Local Self-government in Belarus as
prerequisite for civil society
development: present conditions and
perspectives**

Coordinated by



**Non-Governmental
Organization
Lev Sapieha Foundation**

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Introduction

The Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), together with Lev Sapiiha Foundation, NGO Belarusian Society of Consumers Protection (BOZP) and NGO Belarusian Organisation for Working Women (BOZTH) and the Municipality of Monfalcone, Italy is leading a project called ReAct (Reinforcing Actions of capacity building for civil society) in Belarus since the beginning of the year 2009. The overall objective of this project is to strengthen the role of None State Actors and Local Authorities in the field of poverty reduction in the context of sustainable development, according, mainly, to the Millennium Development Goals.

Noting the difficult situation civil society is facing within the present governmental ruling, and powerlessness of local authorities, it is important to support and provide some capacity building to the local civil society in Belarus, which is very demanding of such projects.

One of the main activities of this project, are the two training sessions, on local self-government and on civil society. The first one took place in Minsk, on 24th October 2009, titled “*Local Self-government in Belarus as prerequisite for civil society development: present conditions and perspectives*”, and this report shall present the different parts of the day, and summarise the various and strong debates that occurred during the presentations.



I. Presentations

1. Sustainable development: Local Agenda 21

Local Agendas, follow the Agenda 21 of the Millenium Development Goals in sustainable development, and there are many implemented in local communities in Belarus. The audience was very interested in this presentation, asking wether those local agendas were available publically, if, as an NGO, they could participate in these agendas, which shows the will of civil society to participate in the local governance of their community.

2. Project of Law on Local self-government in the Republic of Belarus

The global idea was that this reform, asked by the government, does not modernise the local governments, but on the contrary, gives them even less power. Further more, it takes the country back from the European standards, at the same time that a Belarusian representative of the parliament came to express the country's wish to integrate the Council of Europe, in front of the Congress of Regional and Local Authorities, in Strasbourg. The main problem, is that local governments do not have any budget, and therefore cannot take any action of support for NGOs. Moreover, there has been no public concertation for this law project, and in the text, access to information for the citizen is restricted.

The public was very interested in this subject, asking if there had already been an official reply to Lev Sapieha Foundation's comments on the reform; there has been some informal replies, either very negative or positive. Perhaps, to influence this reform, before it passes, there could be an open forum organised, with the government, to discuss this law. It will indeed be presented, with Lev Sapieha Foundation's comments, in the Eastern Partnership civil society forum , and in the German-Belarusian forum.

3. Local Self-Government in Bydgoszcz

In the programme, was foreseen a presentation on Monfalcone's local self-government, partner city of the project. Unfortunately, the expert cancelled his coming last minute, because of family reasons. A representative of ALDA's Governing Board, Imislawa Gorska, was

participating to the training, and as the Director of Foreign Affairs of the Municipality of Bydgoszcz, Poland, accepted to replace him spontaneously.



The public was very interested to see the model of a decentralised system in a Polish city, with a lot of citizen's participation in the decision making process and democratic institutions, in a country that was part of the Soviet Union. Some figures were asked to I. Gorska, in order to compare with the situation in Belarus. People were very satisfied to get this knowledge from their neighbor country.

II. Round-tables: «Participation of civil society actors in decision making process: forms and methods – abilities and obstacles»

1. First Round-table: Experience of interaction between NGO and local authorities: forms and methods

He presented the legal framework in which Local Authorities could work with NGOs and its disadvantages. The main problem, is that the government and the NGOs think differently, but there is no antagonism that should prevent them to cooperate. Plus, it was said, that the government is more willing to let NGOs register, which drew some septicism in the public. His NGO considers itself to be a contact point between NGOs and local government, and already made some propositions to improve the cooperation.

The reactions in the public are quite negative towards this reasoning, because they think that working with local governments is a waste of time, as they don't have any budget. They mostly prefer to work with state representative, because at least they have power to make results.

The general wish, is of course to be able to work with local authorities, in the future.



2. Second round-table: The forms of participation of citizens in decision-making process on local level

He presented the 12 possible forms of citizen's participation in the decision making process. The global conclusion, is that most of these forms are impossible to implement concretely, because too expensive or too complicated. The only form that is realistic, is the citizen's complain to the authorities. What should be improved about this, is to make more collective complains, which would be more efficient, but the initiative of gathering is not enough present in the country.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, we asked the participants to express their feelings about this seminar. Each of them, found it very interesting and enriching, as well as for the polish experience, for the legal information about local government in Belarus, as for the debates that occurred all day long. The only participation to this training, and the will of each of them, shows how important it is to set democracy in the country. There is still some way to go, and it cannot be done without the cooperation of local government representatives, and the state government. Such initiatives should be multiplied in the whole country, to raise people's awareness and make things change more effectively.