



Нацыянальная платформа

Форум грамадзянскай супольнасці
УСХОДНЯГА ПАРТНЁРСТВА

Description of state of affairs in Belarusian National Platform of the EaP Civil Society Forum

24 September 2013, prepared by Ulad Vialichka, Chairperson of the NP Coordination Committee

Introduction

The Belarusian National Platform was founded in July 2010 and Belarus was the second Eastern Partnership country after Armenia to establish a National Platform.

Belarusian NP is organized differently than the National Platforms of other EaP countries which is also due to the different situation within the country and the limited participation of Belarus within the Eastern Partnership. It still has no Working Group coordinators at the national level, but with a Coordinating Committee consisting of seven members with wide mandate elected at NP conference to better manage the activities of the National Platform.

Nowadays most of activities are concentrated at sub-group level (Public Bologna Committee, youth, human rights, regional development etc.). The National Platform organizes its conferences at least twice a year but also has other working formats in use (round tables, public hearings, position papers, panel discussions etc).

As for the end of September, 2013 Belarusian NP includes 65 civil society organizations and initiatives which signed Memorandum on cooperation and have status of permanent participant of the National Platform.

Conferences of the National platform – key format of the platform communication

During the last year of EaP CSF activities participants of Belarusian National platform met at least three times in conference or round table format.

November 2012

How to develop the National Platform of EaP CSF, what should be done for that and which guidelines to follow – these were the issues discussed at the one-day conference of the Belarusian National Platform of the EaP Civil Society Forum in Minsk on November 16, 2012,

which was devoted to the annual meeting of EAP CSF that will be held for the fourth time in Stockholm at the end of November.



At the NP conference in November 2012 Concept of Development of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was adopted.

Among the priorities in the strategic development of the National Platform, the concept reads expansion of operations of the National Platform activity for settlement of world-wide problems not only within the scale of the Eastern Partnership, but within the European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarus society

and other borderline formats and topics of Belarusian and European cooperation where the presentation of civil society position is also required.

The conference resulted in adoption of the resolution by its participants, where they declared their intention to promote the expansion of the EU-Belarus cooperation and also stated that the main obstacle to the development of such cooperation is the attitude and the actions of the Belarusian authorities, including holding political prisoners, repressions towards social and political activists, absence of the will to cooperation on signing of agreements related to the launch of the visa dialogue and small cross-border movement, despite the respective proposals of the European Union.

Besides, during the conference special attention was attached to the goals and objectives of the Belarusian delegation at the fourth meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum at the end of November 2012 in Stockholm.

June 2013



On June 1 the National Platform conference titled "Between the Eastern Partnership and the European Dialogue on Modernization" was held in Minsk.

Among the participants of the conference were both the permanent participants of the National Platform, who signed the memorandum on collaboration as well as representatives of other CSOs.

Together with discussions about further ways of work for civil society in EaP and EDoM the conference resulted in the election of a new Coordination Committee and its chairman.

NP Conference also recommended 26 Belarusian organizations for the 5th meeting of the Civil Society Forum that is to take place this autumn in Chisinau.

During this year of NP activity it was a case when status of voting participant was requested by the initiative that exists only as a facebook group. The NP Conference also adopted updated procedure of getting the permanent participant status (voting rights) at the National platform for civil society organizations and initiatives that want to join the platform. This procedure was reviewed and proposed for conference voting by the Coordination committee.

In addition, the participants of the conference were unanimous when adopting the resolution which observes no enhancement in the situation with human rights in Belarus and supports the attempts of the European Union to start new stage of dialogue with Belarus in case Belarusian authorities fulfill one principal condition, which is to release all the political prisoners.

Statements and position papers of the National Platform – weak influence but clear position

During the last year several NP statements and position papers have been published as a reaction to some important social and political developments in Belarus as well as developments in the relations between EU and Belarus:

- *Statement on the issuing of non-grata status by the Republic of Lithuania to Belarusian anti-nuclear activists (September 27, 2012).*
- *Statement on recurrent series of repressive actions from the side of the Belarusian authorities in relation to Belarusian civil society organizations, their representatives and partners, independent journalists and creative unions, as well as religious communities of Belarus (December 12, 2012).*
- *Position paper “How to increase the transformational potential of the European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarusian society?” (March 18, 2013).*

Unfortunately the statements are rather a reaction of Belarusian CSOs to the situation in Belarus aimed to bring attention of the society and international community to these facts than the way to change situation for the better.

Also unfortunately NP Position paper “How to increase the transformational potential of the European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarusian society?” which is a result of numerous discussions among civil society organizations which want to make their fruitful input to the European Dialogue on Modernization was not heard well enough in the EC structures. The response received in May 2013 by the NP Coordination Committee from Mr. Gunnar Wiegand, Director of the Department of the European External Action Service, showed that ideas and proposals from NP remained almost unheard and not taken into account.

Bologna process - unique case of influence



**PUBLIC
BOLOGNA
COMMITTEE**

Unfortunately due to complicated social and political environment Belarusian CSOs are limited with their opportunities to be more involved into EaP processes. At the same time some possibilities are open - mostly in advocacy field. One of the most promising cases of that is activity of Belarusian Public Bologna Committee which acts on the basis of the EaP CSF National Platform and unites more than 10 CSOs and also experts in higher education.

Representatives of the expert community and a number of CSOs decided to establish the Bologna Committee in order to develop country roadmap on integration of the Belarusian higher education in the Bologna process. The Committee succeeded to achieve development of Alternative Report on the state of the Belarusian higher education which was included in the agenda of the Bologna process summit in 2012, along with an official report of the Ministry of Education of Belarus. As a result of it Belarus' accession to the Bologna process

was postponed for two more years and conditioned by a series of reforms and, above all, non-use of higher education as a tool of political repression. Now Belarus has two years to prepare itself to a more responsible inclusion into Bologna process, which can be started via more active dialogue of state and non-state experts and stakeholders.

During 2012-2013 Public Bologna Committee also implements monitoring of academic freedoms violations in Belarus. This monitoring is aimed at retrieving the actual information about the situation on academic freedoms in Belarusian higher education institutions. The Monitoring is implemented by the students and teachers in all the regional centers of Belarus as well as the other cities.

The other important part of the Committee activity is holding open round tables for specialists and preparation of the White book of reforms in sphere of the higher education.

For more information about activity of Public Bologna Committee, please, see their website www.bolognaby.org

European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarus society – new opportunities for the National Platform



From the very beginning of EDoM numerous representatives of CSOs participating in the National Platform activities have taken active part in consultations and meetings of EDoM working groups.

Representatives of the Belarusian National Platform are ready to become the customers, inspectors and performers of the expert proposals created under the Dialogue. This announcement was made during a round table, "The program of

development of the European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarus", which was jointly organized by the National EaP CSF platform and the EU Delegation in Minsk on October 17, 2012.

Following this intention NP Coordination Committee in November 2012 addressed the letter to EU delegation with expression of interest of the National Platform to be involved into activities of EDoM coordination group as one of key stakeholders of the Dialogue.

A big workshop aimed at finding appropriate space and role for CSOs in EDoM was held in Vilnius in December 2012 by the request of the National platform. Almost a week CSO representatives and the Dialogue experts have been looking for some new ideas and solutions for the second stage of EDoM. Their key findings have been presented to EC in the NP position paper "How to increase the transformational potential of the European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarusian society?" (March 18, 2013):

Through implementing those propositions, Belarusian stakeholders will have the opportunity to take adequate functional place in the Dialogue, as well as to initiate a series of actions and activities under the "program support" of the EDoM. These events can make the concept and the meaning of the EDoM more accessible to the general Belarusian citizens, and provide a meaningful communication between the various parties on the sites and in the environment

that are not formally part of the overall composition of the European Dialogue on Modernization.

Unfortunately recent developments of the Dialogue (the third phase of EDoM is announced in late August 2013) put much more focus to expert dimension of this dialogue and decrease the role and influence of stakeholders of this initiative. Overall management on EDoM in Belarus was exclusively given to one organization – Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies.

National platform can't agree with such a change and tries to pay attention of other stakeholders and the European Commission to this challenge to bring back the idea of multi-stakeholder communication and joint governance of EDoM process for the benefits of Belarusian society.

The main issues NP finds crucial in further development of EDoM to be useful for the country as well as for CSO's participation in this initiative are the following:

1. **Providing the role of stakeholders to all important players** that previously have been identified as the interested sides of EDoM – organized civil society and political opposition together with state representatives and thematic experts and professionals. Stakeholders should have clear place in decision-making bodies of EDoM.
2. **Balance between thematic focuses of EDoM** – together with attention to economic and social themes, political and HR aspect of modernization should be not less important and visible in public and expert discussions.
3. **Transparent, public and inclusive communication and decision-making** mechanism between all stakeholders and providers of reform proposals.

Belarusian EaP CSF National Platform hopes that with correcting mistakes EDoM process could be moved forward in the direction that will bring significant benefits to Belarusian society.

Thematic activities within the Belarusian EaP CSF National Platform and the nearest plans:

As a part of joint EaP CSF project aimed among other at strengthening the National platforms the following activities have taken part in Belarus:

18.04.2013 Working group 5:

Minsk Capital Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers \ Republican Confederation of Entrepreneurship

"Development of social partnership in Belarus: legal frames and holding limits (28 participants)

Policy paper "Development of social partnership in Belarus "

03.05.2013 Working Group 1:

Belarusian Association of Journalists

"Perspectives of media-sphere reformation: What can journalist community do?" (29 participants)

21.06.2013 Working group 3:

Green Alliance

"Problem of implementation of Aarhus Convention in Belarus and possible solutions " (10 participants)

Policy paper "Proposals to make changes in the law on Public-state environmental council".

25.09.2013 Working Group 2:

Republican Confederation of Entrepreneurship

"Problem of labor resources for business in Belarus and ways of its solution. Role of business-associations and NGOs"

25.09.2013 Working Group 4:

Alternative Youth Platform

"Legal regulation of state of affairs with youth in Belarus"

Analysis of legislation in youth policy sphere.

In late September 2013 special website of Belarusian EaP CSF National platform has started to work. The main news and updates of NP activities as well as EU-Belarus relations are regularly published there in Belarusian (partly Russian) and English languages. The website is available on the web address: <http://npbelarus.info/>

During the rest of year 2013 National Platform also plans to hold one more conference on the eve of the third EaP summit in Vilnius. Belarusian civil society organizations will try to assess the results of Chisinau Forum and articulate their expectations from the Summit regarding situation with EU-Belarus relations. The next NP conference is preliminarily planned for October 31, 2013 in Minsk.

Progress in NP work during the last year

During this year National Platform was limited with its activity development due to two key factors: very weak participation of Belarusian authorities in EaP (nothing to monitor or refer to) and de-consolidated state of the National platform and its Coordinating committee. Due to these factors NP was not very active this year in EaP process despite some particular projects in bilateral or multi-lateral format implementing in particular fields of activity (culture, youth etc.).

Due to the activities implemented 8 more CSOs joined the NP the last year, the new NP Coordinating Committee has got more supportive mandate from NP participants.

At the same time the main focus of attention of both NP participants and Coordinating Committee has moved to EDoM. National platform CSOs and some experts tried to invest as much as they can into this initiative.

The main areas where improvements can be made in the work of the Belarusian National Platform:

- More proper activity in thematic areas of EaP, filling-in WG formats with CSO activities at sub-group national level (it was not the case by now).
- More space for CSO initiative in developing/supporting EaP with own activities of CSOs without waiting when Belarusian authorities activate their participation in EaP.

- Pro-active work of NP with regional CSOs to involve them more into EaP based activities.
- Position and policy papers on behalf of NP on particular EaP thematic areas of EaP and EDoM towards Belarusian authorities and European Commission.
- Active information policy – NP website, presenting NP position in media.

Dialogue with the government

It is hardly possible to have any progress here until political prisoners will be released. It is a crucial borderline for civil society to come back to a strategy of dialogue with Belarusian authorities. Our hopes are very much related to the situation of EaP Summit which could be some key point for Belarusian authorities finally to solve this issue and re-open opportunities for dialogue strategy even when none of the sides can expect trust and support.

For dialogue with the government EDoM at the moment has more entry points than EaP, so maybe it makes sense to use EDoM approach so that state and non-state stakeholders and experts can finally sit together at one table.

Belarusian National EaP CSF platform will be open for any further dialogue at any possible formats with the office of the EC Commissioner regarding possibilities to bring more dynamic and success to the Eastern Partnership initiative.

Current composition of the Belarusian NP Coordination Committee

- Ulad Vialichka | EuroBelarus | Chairman
- Yaroslav Bekish | Green Alliance
- Piotr Kuzniatsou | Homel Democratic Forum
- Siarhei Mackievic | Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus
- Andrei Yahorau | Centre for European Transformation
- Aliaksandr Valchanin | Union Chernobyl - Belarus
- Aksana Shelest | Agency of Humanities Technologies

Contact e-mail: csfbelarus@gmail.com

EaP CSF National Platform website: <http://npbelarus.info/>