

EXAMINATION OF RESULTS OF RESEARCH OF CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX IN BELARUS



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On November, 14th, 2010, in Minsk, there will be the national conference following the results of the research of the Civil Society Index (CSI) in Belarus, which “is carried out within the scope of the OSCE project “Development of the potential for interaction between State and Non-governmental Organizations” and according to the CIVICUS methodology “Civil Society Index”. The tasks of the conference include a discussion of the results of the research of the Civil Society Index in Belarus and – simultaneously – the implementation of offers on interaction of civil society with the state, which model has been developed on the bases of the results of the implementation of this research project (http://civilsociety.blog.tut.by/?_page_id=55).

This document is an independent expert appraisal of the research carried out within the scope of the CIVICUS project “Civil Society Index in Belarus”. The task of this examination is to answer the following questions:

- *Does this research correspond to the CIVICUS methodology?*
- *Do the conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the research of the Civil Society Index reflect the real condition of civil society in Belarus?*

The examination is based on the analysis and comparison of the following documents:

1. “An updated program description of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index: Phase 2008 to 2010”, can be seen here:
[http://www.civicus.org/media/Assessing%20and Strengthening Civil Society%20Worldwide2008-10.pdf](http://www.civicus.org/media/Assessing%20and%20Strengthening%20Civil%20Society%20Worldwide2008-10.pdf)
2. “Project Implementation Stages: A Short Overview”: <http://www.civicus.org/csi/csi-phase-two08/csi-implementation-phase2>
3. “Civil Society Index in Belarus (a preliminary report on the implemented research)”:
<http://civilsociety.blog.tut.by/?p=62#more-62>
4. Informational letter which is an annex to the invitation to the conference, which contains “brief information on the CIVICUS methodology “Civil Society Index» and the results of the research in Belarus”.

The first two documents describe the CIVICUS methodology of studying the CSI at the stage of 2008-2010. The last two documents represent the only available now information on the implementation and results of the research of the CSI in Belarus.

The preliminary report on the implemented research, called the “Civil Society Index in Belarus”, consists of three parts. The first, biggest part is devoted to a statement of substantive provisions of the CIVICUS methodology concerning the Civil Society Index, the second – to a description of the results of the sociological research of the CSI in Belarus, the third one contains conclusions and suggestions.

Conformity of research implementation procedure of CIVICUS methodology

The implementation of the research of the Civil Society Index according to the CIVICUS methodology includes **not only an empirical research (3 kinds of sociological polls and a qualitative research), but also a number of accurately stated steps of preparation of these researches and a discussion of their results.** During the construction of the Civil Society Index:

- “Knowledge which is *spread* among the interested parties of civil society, are *generated*
- The *potential* of civil society increases, *civil activity* is stimulated¹.”

Therefore, the stages of preliminary preparation and subsequent discussion are extremely important and represent **a source and basis of knowledge about the condition of civil society. They are directed on consolidation of civil society on the basis of a discussion of weak and strong sides of civil society of the country, strategies and prospects of development.** In this connection, step-by-step conformity of the methodology is important.

A step-by-step implementation of a research according to the CIVICUS version and the scheme implemented in the CSI research in Belarus, differ. The most essential changes concern the implementation of researches and the final stages of the implementation of the project, which are aimed at discussing the results of researches and a formulation of conclusions and recommendations.

First, the **implementation of qualitative research**, which, within the scope of the CIVICUS methodology, are the necessary element allowing to take into account the specificity of the conditions and process of formation and development of civil society in different countries, **is excluded** (steps 7,8 in the CIVICUS scheme and step 8 in the Belarusian research).

Second, **steps on a discussion of results and development of strategies of development and recommendations to strengthen civil society, are replaced.** In the CIVICUS methodology, this process includes the implementation of regional focus groups, a discussion at the Advisory council of the project and the implementation of a national conference. In the scheme implemented in Belarus, there is a discussion in “thematic groups / platforms” and a national conference / creation of a national platform”. The role of the Advisory council after the implementation of the empirical research is not designated.

¹ Civil Society Index in Belarus (a preliminary report on the implemented research):
<http://civilsociety.blog.tut.by/?p=62#more-62>

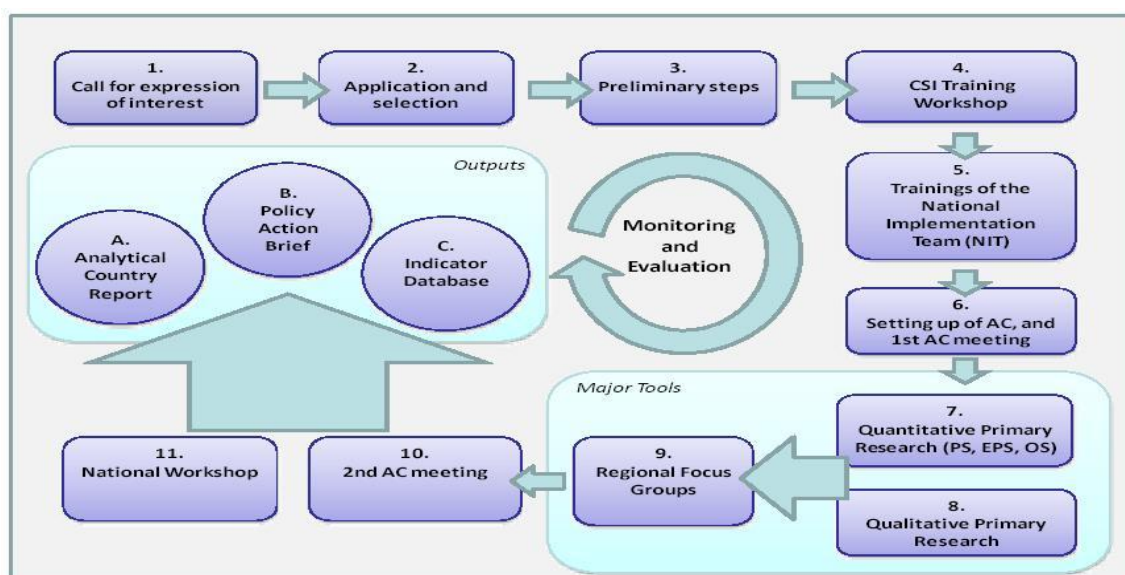
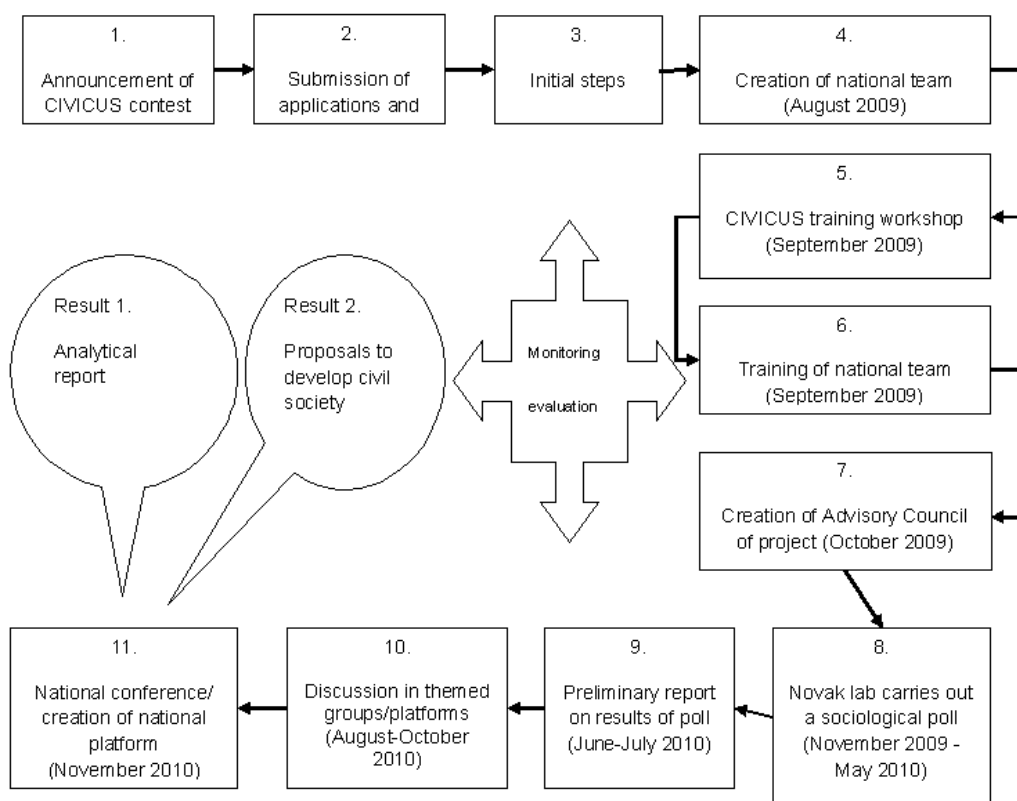


Figure 3: CSI Implementation flow chart

Pic. 1

CIVICUS methodology and concept



Pic. 2

One of advantages of the CIVICUS methodology is its flexibility and possibility of taking into account the national specificity. Even taking into consideration this flexibility, such changes require arguments and substantiation. **None of documents published by the executors of the project contains any substantiation of this replacement or arguments of a choice of these forms.**

The available documents make it impossible to understand **at what stage now the project implementation is**: on the one hand, the presentation of the results at the National conference on November 14th, allows to assume that it is the *final stage of the implementation* (step 11); at the same time, the informational letter which was sent as an annex to the invitation to the conference, says that, “Now the work is at Stage 10 – “Discussion in thematic groups/platforms”.

Anyhow, there is still a question of in what format and structure the results of the research of the CSI in Belarus were discussed and the conclusions and recommendations presented in the preliminary report, were formulated.

Quality of implementation of empirical research

1. The CIVICUS methodology does not contain a standard technique of construction of a sample of sociological researches, i.e. principles and procedures of selection of civil society organizations and external experts, which use would provide adequacy and presentability of results of polls. If in case of polls of the population, procedures of construction of a sample of a representative sociological research are standard and do not demand a separate specification, then in case of the implementation of expert polls and polls of NGO representatives, all is different. It is connected with the specificity of conditions in different countries: on the one hand, social and political conditions of the existence of civil society, on the other hand – a condition and characteristics of NGOs. Especially essential is this question for Belarus in connection with the specificity of the legislative regulation of the NGO sphere. The existence of a considerable quantity of non-registered public organizations and the absence of full and systematized information on public organizations working in Belarus and their characteristics, make the procedure of construction of a representative sample a difficult methodical task. **The presented preliminary report on the results of the research of the CSI in Belarus does not contain any information on how public organizations and external experts were selected for participation in the poll.** Except for the quantity of respondents and their distribution on the fields of activity, there is no information on criteria and selection procedures in the report, which **does not allow to make conclusions about representativeness and validity of the presented results.**

2. The CIVICUS methodology assumes a combination of quantitative methods of research (sociological polls of external experts, NGO representatives, and the country population with the help of standard questionnaires) and qualitative methods of research (case studies, research of secondary sources, charting of civil society).

In the presented report on the research implemented in Belarus, there is only information about sociological polls. There are no **data about qualitative research.**

3. The technique of standardized polls which is the basis for a description of a condition of civil society and construction of the "Diamond" of civil society (a graphic display of different characteristics), includes 55 indicators for the analysis of civil society (which are grouped in 24 sub-groups, united in their turn in four basic measurements) and 12 indicators (grouped in three sub-groups) for measurement of the external context. In the preliminary report on the research of the CSI in Belarus, the part of the CIVICUS methodology which describes these measurements and characteristics, is presented in detail. However, **the results of sociological researches presented in the report, are obviously incomplete and concern only a limited number of these measurements.**

There is no graphic representation of the results – “Diamond” of civil society.

Even the results described in the report, **are not grouped properly.** Therefore, without profound knowledge of the CIVICUS methodology and technique, it is impossible to establish a connection between «measurements of a condition of civil society and the external context» and answers, figures, and percent, which are presented in the report. The data presentation form complicates work with them.

The results of the polls presented in the report, obviously, **have not been properly processed.** For example, the report presents the results of answers to the question on NGOs' participation in associations, umbrella associations, or networks, according to which 53,3% of organizations are participants of such associations and there is a list of associations, organizations, and networks

which were named by the respondents during the poll. In this list, except for various associations and networks of civil society organizations, there are such institutions as the Ministry of Health, Religions and Nationalities Committee, Territorially-social center, etc. It testifies about **the absence of the control of data gathering and processing, or it demands a fuller and adequate description and interpretation**, it also makes you doubt both quality of the implementation of the poll and quality of processing and analyzing of the data.

Thus, the results of the empirical research are not processed and not presented properly so that they could be used in the further implementation of the CIVICUS research. It is necessary to carry out an additional processing and grouping of the results of the research so that it would be possible to discuss the data of the implemented researches at any levels - from expert consultations to a wide discussion in civil society.

Validity of conclusions and suggestions

The last part of the preliminary report on the research of the CSI in Belarus, titled “Conclusions”, consists of **three different parts**.

The first part of the “Conclusions” contains a number of stating assertions, some of which leans on the presented above data. While the other part of the assertions refers to “respondents’ opinion” and “the analysis of the research data”; however, there is no information on these questions in the description of the research data. It concerns, first of all, the descriptions of the attempts to create umbrella organizations and representations of how the structure of civil society and relations between organizations of the public sector in the country should be built. It is not clear either why there is a conclusion that “the basic challenge in development of civil society in Belarus is the creation of mechanisms of inter-sector interaction and cooperation”. There are **no bases which would allow to draw such a conclusion on the basis of “the analysis of the results of the research” in the description of the empirical data**. Therefore, it is impossible to judge neither their validity, nor their justice.

The second part of the “Conclusions” represents “suggestions on development of inter-sector cooperation” in Belarus, made “as a result of preliminary discussions”. However, as **no information on where, in what format, and with participation of what subjects these discussions took place, is presented in the report, the status of the proposed suggestions is not clear either**. Accordingly, their validity cannot be estimated either.

At last, *the final part* of the document, in general, is beyond the representation of the research of the CSI and the work within the scope of the CIVICUS methodology as it is a description of the history of the creation of the Socially-advisory council at the Administration of Belarus President, some actions of the SAC members, and prepared as a result of these actions “suggestions on perfection of activity of the SAC”.

Leaving outside this examination the status and role of the SAC, as well as the contents of suggestions (as it is not quite clear who makes them and for whom), we shall mark that **the formulated suggestions have nothing to do with the implementation of the research of the CSI in Belarus according to the CIVICUS methodology**. These suggestions can have a status of private judgments or offers, and in such a status they are subject to discussions, along with similar and alternative proposals.

It is also difficult to explain the fact that in the resulting part of the report on the implementation of the research of the CSI in Belarus according the CIVICUS methodology, there is a model of an organizational structure of interaction of state-run and public organizations, suggested by the SAC, and there is no information on what models of interaction are offered by civil society of Belarus. There is a question – why is it so: because subjects and organizations of Belarus’ civil society have no such representations and models, or because they were not included into the report?

The “conclusions and suggestions” presented in the preliminary report, have no accurately expressed and clear connection with the procedures of the CIVICUS methodology (the order and norms of a discussion of data and formation of proposals) and with the empirical data shown above.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

1. The presented document does not reflect the results of measurement of the index.

- the document does not present the necessary and sufficient volume of materials of measurement of the condition of civil society (poll of the public opinion, poll of external experts, poll of public organizations). On the basis of the presented data, there is no possibility to make a high-grade analysis of the condition of civil society, to reveal its problems, to draw conclusions, and to develop suggestions on development;
- the formulated conclusions do not correspond with the information on the results of the poll, which is presented in the document. It does not give a chance to evaluate their validity.

2. The presented document raises doubts in the adequate performance of all stages of the CIVICUS methodology:

- there is no description of the procedure of selection of public associations for the research, which is an important stage providing the reliability of the analysis in the conditions of Belarus;
- there are no instructions on the format and procedures of formation of the proposal “*on development of inter-sector interaction*” (according to the CIVICUS methodology, these are regional focus groups, discussions in the Advisory council of the project, National conference);
- proposals “on perfection of activity of the SAC, its interaction with NGOs, and further development of civil society in Belarus”, prepared as a result of the visit of the SAC members to France and Cyprus, drop out of the CIVICUS general methodological procedures.

3. The model of interaction of the state and society, and mechanisms of development of the dialogue, offered by the members of the SAC at the Administration of the President, can be considered as a material and private suggestions (of the SAC or its separate members), which are subject to a high-grade discussion organized according to the CIVICUS methodology with attraction of a wide range of experts, representatives of the state bodies and civil society, together with an analysis of alternative proposals.

4. Actions on formation of thematic platforms and creation of a national platform of civil society (declared as one of the tasks of the conference) are not the result of the research of the Civil Society Index. The initiative on creation of such platforms has not passed the necessary discussion and analysis.

5. To bring in conformity the research of the Civil Society Index in Belarus and the CIVICUS methodology, it is necessary:

- to carry out an expert discussion of methodological and methodical decisions in the implementation of the research in Belarus;
- to provide full access to the results of the sociological poll (citizens, external experts, and public organizations) for all interested participants;
- to determine at what stage the discussion of the presented results is now, and to complete it according to the CIVICUS methodology.