CIVIL SOCIETY IN UKRAINE:
"DRIVING ENGINE OR SPARE WHEEL FOR CHANGE?"

CIVICUS Civil Society Index Report for Ukraine

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Kyiv, 2006

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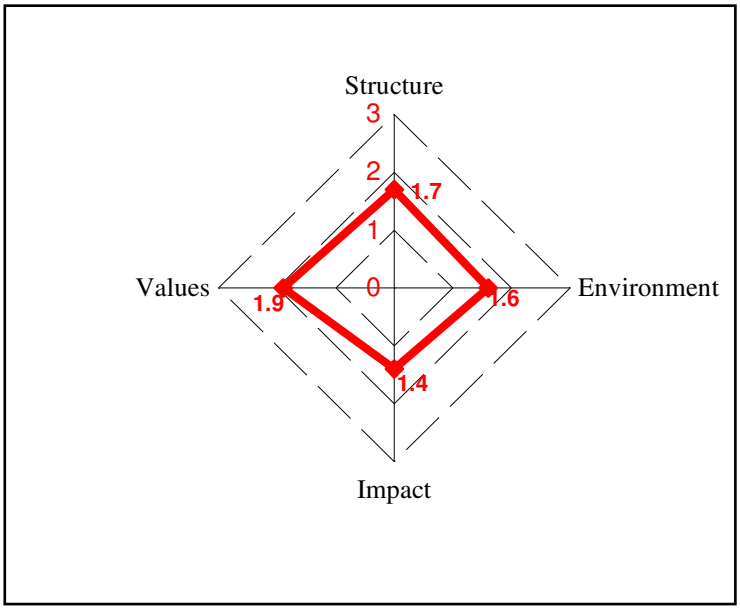
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the period between 2003 and 2004 the CIVICUS Civil Society Index project (CSI) collected information and input from a broad range of civil society representatives, citizens, experts, and researchers on the state of civil society in Ukraine. The National Implementing Team aimed to build on the 2001 pilot CSI project and to examine to what extent Ukrainian civil society has changed over the last years. The CSI included data gathered up to December 2004, i.e. it included events and actions connected to the Ukraine Presidential elections of 2004 and the prominent civil society actions during the "The Orange Revolution".

Using a comprehensive framework of 74 indicators and drawing on extensive data collected by the project team, the project's National Advisory Group assessed the overall state of civil society in the country, which is summarised in a visual graph (see figure 1), Ukraine's Civil Society Diamond.

FIGURE 1: Civil Society Diamond for Ukraine



The diagram visualising the state of Ukrainian civil society in the form of a diamond shows that civil society is rather well balanced and of medium size. The least developed is the impact dimension despite the tremendous success of Ukrainian civil society during Presidential elections in 2004. It seems that civil society's actions in the field of public policy did not necessarily lead to greater impact on society at large and on the well-being of citizens. Still, the Orange Revolution events signified a great step forward for the recognition of civil society as an important actor in the policy-making arena. The lowest score for the impact dimension is certainly connected to the average score for its environment, which remains quite unsupportive for civil society. The general political and socio-cultural context strongly shapes CSO practices as they needed to survive in a society with a high level of corruption, disrespect for the rule of law, clientelism, an indifferent attitude of government, distrust and intolerance. This eventually determines CSOs' advocacy practices, since organisations cannot use the legal mechanisms for protecting the interests of their stakeholders, and lead to government ignoring any propositions submitted by civil society.

The impact of civil society also largely depends on the organisational capacity and CSOs infrastructure, which are key features of its structure dimension. The structure of Ukrainian civil society is currently above average, although the tendency is for citizens to participate in informal groups rather than in CSOs. Ukrainians' participation in CSOs is limited by the lack of transparency and low outreach by CSOs to the population.

Despite the lack of citizen participation in their activities, CSOs play important roles in preserving peace, non-violence, tolerance, gender balance and environmental sustainability in Ukrainian society. This leads to a moderately high score for civil society's values. The major problem in the values dimension rests in the limited ability of CSOs to pursue practices of democratic governance, tolerance and gender balance inside organisations as effectively as they advocate for such practices in society in general. There is clearly an imbalance between declared CSO values and actual practice, which needs to be addressed.

The CSI project provided a multitude of data, interpretations, assessments and recommendations. Focusing specifically on action and policy-oriented recommendations, several specific themes emerged from this comprehensive analysis of the state of Ukrainian civil society. First, civil society needs to address issues of citizen involvement in CSOs, by increasing CSOs' capacity to reach out to people, by providing services to the public and by mobilising citizens' philanthropic potential. Second, civil society should request that government establish clear procedures for civil society's involvement in policy making, policy implementation and monitoring, since the current system is non-transparent and insufficient for an effective engagement between civil society and government. Third, civil society organisations should develop their organisational capacity not only by using the facilities provided by international technical assistance, but also by creating a domestic base of CSO professionals with the support of government and the mobilisation of local resources.

For Ukraine the project outcomes will become a valuable resource for the development of the strategy of civil society and state cooperation, which the Ukrainian government can use in the framework of the EU-Ukraine Action Plan. The CSI has become a part of the National Strategy of Civil Society Development, which is initiated by the Consortium of NGOs "Ukraine – It's Us", since it is recognised by the Consortium members as a valuable source of tangible data on civil society's state and development, which requires further periodical measurement of civil society in Ukraine. Therefore, efforts will be taken to continue the project on the basis of methodology provided by CIVICUS.

In conclusion, it is important to highlight the three distinguishing features of the CSI project, which are important in the context of civil society strengthening. First, the CSI has become a key method for a systematic and organised collection of data on the state of civil society. Second, the collected data is mostly based on facts rather than only on perceptions and opinions. Third, the opinions of civil society stakeholders are an important component of the project since they are used to develop actions regarding the development of civil society in Ukraine. Together, these features make the CSI a most valuable tool for strengthening Ukrainian civil society to take on the challenges in the years to come.