

May 2010 Policy paper:

**Proposals on priorities of the EU-Belarus cooperation within the framework
of the National Indicative Program and the role of civil society in its
development**

This document is about the priorities of the National Indicative Program for 2012-2013 for Belarus, as well as the approaches to the formation of such programs in the future. Admitting the important role of strategies of cooperation and financial help for our country, on the part of civil society, we are compelled to speak about their drawbacks and gaps, too. The introduction of new principles and approaches for the formation, implementation, and estimation of cooperation programs, from our point of view, will help to make this help more effective and productive.

General description of the situation and actual problems

Orientation to the European development of Belarus is one of the most important and steady characteristics of civil society in Belarus. Structures of civil society were and still are those who are most interested in Europeanization of Belarus and support development of Belarusian-European relations of cooperation and partnership. Prospects of development of civil society are directly connected to the general strategy of Europe concerning Belarus, and also to the quality and contents of programs of interaction and support.

This interest is the basis for our steadfast attention and active participation in the organization of interaction in all accessible forms and formats.

A qualitatively new stage of development of the Belarusian-European relations started in 2008 and in the greatest measure embodied in the initiative of the Eastern Partnership¹, considerably strengthens the potential of rapprochement of Belarus with the European space and implementation in our country of democratic norms and values.

Within the framework of a new stage of relations, we consider essentially important (and we support) the following strategic orientations:

¹ We think that for today the EaP is the strongest and potentially rich initiative which is able in the long term to render an effective influence on Belarus' rapprochement to the European norms and standards.

- Keeping as the basic priorities of cooperation strategy of the EU and Belarus strengthening democracy, protection of human rights, and development of civil society².

- Change of the general approach in the development of relations with Belarus from the policy of sanctions and conditions on the instrumental approach when cooperation is considered as a tool of long-term changes.

- Recognizing civil society as an important target group and partner for cooperation in the democratic development³.

Civil society, included in the dialog of the EU and Belarus as an active participant and partner, is the guarantor of maintenance and a conductor of democratic values within the framework of instrumental and pragmatic format of relations.

Marking and supporting these positive changes during the formation of strategies and programs of the EU concerning Belarus, it is necessary to specify two most actual problems which constrain effective and thought-over interaction:

1. Insufficient inclusion of the Belarusian side in the system of planning programs and strategies oriented on Belarus from the EU, as a whole, and from separate European countries, in particular. Recognition of low efficiency of standard programs of democratization aimed at Belarus and earlier realized by the EU within the framework of the program of expansion, testifies not only about problems in political sphere, but also about lack of necessary scientific, conceptual, and methodological equipment for formulating such specific strategies and programs. Belarus represents a phenomenon of the post-Soviet states which have not passed a third wave of European democratization. This phenomenon must be studied and pondered over. Results of such intellectual work should be located in the basement of development of programs and strategies. Today, functions of allocating directions and subjects of activity, methods and criteria of estimation of success, are in hand of the European structures or donor organizations which basically use the already generated standard installations. The system of regular consultations which is gradually being introduced in separate programs, is not distributed widely yet. Meanwhile, conceptual and methodical experience inside Belarus remains unused at a level of preparation of programs. This potential is used not systematically, but casually - through occasional consultations and experts' estimations.

2. Weakness (weak representation) of Belarusian civil society, as an equal in rights partner, in the European-Belarusian dialogue and cooperation. Civil society in new conditions still remains the consecutive supporter of the European vector of development and the basic force of democratic changes in Belarus. However, today the majority of the organizations and structures of civil society are hostages of their long-term unstable position. Planning their activity, they are appreciably guided by the tasks and directions which are most actively financed by the international funds and organizations. For a high-grade participation as partners in the dialogue with their purposes and interests, civil society of Belarus has neither sufficient resource security for independent actions (material base, stability of existence and

² National indicative program for 2012-2013 for Belarus. Concept.

³ Establishment of the Civil Society Forum within the scope of the EaP initiative; National indicative program for 2012-2013 for Belarus. Concept.

long-term action programs, independence of concrete actions from financing), nor adequate mechanism of inclusion in partners' dialog. Arising examples of creation of such mechanism (for example, within the framework of the Civil Society Forum) are an essential step in the solution of this problem, but they can be considered only as potential yet.

Principles and bases of formatting development programs

We are deeply convinced that efficiency of the future development cooperation strategy with Belarus can be much higher if it is reoriented on other principles and bases. The prototype for formation of such principles can be the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, but with an obligatory inclusion of civil society as a third party, alongside with national governments and international donors.⁴ EU experts have come to the same conclusion when analyzing quality of development cooperation programs: "Civil society will also be participating in the international discussions on making aid more efficient. It is generally considered that civil society was the "missing element" in the Paris declaration on aid effectiveness".⁵

International assistance programs for Belarus based on ideas of Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness should provide implementation of the following principles:

1. The principle of partnership assumes that all decisions concerning Belarus cannot be accepted without participation of the Belarusian side. Inclusion of national experts in definition of purposes, reference points, and indicators of progress for development programs, as well as in the system of their monitoring and estimation is necessary. While development of programs concerning civil society of Belarus, the voice of this civil society should be taken into account by programs' developers.

2. The principle of coordination. Activity of funds and assistance programs concerning Belarus should be coordinated. Coordination of donors' strategies should be done concerning national strategies and programs of development. Existing lack of coordination and inconsideration of actions of separate subjects leads to the situation when there are no unique logic of actions and no certain strategic orientation of changes. It leads to a change of the situation in Belarus in the direction which is opposite to the declared one.

3. The principle of publicity. At the level of development of assistance programs there is a need of public discussions about forms, methods and contents of any activity concerning Belarus. It will not only help to achieve a better quality of accepted decisions, but will also increase openness and trust and will allow to adjust a system of the proved control over accepted decisions.

4. The principle of efficiency evaluation. It is necessary to carry out monitoring and evaluation of development programs on the basis of the precise and transparent indicators which allow evaluate adequately the productivity and efficiency of development programs. Results of this evaluation should be open and accessible to civil society of Belarus.

⁴ Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. – Paris, 28 February – 2 March 2005

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/development/how/relations/relnsas_en.cfm

Current challenges

In the short-term period, the efficiency of the strategy of cooperation can be raised due to the following actions:

1. To provide participation of civil society in interstate (bilateral) programs at a level of monitoring and evaluation. Practice of consultations and monitoring evaluations which is now implemented in such programs as NSA-LA and EIDHR, should be distributed to other programs of the EU and separate countries, as well as lobbied concerning UN programs.

2. To change the approach to financing structures of civil society: transition from palliative programs to investment ones. Investments must be directed both on people and real estate, creation of institutions, which all together should result in a formation of a higher level of stability of organizations and results of their activity.

3. To support the development and increase of the potential of Belarusian scientific centers, think-tanks, and their activity aimed at studying processes of European transformation of Belarusian society. It is necessary to take the most of intellectual potential available in Belarus in order to ponder over the modern processes and to develop this sphere of Belarusian society. It is necessary to raise the status of independent experts inside Belarus, to promote development of the dialog of experts and researchers, to support cooperation between Belarusian and European experts in the process of development of European programs and projects.

4. To develop the system of complex and regular researches which are able to adequately evaluate progress of Belarus within the European space and efficiency of the current programs. There is a need in (1) formation of a system of criteria and indicators to evaluate the promotion of Belarus, in view of specificity of the course of European transformation in our country; (2) distribution to Belarus of standards and norms of carrying out comparative researches implemented within the framework of the EU, with a subsequent opportunity of distribution on Belarusian-European cooperation of «soft» methods of coordination and management.

These actions are necessary to be considered as an addition to the suggested priorities of the National Indicative Program. This addition is directed on accentuation of attention and efforts to methods and tools of implementation of the designated thematic priorities.

Remarks and offers on the priorities, suggested for a discussion, of the National Indicative Program for 2012-2013

Concerning the suggested priorities, it is necessary to make a number of remarks:

1. Recognizing adequacy of the allocated thematic priorities - good governance, contacts between people, market economy, and local regional development - developers of the program should take into account that the meaning and contents of these categories and concepts are not always equally understood by participants of dialogue. Culture developed in Belarus, including culture of governance, brings its own sense into these concepts. Especially, it concerns the concepts of good governance, local communities, and local regional

development. The difference in the contents of concepts is not fixed at a level of formal indicators and parameters. As a result, actions and projects within the framework of the program do not achieve the declared purposes, but fix the existing adverse state of affairs. Key concepts and categories should be more developed in order to provide their clear and sharp interpretation. Criteria and parameters necessary for objective evaluation of the progress in implementation of the described priorities, according to the declared concept, should be separately determined or specified. The given criteria and indicators are necessary to be made visible and clear for recipients of EU programs.

2. In the suggested concept, among priorities there is “modernization of economy, including regional development”; in the context of Belarus, it is understood and interpreted more likely as a social and economic development with an accent on economic component. We strongly recommend finding in the given priority a place for the implementation of ideas of sustainable development which takes into account not only economic component, but also ecological, demographic, and social dimensions of the concept of the quality of life.

Special attention should be given to development of communicative arenas for the dialogue between civil society organizations and local authorities as obligatory component that could provide wider participation of citizens in discussing the issues directly related to their life and interests.

3. Means and methods which will be used for their implementation are rather briefly planned in the suggested priorities. The specified means - development of standards of good governance, intensification of students’ and cultural exchanges, the use of experience of EU in the policy of regional development, etc. - are standard and, obviously, do not reflect the specificity of Belarus and Belarusian society. For example, in Belarus, local communities, local self-management, etc. do not need to be developed, but to be created anew. Experience and methods used in the EU, cannot be applied here. Tools of the program and methods of work should be coordinated with the actual problems and actions described above, and discussed with Belarusian experts in each sphere.

4. Success of the implementation of the NIP priorities in Belarus depends not only on accuracy of a formulation of priorities, but also on the relevance of methods and mechanisms of their implementation. From our point of view, it is possible to develop and enter into practice relevant methods and mechanisms of the implementation of programs on the basis of the described above Principles of formation of programs which, in particular, assume the use of regular expert meetings - consultations of representatives of EU and Belarus as one of the key mechanisms.

5. Interaction between experts from Belarus and EU is necessary be conducted at two levels:

- Level of experts - professionals in a corresponding field of activity.
- Level of actors directly touched by the planned changes (stakeholders, beneficiaries of programs, etc.).

Due to splitting up Belarusian professional elite on pro-state and independent ones, there is a problem of exclusion of some expert communities and groups of interests (as well as that of their positions and opinions) from the sphere of consultations that results in the incomplete analysis of the situation and non-representativeness of some positions and forces in the sphere of planning and implementation of the programs. In this connection, we want

representatives of European programs to pay attention to the necessity of inclusion in the regime of consultations of representatives of all key groups of interests and experts-professionals representing them.

In our opinion, the account of the offers and recommendations stated above, will make the priorities of the National indicative program more exact and clear, and the program itself - more effective and productive, that will allow implementing in the best way the interests of stakeholders of the program in Belarus and the European Union.

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