

# Belarus Civil Society: In Need of a Dialogue

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE CIVICUS  
INDEX ON CIVIL SOCIETY PROJECT IN BELARUS

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# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	i
Table of Contents .....	ii
Part I	
Introduction .....	1
Part II	
Civil Society in Belarus: In Need of a Dialogue .....	5
The Structure of Civil Society in Belarus.....	7
Space for Civil Society in Belarus .....	12
The Values of Belarus Civil Society.....	16
The Impact of Belarus Civil Society.....	18
Part III	
Conclusion .....	21
Selected Biography .....	24

# Part I

## Introduction

The activity of civil society is ever increasing in Belarus — networks of resource centres, umbrella organisations for youth, women, and social welfare associations, centres for training and research, hundreds of civil society publications and web sites and, of course, thousands of grassroots organisations. The development of civil society in Belarus in the past years is an indication of the transformation it — along with other Central and Eastern European countries — is going through, as it moves from a communist to a pluralistic society (Dube 2001).

Yet in Belarus, the progress of civil society has been different from that of most other post-Soviet countries. In Belarus, the old Soviet system had not exhausted its resources by the mid-1980s, and still had potential to develop. At the time when the Gorbachev's 'Perestroika' began, the Belarusian society was not ripe for reforms. Here, democratisation and other reforms were not spontaneous processes from within the country, but rather imposed from the outside, mainly from Russia.

The obstacles facing civil society development in Belarus include the existence of a weak national consciousness, an underdeveloped private sector, the absence of a middle class and apathetic mass attitudes towards public issues. The development of a strong and vibrant civil society will therefore be significantly more difficult than in most other post-totalitarian states in Europe, where these problems are less extensive. The elements of civil society that are now coming into being affect only a tiny section of society, mostly the elite; but such an elitist system might be a necessary stage in the transition to a civil society that is deeply embedded in broader society.

Belarus civil society has yet to become a legitimate partner with the state and the market in a democratic system of governance. It needs to be integrated into the international civil society networks to promote citizen interests both locally and globally. Belarus demonstrates encouraging examples in this respect. The Belarus Campaign to Ban Landmines initiated by The Support Centre for Associations and Foundations (SCAF) in 1998 is one example. In co-operation with the Nobel Prize Laureate International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the Belarus campaign has recently managed to convince the Belarus authorities to disclose classified information on the landmines stockpiles, and to sign the *Ottawa Treaty* on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines. International civil society organisations assisted Belarus counterparts in negotiating with western governments and donors to secure funding for the landmine removal in Belarus. This is a good example of how civil society in Belarus has successfully moved the Belarus government toward closer adherence to international standards and promoted solution of a humanitarian problem. A great deal of work still remains to be done, however, to develop Belarus civil society into an influential actor in larger Belarusian society.

## The State of Civil Society Research & the Objectives of the CIVICUS Index on Civil Society Project

Until recently, Belarus civil society has been a *terra incognita* for the global community as little international research has been done in this respect. Belarus CSOs, being relatively isolated from the larger civil society around the world, have lacked knowledge about international standards of civil society development and their judgements concerning the progress made by Belarus since the break-down of the USSR, were based primarily on experiences from within the country.

The very small number of studies conducted in the 1990s explored only a limited number of aspects of Belarusian civil society (Levchenko 1999; Kasianenko 2001). These studies did, however, help to better understand the individual elements of civil society development in Belarus, but at the same time they lacked a holistic approach in exploring the state of civil society as a whole. Most of the studies targeted specific groups of CSOs, and their results were not accessible by civil society stakeholders in Belarus. Consequently, the findings of these projects did not encourage public dialogues at the local, national and international levels, on the development and strengthening of civil society in Belarus. In this respect, the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* project is the first comprehensive research on civil society in Belarus, conducted by Belarusians, the findings developed for use by Belarusian civil society. In October 2000, SCAF, in partnership with CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation began the implementation of the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* project in Belarus.

The objectives of the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* project in Belarus are as follows:

- To increase the knowledge and understanding of civil society through reflecting on and assessing the health of the sector in Belarus
- To empower Belarus stakeholders through the promotion of dialogue, alliances and networks
- To strengthen civil society in Belarus by providing stakeholders with a tool for developing a common vision and agenda to foster social change

In order to accomplish these goals, this study explores four dimensions of Belarus civil society using the Civil Society Diamond tool<sup>1</sup>, capturing civil society's basic facets:

- (1) The structure of civil society
- (2) The legal, political and socio-cultural space that civil society occupies within the larger regulatory, legal and social environment
- (3) The values that civil society represents and advocates
- (4) The impact of civil society on social and community well being

A three-staged process was used to assess the state of civil society in Belarus across these four dimensions (structure, values, space and impact) and to develop an agenda for the further development of civil society. These stages include:

- A review of existing data,
- The distribution of a targeted experts/stakeholder survey and,
- A National Workshop

In co-operation with the UNDP office in Minsk, a co-ordinating group for the implementation of the *Index* project was established. It consisted of civil society leaders, researchers, journalists and government and parliament representatives.

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<sup>1</sup>The CIVICUS Diamond Tool and analytic framework was developed for CIVICUS by Dr. Helmut Anheier, Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics. For more information, see Anheier, H. K. and Carlson, L., *Civil Society: Measurement and Policy Dialogue*, London: Earthscan, forthcoming.

The co-ordinating group selected civil society sub-sectors to be researched, with co-ordinators for each sub sector. The co-ordinating group then selected indicators to be used. It was decided to pilot the *Index project* in Belarus in the culture, business, women, ethnic, social, human rights, education, youth, ecology and international civil society sub-sectors. Labour unions and religious sub-sectors were not selected for the pilot study, as these areas are very sensitive, especially since the survey was performed on the eve of the presidential elections in Belarus. However it was agreed to collect existing information on these sub-sectors.

The nominated co-ordinators for each of the sub-sectors in turn selected national and regional experts for participation in the project. To ensure objectivity in the selection process, regional expert co-ordinators for major Belarus regions were nominated and also included in the list of experts for each of the sub-sectors. As a result, over 150 national and regional experts were invited to assess the state of the civil society in Belarus and set an agenda for its development.

To ensure transparency of the project activities and an inclusive approach in its implementation, an interactive web page was established by SCAF (<http://www.dialogue.unibel.by>) so that anyone who had relevant expertise in civil society issues was able to participate in the project at any stage of its development.

The co-ordinating group and the experts group analysed the list of indicators and questions proposed by CIVICUS and decided to use all of them for the pilot study in Belarus.

The co-ordinating group discussed two methods of conducting the survey:

- Sending out the questionnaires by mail, both electronic and regular mail
- Holding expert group meetings

The majority of the sub-sector and regional co-ordinators preferred holding expert group meetings, as they allow for the development of a common understanding of the questions, provoke dialogue and ensure a high response rate.

It was essential for the legitimacy of the project that the UNDP office in Minsk agreed to work as a partner in the implementation of the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* project and host the meetings of the CIVICUS co-ordinating and expert groups. Being a politically unbiased international organisation, UNDP provided an ideal niche for exercising an inclusive approach in the implementation of the *Index on Civil Society* project in Belarus.

As a result, the *Index* project managed to bring together those civil society stakeholders whom, due to the existing political and social divisions present in the country, had never collaborated before.

Based on the analysis of the political situation in Belarus, and the financial constraints, a three-staged approach was chosen by the co-ordinating group for the discussion of the results of the *Index* study in Belarus and setting agenda for civil society development.

The results of the survey were first discussed at sub-sector expert group meetings, and again at the National Round Table that took place on June 11, 2001. At this Round Table, 35 national and regional civil society experts representing 10 sub-sectors from all regions of Belarus were present. Other participants included researchers, journalists, members of the parliament and top government executives responsible for civil society development.

The description of the *Index* methodology, outcomes of the discussion and interviews with the participants of the Round Table were recorded and portrayed positively on Belarus National Television. Mr. Volkhart Finn Heinrich, *CIVICUS Index* project co-ordinator, actively participated in the Round Table and contributed to the discussion.

The third stage of the agenda-setting process will take place after the presidential election in Belarus, aiming to bring together over 100 civil society stakeholders for this national conference.

## Limitations of the Study

This report presents the findings from a preliminary exploration of Belarus civil society, through the participation of SCAF in the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* project. It does not provide an exhaustive analysis of all the issues affecting civil society, and has some limitations. First, the research findings are based on a targeted opinion survey of a relatively small group of Belarusian civil society experts (158). Only ten sub-sectors were selected for the pilot study and consequently, views of certain sub-sectors were not adequately represented in the pilot implementation. The majority of experts represented CSOs, therefore, the views of other stakeholders — businesses, governments, and academics — may not be represented adequately. The survey was designed to gather informed assessments and other subjective experiences of key experts. Because variables are not always measured quantitatively, responses are often a matter of interpretation and are based on the experts' own experiences and assumptions. Thus, in interpreting the results, one has to take into account that, as many experts are not aware of other international experiences in civil society development, their assessments are bound to the Belarusian context. Straightforward comparisons of the Belarusian survey scores with those from other countries are therefore not always appropriate. Generally, most secondary data sources indicate a less healthy civil society in Belarus than do the stakeholder assessments. However, as the numbers of stakeholder indicators far outweigh the number of secondary data indicators, the latter can only somewhat compensate for the potential bias of the very positive stakeholder assessments. Finally, the project's success was restricted by a lack of financial resources for the survey and agenda-setting workshop stages of the project. This, coupled with time limitations, reduced the scope of the study. A more comprehensive analysis of the status of civil society in all regions of Belarus would require a more extensive project than the one accomplished in the pilot stage.

## Outline of the Report

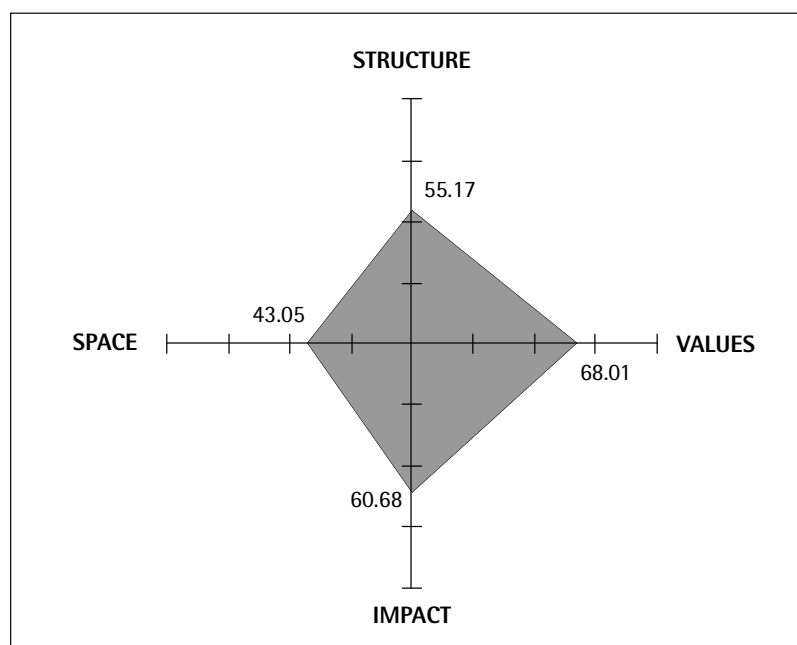
Following this introduction, Part Two of the report presents a picture of the current state of civil society in Belarus, followed by a detailed account of the findings in the four dimensions, structure, space, values and impact. The last section of Part Two concentrates on the agenda-setting workshop proceedings and outcomes. Part Three summarises the most interesting findings emerging from the project implementation.

## Part II

### *Civil Society in Belarus: In Need of a Dialogue*

The overall Civil Society Status Diamond for Belarus indicates a civil society with ‘medium health’ in most fields, especially in its internal structure and its impact on policy and broader society (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:  
Civil Society Status Diamond for Belarus



Taking into account the difficult political environment faced by civil society in Belarus, the relatively high score on the space dimension of 43% comes as a surprise. A score of 68% on the values dimension is very high, indicating a civil society that is very active in promoting and practising progressive values (equity, tolerance, human rights etc.) in broader society. Here, strong discrepancies exist between the stakeholder survey data which is very positive, and other data sources for which the indicator scores were less positive.

In terms of the structure dimension of Belarus civil society, the stakeholder survey data confirms the picture provided by the previous studies (Levchenko 1999; Kasianenko 2001), which illustrates a relatively large civil society, with some internal problems related to, for instance, collaboration and funding.

The results of the impact dimension are partially mirrored by the findings of previous studies, but again the results here are more positive than expected. The individual indicators on this dimension offer interesting insights into Belarus civil society. These are articulated below.

To conclude, the overall picture provided by the stakeholder survey results and the resulting Status

Diamond shows a relatively healthy civil society, with a need to improve the space in which it operates. Building partnerships and promoting dialogue between CSOs, government and private sector is the major challenge for civil society development in Belarus. The identification of specific areas of action, calls for a more in-depth examination of individual indicators.

## Sub-Sector Comparisons

When comparing sub-sector scores, it should be noted that the calculations for the different sub-sectors rely solely on stakeholder survey data. Thus, their average score is more positive than the diamond in Figure 1 that also includes secondary data indicators that unfortunately, are not available on a sub-sector level. This general over-estimation, however, should not affect the comparisons of the *relative* numbers of the specific sub-sector scores (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Sub-sector Overall Scores<sup>2</sup>**

Sub-sector	Score	Rating
Ethnic	61.40%	1
Culture	61.03%	2
Women	60.85%	3
Business	60.64%	4
Social	59.28%	5
Education	53.72%	6
Human rights	53.41%	7
Ecology	52.41%	8
Youth	51.92%	9
International <sup>3</sup>	50.92%	10

Generally, the differences in the dimensional scores for the ten sub-sectors are not very large, rarely more than 10%. Nevertheless, some interesting patterns can be detected. From the data, it is apparent that the more 'political' sub-sectors, such as the human rights and international sub-sectors, have lower scores on most dimensions than other sub-sectors, especially in terms of the space dimension.

<sup>2</sup>The scores are established by averaging the four dimensions for each sub-sector

<sup>3</sup>Different from other sub-sectors, experts from international CSOs were asked to base their answers on an assessment of civil society as a whole, rather than on a specific sub-sector.

## *The Structure of Civil Society in Belarus*

### **How large is civil society in Belarus terms of institutions and organisations; and what resources does it command?**

In the structure dimension, several individual indicators received rather negative scores, indicating areas in need of action and improvement. The first area relates to umbrella bodies and resource centres. Whereas these organisations are assessed as rather effective and participatory, they are not very inclusive in the sense that only a small number of CSOs benefit from their activities. The second area concerns the distribution of organisations throughout the country. The third looks at the detrimental competition and absence of co-operation between Belarus CSOs. The last area concerns funding as the findings indicate that a substantial number of CSOs have had to close down over the past year due to lack of funding.

### **Rating of Sub-Sectors in Structure Dimension**

There is little difference in the ratings given to the structure dimension between the different civil society sub-sectors in Belarus (see Table 2). According to stakeholder opinions, the sub-sectors with the healthiest structure are those involved in cultural and business activities. In assessing Belarus civil society as a whole (rather than just looking at the individual sub-sectors), stakeholders from international CSOs were less positive about the structure of civil society. This is possibly because although serious problems may affect civil society's structure in Belarus, these may not be as apparent to Belarusian CSOs, who have become accustomed to working within this structure.

**Table 2. Rating of Sub-sectors in Structure Dimension**

Sub-sector	Score	Rating
Culture	60.56%	1
Business	59.75%	2
Women	58.53%	3
Ethnic	58.05%	4
Social	56.47%	5
Human rights	54.14%	6
Education	52.44%	7
Youth	51.41%	8
Ecology	49.5%	9
International	49.35%	10

### **The Main Components of Civil Society in Belarus**

Civil society is defined in Belarus as 'a voluntary association of those individuals who act together to form independent organisations'. These organisations provide channels of communication and interaction between the state and the public and include NGOs, political parties, religious associations and various informal pressure groups.

NGOs comprise one of the largest and most active groups of CSOs in Belarus. Their growth occurred following the collapse of Communist rule. By 1994, the number of NGOs had reached 784. However, the enactment of a new law on public associations was followed by the re-registration of NGOs, and as a result, the number of NGOs reached 2502 by the beginning of 1999. At this stage, a new re-registration began, which was passed by just 1326 NGOs. By the beginning of June 2000, their number had grown to 1,877 and by June 2001 — to 1900. Some 56,000 people were involved in NGOs in 1990. This number then declined, until 1995 when it took an upward turn, reaching 45,500 people in 1998 (Levchenko 1999).

On average, nearly 50-60 NGOs are registered each month in Belarus. Lately, the majority of registrations have included charitable organisations, as well as organisations dealing with the rehabilitation of children abroad and the collection and distribution of humanitarian aid. Moreover, the number of professional organisations and national minority associations has significantly been increasing.

In 1997 there were 35 political parties in Belarus. Eighteen of them passed the registration in 1999. Eight of these parties are in opposition to the existing political authorities in Belarus. To be registered, a party needs to have a minimum of 1,000 members. The exact number of party members is not known. The figures provided by party leaders are often exaggerated, as a means of promoting the status of their parties in society (Levchenko 1999).

There are 38 national trade unions and another 16 trade unions for Belarusian institutions and organisations, which are separate from the national unions. The Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions was established in 1990, uniting approximately 4.3 million people, while the *Law on Trade Unions* regulates their activities.

According official information, in January 1, 1999 there were 2,427 religious organisations in Belarus. Of these, 1081 belong to Belarus Christian Orthodox Churches, 399 to Roman-Catholic Churches, 883 to Protestant Churches, 36 to Old Belief Churches, 21 to Jewish synagogues, 24 to Muslim mosques. Forty five and a half percent of the population of Belarus is Christian Orthodox, 36.4% Protestant and 16.4% Catholic (Zemlyakov, 1999). According the Belarus National Academy of Sciences the number of believers in Belarus has increased from 10-15% in 1988 to 30% in 1990 and currently is at a high of 45% of the population (Zemlyakov 1999).

In Belarus the church and religious organisations often collaborate with NGOs on social and cultural issues. For example, the Belarusian Christian Orthodox Church provides its facilities to the Annual NGO Fair. In 2000, 100 NGOs from all Belarusian regions presented the results of their projects, demonstrating the impact of NGOs on Belarus social, cultural and educational development.

The relations between NGOs, political parties and trade unions are controversial. There have been continuous attempts made by political opponents in Belarus to involve CSOs in political confrontation, while the majority of Belarus population stays politically neutral and is rather focused on social and economic problems (IISEPS 2001).

## Citizen Participation in CSOs

This indicator received a rating of 71%, indicating that stakeholders believe CSOs have an active membership base. However, there still is a great potential to increase citizen participation as a means of solving the social and economic and political problems facing Belarus society. This growth is hampered by a lack of appropriate management of volunteers. According to the research conducted in 1999 (Levchenko 1999), Belarusians are willing to be involved in volunteering because:

- They want to help people – 61%
- They have an opportunity to meet new people – 29%
- They hope to learn something new – 46%
- They want to pay people back for the good – 11%
- They want to have an occupation – 41%
- They want to solve problems – 7%
- They do it for their own pleasure – 31%
- They have free time – 4%

In Belarusian society there is a tradition of actively participating in voting in local and parliamentary elections, and more recently in presidential ones. Three of the opposition parties, namely liberal democrats, communists and social democrats, as well as NGOs affiliated to these parties, participated in the local elections in 1999 and parliamentary elections in 2000. The remaining opposition parties boycotted these elections as they disagreed with the existing election code. According to the government interpretation these parties boycotted the elections because they had no chance of winning. The opposition parties also organise marches and demonstrations. However these 'street' actions leading to clashes with the police do not enjoy much general support. According to independent national polls the majority of Belarusians stand for social and economic change but prefer non-violent ways of promoting their interests (IISEPS 2001). According to an independent survey, over 70% of Belarusians plan to come to the voting polls for the presidential elections in 2001 (IISEPS, 2001).

## Distribution of CSOs

Most Belarusian CSOs are located in the capital and more regional centres of the country, creating a problem in servicing the needs of the population in smaller towns and rural areas. This is indicated in responses by stakeholders who gave this indicator a score of 48.2. Table 3 shows the regional distribution of NGOs in Belarus. There are 1,033 NGOs in Minsk, 248 in Gomel region, 224 in Vitebsk region, 188 in Mogilev region, 158 in Brest region, 132 in Grodno region and 96 in Minsk region (excluding the city of Minsk). Some 300 branches of the national associations operate in the Belarus regions (*see Table 3*).

**Table 3. Regional Distribution of NGOs (including branches)**

Minsk	52.32 %
Minsk region	5.21 %
Gomel	10.27 %
Brest	8.70 %
Vitebsk	8.60 %
Mogilev	7.66 %
Grodno	7.24 %

The stakeholders recognise the lack of corresponding civic education in schools as the major problem that hampers development of civil society initiatives in the regions. Both young people and adults are often not aware of opportunities for self-realisation and promotion of their interests through CSOs. Stakeholders recognise the lack of resources in the regions outside the major cities needed for implementing civil society initiatives.

## Composition

The analysis of CSOs by activity, according to the information received by the United Way-Belarus from the national authorities in 2000, is shown in Table 4 (United Way Belarus 2000).

**Table 4. NGOs in Belarus by Field of Activity (including branches)**

Health care	3.76%
Human rights and freedoms	2.28%
Consumers' rights	2.00%
Education	8.68%
Servicemen, veterans	2.31%
Disabled and handicapped	2.47%
Charity	8.32%
Government, self-government, law	2.88%
Women	1.07%
Arts, culture	7.94%
Science	4.06%
Youth, children	4.39%
National minorities	2.55%
Professional organisation	7.08%
Resource centre	0.44%
Social work, rehabilitation	11.15%
Sports, tourism	10.49%
Hobbies	4.42%
Chernobyl	2.80%
Environment	2.14%
Economy, business	2.03%
Miscellaneous	6.73%

There are, however, many umbrella bodies and resource centres operating in Belarus. For instance, there are eight unions of NGOs that have been reregistered in accordance with the president's decree, *On Certain Measures Regulating Activities of Political Parties, Trade Unions and Other Non-*

*Governmental Organisations* of January 26, 1999 (including amendments introduced by Decree 26 of July 13, 1999). These include the Belarus National Youth Council, which is comprised of 36 NGOs and the Belarus Association of Think Tanks, created by 17 NGO leaders. Additionally, there are 11 NGO resource centres and organisations that provide legal assistance to NGOs, and other non-registered coalitions of NGOs and NGO resource centres that are considered illegal according to Belarus legislation. These organisations operate in opposition to the current government. According to a study conducted in 2000 (Kasianenko 2000), 41.9% of civil society stakeholders in Belarus (including government and NGO representatives) believe that NGOs are often involved in the political opposition activities, while 53.1% disagree with this statement.

While Belarus has CSOs operating in a variety of different fields of activity, when asked about the activities of umbrella bodies, resource centres and co-operation/division within civil society, stakeholders provided negative assessments. This is an area of major concern in the structure dimension of Belarus civil society.

The differing political alliances and leanings of Belarus CSOs often prevent co-operation among them. Politicians often attempt to establish coalitions of politically-biased CSOs. They put pressure on apolitical CSOs to join them by labelling them 'non-democratic'. These coalitions do not encourage co-operation with local and national authorities, because they do not recognise the legitimacy of the government. However, many CSOs that adhere to democratic values stay away from the politically-biased coalitions, believing that political struggle cannot substitute civil construction. They also do not want to be controlled by politicians and prefer to stay independent. Lastly, they consider it important to co-operate with the local and central government in areas where it is essential for meeting the needs of society (social protection, public education, environment, etc.).

Political divisions are only one area threatening the structure of Belarus civil society. Belarus CSOs compete for foreign funding, usually from western sources, which is often the only financial source for their activities. There are continuous attempts by coalitions of NGOs and NGO resource centres to control the allocation of western funding in Belarus by establishing a monopoly in the sector, serving as filters between Belarusian NGOs and western donors. These coalitions claim to represent civil society as a whole, when in fact they only have a small number of member organisations.

## Resources

Funding is an additional challenge that has a negative impact on the structure of civil society in Belarus. For instance, survey respondents indicate that a significant number of NGOs were forced to cease operation in the past year due to lack of funding. This trend was the worst in the women's and ecology sub-sectors.

Western funding is currently the major financial source of civil society development in Belarus. The support given to CSOs by the Belarus government is limited, and focuses primarily on promotion of those NGOs loyal to the government, such as non-confrontational youth organisations and organisations comprised of disadvantaged groups of the population. There is almost no support given to CSOs from the private sector in Belarus.

The findings for the structure dimension of civil society highlight deficiencies in the ability of umbrella organisations and resource centres in Belarus to achieve their missions and mandates, and in their capacity to meet the interests of CSOs; consequently, the structure of civil society as a whole is weakened. Limited financial support, lack of funding options, control of the allocation of a considerable proportion of foreign funding by politically biased coalitions of NGOs and resource

centres and the lack of transparency in CSO activities make the climate in the civil society sector highly competitive, and do not stimulate co-operation between CSOs. Finding an appropriate solution to these problems is a challenge for civil society in Belarus.

## *Space for Civil Society in Belarus*

### **What is the legal, political and socio-cultural space in which Belarus civil society operates? What laws, policies and social norms enable or inhibit its development?**

Overall, stakeholders rated the space dimension for civil society as 43.5 out of a possible 100. This dimension received the lowest rating of all dimensions, which is not surprising considering the often hostile environment facing CSOs. For instance, stakeholders indicate that the procedures of registering a CSO are inconvenient and inappropriate, tax legislation is unfavourable to civil society and discourages individual giving, and the state is not seen to support the activities of CSOs. Additionally, CSOs in Belarus lack support from the business sector, both financially and programmatically, with the absence of philanthropy and volunteer programmes for employees. Finally, the lack of transparency in relations between Belarus CSOs and foreign donors is another area of concern, and stakeholders believe local intermediaries have a negative impact upon these relations.

### **Laws and Regulations**

According to Belarus legislation, different laws regulate the activities of NGOs, political parties and churches. According to research that involved both CSO and government experts, 79.0% of the respondents believe that Belarus legislation does not promote the establishment of NGOs, 21% disagree with this assumption and 1.8% neither agree nor disagree (Kasianenko 2000). The Law On Public Associations, enacted on October 4, 1994 and amended in January 1995 and December 1999, governs the work of NGOs. The activities of the political parties are regulated by the Law On Political Parties, while the activities of religious organisations are governed by the Law On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organisations, enacted in 1993.

All CSOs in Belarus are required to be officially registered by either the Ministry of Justice or the Justice Departments of the local Soviet. According to Decree 2 issued by the president of Belarus on January 26, 1999, the activities of non-registered CSO are banned and are thus deemed illegal. And yet there are hundreds of unregistered CSOs and several unregistered coalitions of CSOs in Belarus, most of which are supported through western funding. There are also coalitions of unregistered CSO resource centres that provide financial and technical assistance to unregistered CSOs (Dube 2001).

Where associations are registered and thus considered legal, the Law On Public Associations introduces a complex regulatory framework for CSOs, which limits the period of CSO registration for up to six months. Those who are refused registration or re-registration can make a court application to appeal this decision. There are also by-laws and regulatory documents that are more restrictive than this law. Belarus authorities believe these restrictions necessary to avoid cases of fraud where, for instance, for-profit organisations use the CSO niche to avoid paying taxes, or where political organisations may register as a CSO to enable them to receive grants for their political activities from foreign donors. Research sponsored by USAID shows that over one third of stakeholders (37.8 %) believe that NGO status is often used by commercial organisations to avoid paying taxes. Sixty two percent of respondents disagree with this statement and 2.7% neither agree nor disagree (Kasianenko 2001).

The Ministry of Justice and Departments of Justice register NGOs and verify that their activities conform to their charters. These bodies also help NGOs to find partner organisations to carry out similar activities and implement joint projects. Though this duty is not mentioned in the Statute of the Ministry of Justice, its officers provide consultations and recommendations on changes added to the charters.

As a result of the new registration process, the Supreme Court and Courts of Minsk and Regional Cities has reviewed over 500 cases. In 2000 over 200 written warnings were given while during the first five months of 2001, 60 CSOs received warnings for failing to comply with government regulations.

Since October of 2000, 170 NGOs were refused registration. Sixteen of these NGOs appealed the decision in the Supreme Court without success. These organisations were, however, allowed to amend their charters and reapply for registration. Although some organisations — whose application for registration had been rejected or who had refused to register — continued to operate, in spite of the administrative penalty for non-registered NGOs who carry out some activity.

International, national and local level CSOs may operate legally in Belarus under the present law. NGOs may also be legally involved in commercial activity, but neither NGOs nor their donors are entitled to any significant tax reductions. There is no special law regulating the activities of charity foundations. In line with Decree 8 by the Belarus president all donations to Belarusians from foreign charity organisations or individuals require registration by the authorities so that these donations are only granted with the consent of the Belarus central government. While most CSOs in Belarus agree that there needs to be more transparency in the financial activities of CSOs and international donors in Belarus they disagree with the restrictive methods used by the Belarus authorities in this respect.

Ninety-three percent of NGO leaders in Belarus believe that there should be separate legislation for charity foundations (Levchenko 1999). The steering group of CSOs has recently approached the Belarus legislators with a proposal to develop a law on 'Charity Activities' that would meet the real needs of civil society in Belarus as well as international standards.

According to the Minister of Justice, the legislation of the Republic of Belarus regulating the issue of NGO registration and activity is stable and accurate, and no changes are likely to be made in the near future (Ministry of Justice Briefing 2001). Nevertheless, the Ministry is planning to initiate revision to the Law of Political Parties, which take into consideration Russia's legislation. In addition, some alterations are likely to be made in the normative and legal acts, for instance, those regulating issues of registration of trade unions' primary organisations, to simplify the registration process. Until then, the laws and regulations governing the civil society sector in Belarus will remain a challenge for CSOs operations. Many have overcome this challenge, while others are still struggling.

## Links to Government

The stakeholders assess relations with the government as a problem in the space dimension of Belarus civil society. CSOs are seldom requested by local and national government to be involved in policy formulation and they do not have good access to the legislature to present their points of view (48.43<sup>4</sup>).

There are CSO liaison offices in the central, regional and local governments. The research conducted in 1999 by Levchenko revealed that 26% of CSO's respondents believe government

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<sup>4</sup>This score and the additional scores in brackets show the assessment by civil society stakeholders of the respective indicator, on a scale from 0 (most negative) to 100 (most positive).

agencies exercise a selective policy towards partnerships with NGOs, 13% believe government agencies support only those NGOs who support government, 16% think government agencies do not support NGOs at all, 13% think there is little support of NGOs by the government, 10% believe government agencies support all NGOs and only 3% believe government agencies work in partnership with CSO in solution of social problems in Belarus (Levchenko 1999). Accordingly, CSO's representatives scored the attitude of the government towards CSOs rather low.

Research conducted in 2000 with both government and NGO experts (Kasianenko 2001) revealed better attitudes concerning the relations between the government and NGOs (*see Table 5*).

**Table 5. Attitudes on the Relations between the Government and NGOs**

Statements about NGOs	Agree	Don't agree	Neither agree nor disagree
Collaboration between local authority and NGOs is useful for both parties	93.8%	6.2%	1.5%
NGOs could be good partners for the government	89.9%	10.1%	1.7%
Such activities as working with homeless children, elderly and handicapped should be carried out by NGOs and be financed by the government	63.5%	36.5%	2.21%
There is no need in NGOs as meeting public needs is the responsibility of the government	10.6%	89.4%	3.46%

There are NGOs that depend on government funding (mostly associations focusing on disadvantaged population groups and also some youth organisations) and there are NGOs that reject any collaboration with local and central governments. However, the majority of Belarus NGOs are open for collaboration with all civil society stakeholders in Belarus, including government bodies, and international organisations and governments, but only insofar as this collaboration helps to solve the problems identified by these NGOs as priorities. For example, the Belarus Association of Social Workers actively collaborates with western donors, the Belarus Ministry of Social Protection and with local governments in working with disadvantaged groups in Belarus. The United Way-Belarus has managed to build a partnership with the Belarus Ministry of Justice in the development of a database of NGOs. The Support Center for Associations and Foundations (SCAF) has successfully worked with its Dutch counterparts and the Belarus Ministry of Education on promoting civic education and democratic leadership in schools. SCAF has also collaborated with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the Belarus Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to resolve landmine issues in Belarus. The strategy of 'democracy corridors' was developed and used effectively by SCAF for civil society partnerships that promote the common good in Belarus (Zagoumenov 2000).

### **Socio-cultural norms: Respect for Volunteering and Public Spiritedness**

Belarus civil society stakeholders are not satisfied with the general state attitude towards CSOs in Belarus (41.77). They are also concerned that the state does not recognise people who show great public service in the CSO sector (34.70). They are also not satisfied with the social recognition accorded to CSO's activities, and believe that public spiritedness is still not an admired character trait in Belarus society. This data, however, contradicts the results of studies sponsored by USAID that involved not only CSO's representatives but other stakeholders as well — government officials

and public opinion builders (Kasianenko 2001), which revealed positive attitudes of civil society stakeholders toward the mission of NGOs in society. Seventy-five percent of CSOs, government representatives and regional opinion builders assess this mission as important. Only 19.3% of respondents believe this mission is ‘unimportant’ for their regions and only 5.7% think that it is ‘not important at all’.

When looking at the respect the business sector has for the civil society sector, stakeholders indicate that businesses in Belarus do not support their employees’ role as activists in CSOs (37.69) and they are not engaged in philanthropic programmes supporting CSOs (25.21). Unfavourable tax legislation and a lack of philanthropic traditions in Belarus society are identified by stakeholders as major reasons for this negative attitude of businesses towards CSOs.

Belarus civil society stakeholders believe that lack of transparency in relations between organisations and foreign donors considerably limits space for civil society activities in Belarus. It also allows local mediators to control the allocation of foreign funding and negatively impacts upon the relations between CSOs and foreign donors. Lack of transparency in allocating western funding leads to a lack of accountability and consequently to corruption. Another potential consequence is the creation of ‘phantom’ CSOs that imitate political struggle but in fact are only hunting for western funding.

There are some differences in the dimensional scores for the ten sub-sectors of civil society in Belarus (*see Table 6*).

**Table 6. Rating of Sub-sectors in Space Dimension**

Sub-sector	Score	Rating
Ethnic	54.6%	1
Women	52.76%	2
Business	52.54%	3
Social	51.27%	4
Culture	48.1%	5
Education	44.88%	6
Youth	42.75%	7
Ecology	42.1%	8
International	39.77%	9
Human rights	39.28%	10

From the data, it is apparent that the more ‘political’ sub-sectors, such as human rights and international, have lower scores on the space dimensions when compared to the other sub-sectors. More ‘political’ sub-sectors actually have more problems with the state as they are considered a threat by authorities. Government officials lack the knowledge and skills to co-operate with CSOs on human rights issues, and often interpret their initiatives in this field as a threat to the existing political regime. The Helsinki Committee has recently proposed to the Belarusian government a corresponding training programme for officials co-ordinating human rights issues. The same pattern is also noted in the ecology sub-sector. The ‘healthiest’ sub-sectors — ethnic, women and business — have managed to establish a dialogue with the authorities.

## Dialogue Initiatives towards Increasing the Space for Civil Society in Belarus

There have been several initiatives undertaken in Belarus aimed at increasing the space for civil society. The Dialogue of Public and Political Forces in Belarus was initiated by a steering group of NGOs and trade unions on the eve of the parliamentary elections in March 2000. Over 100 NGOs, trade unions, political parties, religious organisations joined this initiative, identified priority issues for Belarus development and formed corresponding experts' groups comprised by civil society stakeholders. The information on the process and outcomes of this dialogue was available for Belarus civil society stakeholders and international community via the SCAF web page (<http://www.dialogue.unibel.by>). This web page is now used to ensure transparency of the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* in Belarus.

The most recent 'dialogue' initiative emerged in March 2001 in response to Decree 8. In line with Decree 8, issued by the Belarus president, all donations to Belarusians from foreign charity organisations or individuals require registration by the authorities so that these donations are granted with the permission of the Belarus central government. While most of the CSOs in Belarus agree that there needs to be more transparency in the financial activities of CSOs and international donors in Belarus, they disagree with the restrictive methods used by the Belarus authorities in this respect. The dialogue steering group mobilised hundreds of NGOs and their beneficiaries in the preparation of petitions that were sent to the Belarus president, parliament and government with a request to withdraw the Decree. The first public hearings involving NGOs, parliamentarians, government representatives and other stakeholders took place in April 2001.

## *The Values of Belarus Civil Society*

### What values, norms and attitudes do Belarus CSOs represent and propagate? How inclusive and exclusive are they?

In the values dimension, there are only two issue areas that received negative ratings. The first is the complexity of accountability (i.e., corruption, transparency etc.) within CSOs. The second is the issue of environmental sustainability, which civil society does not seem to endorse strongly (59.09), except with the ecological sub-sector (77.00).

### CSOs Promoting Tolerance, Human Rights, Gender Equity and Sustainable Development

Tolerance, human rights, and gender equity are the focus of CSO activities in Belarus. According to the World Value Survey, the percentage of members in CSOs who reported that most people could be trusted is 26.7%. The averaged value of 'tolerance' ranging from 0 to 5 among members in Belarus CSOs is 3.3 (see Table 7).

**Table 7. Data on Belarus CSO Trust and Tolerance**

Trust (CSO members) <sup>5</sup>	Trust (others) <sup>6</sup>	Trust – Proportional Difference <sup>7</sup>	Tolerance <sup>8</sup> (CSO members)	Tolerance (others)	Tolerance – Proportional Difference
26.7	23.8	12.2	3.3	3.3	0.0

<sup>5</sup>Percentage of members in CSOs who said that generally most people can be trusted.

<sup>6</sup>Percentage of non-members in CSOs who said that generally most people can be trusted.

<sup>7</sup>Proportional difference between score for CSO members and non-members.

<sup>8</sup>Averaged value of 'tolerance index' ranging from 0 to 5 among members in CSOs. The higher the score, the more tolerant people are. The index is composed of 5 items. For each item respondents were asked whether they would not like to have the following group as neighbours. The groups are: people of a different race, political extremists, people of a different religion, immigrants/foreign workers and homosexuals. The Index indicates the average number of "no"-answers (i.e. tolerant) to those questions.

This moderate rating can be explained by the specific history, traditions and culture of Belarus society, which are relatively conducive to social trust. However, as one can see from comparing the trust levels among CSO members with those among the general population, Belarusian civil society does not perform its 'social capital' role effectively in terms of building trust and tolerance among its members.

### Transparency and Accountability within CSOs

There is a need to develop a legal mechanism in Belarus to ensure more CSO transparency (55.06) and accountability (76.04). In response to Decree 8, a group of CSOs including the Belarus Independent Society for Legal Research, volunteered to develop such a mechanism and propose it for consideration to the parliament.

### Internal Processes: Involvement of Stakeholders, Internal Democracy

Sixty-seven percent of NGO leaders believe that NGO members have a considerable impact on decision-making in their organisations, while 29% believe this impact is minimal (Levchenko, 1999). However this data could not be fully trusted as these respondents held formal leadership positions in their NGOs. The score in index stakeholder survey is lower (55.06) and demonstrates a more balanced point of view on this issue.

Authoritarian leadership style prevails in most of Belarus NGOs. Sixty seven percent of respondents admit that discussions based on different opinions are not a usual practice in their organisations, while almost a third of respondents, (29.6%) state that discussions take place only from time to time. Only 3% indicate that discussions take place frequently in their NGOs (Levchenko 1999). Sixty three percent of NGO leaders believe that conflicts of opinion make their NGO activities less effective, while 9.6% think that conflicts promote the effectiveness of NGOs.

The following areas of conflicts are listed by NGOs:

- personal relations — 24.7%;
- allocation of responsibilities — 16.6%;
- allocation of financial resources — 9.3%.

It is believed by NGO members that an authoritarian style of leadership in NGOs is an obstacle for civil society development in Belarus (Levchenko 1999).

The USAID sponsored research (Kasianenko, 2001) that involved both NGO and government experts demonstrated the following situation in CSOs management and leadership in Belarus (*see Table 8*).

**Table 8. Opinions about CSOs Management and Leadership**

Statements about NGOs	Agree	Don't agree	Neither agree nor disagree
Those NGOs that I have information about are well managed	56.8	43.2	2.38
Often the style and character of leadership in NGOs doesn't correspond to their civil society mission	54.7	45.3	2.41
NGOs that I know are not professional and they are badly managed	29.3	70.7	2.86
They are closed from the society and are focused on solving their own problems	21.8	78.2	3.08

When looking at the values dimension by sub-sector, the culture and ethnic sub-sectors, which are strongly value driven, receive the highest scores among the civil society sub-sectors (see Table 9).

**Table 9. Rating of Sub-sectors in Value Dimension**

Sub-sector	Score	Rating
Ethnic	73.95%	1
Culture	72.02%	2
Women	69.17%	3
Social	68.82%	4
Business	66.85%	5
Human rights	65.01%	6
Ecology	63.49%	7
Education	62.82%	8
Youth	62.16%	9
International	60.71%	10

## *The Impact of Belarus Civil Society*

### **What is the contribution of Belarus civil society to specific social, economic and political problems?**

Whereas the impact of civil society with regards to its constituencies and broader society is assessed as rather strong, its impact on government policy is regarded as rather weak. Civil society does not make a significant input into neither the drafting nor the implementation process of government policy. The only notable exceptions are the business sub-sector and to a lesser extent the culture sub-sector. Positive ratings were provided on the general issues of civil society's promotion of the public good and civil society's ability to effectively fill the niche between the state and the market, although the same issue has received considerably less positive ratings in previous studies.

### **Civil Society's Impact on Public Policy**

The majority of survey respondents in Belarus believe that they successfully represent the interests of their constituents, putting them on the public policy agenda (64.96). However, they are seldom invited to participate in the generation and discussion of corresponding legislation (38.73) or to cooperate with government in implementing policies (33.74).

In Belarus CSOs have been actively monitoring government commitments and policies. Belarus human rights CSOs have been particularly successful in this respect. Additionally, the Landmine Monitor research conducted by the Belarus Campaign to Ban Landmines since 1999 has resulted in three annual country reports published in Belarus and abroad. Still, the majority of Belarus CSOs fail to monitor the implementation of the government policies in their areas of interest.

## Public Profile of CSOs

The stakeholders are concerned about the negative portrayal of CSOs in the media. CSOs activities receive negative coverage by the state media and are usually ignored by independent media. Lack of public relations skills is one reason for existing problems.

## Responsiveness of CSOs

The majority of the stakeholders surveyed believe that Belarus CSOs are responsive towards their constituents and the marginalized in society. The following areas of NGO activities are prioritised in order to meet the expectations and needs of the constituents (*see Table 10, Kasianenko 2001*).

**Table 10. Priority Areas of NGO Activities in the Regions**

Area of activities	%
Ecology, protection of the environment	83.7
Human rights	77.6
Social protection of handicapped	74.9
Youth and children	74.1
Science, education	69.9
Protection of consumers' rights	69.5
Health	68.1
Rehabilitation after Chernobyl explosion	66.8
Social protection and rehabilitation	61.3
Arts and culture	59.1
Charity	58.9
Economics, Small business	58.5
Women's rights	57.4
Sport and tourism	45.5
Development of local government	40.2
Support to national minorities	33.2

## Effectiveness

Survey respondents believe that CSOs are effective in advancing the common good (i.e., poverty reduction, social inclusion, and sustainable development) (85.37). This assumption, however, is not supported by the USAID study of the effectiveness of civil society organisations in Belarus (*see Table 11, Kasianenko 2001*).

Table 11. Percentage of Local NGOs that Effectively Implement Their Mission and Activities

Percentage of effective NGOs	Opinions by		
	NGO leaders	Other experts	International experts
More than 10%	20.4	31.6	29.4
10-20%	29.6	25.3	23.5
20-30%	15.1	16.0	23.5
30-50%	9.9	7.5	11.8
50-60%	7.9	3.5	11.8
More than 2/3%	2.6	0.7	
No answer	14.5	15.4	

Culture, business and women sub-sectors are assessed by the stakeholders as most advanced in the impact dimension while in youth, ecological and educational areas CSOs have the least influence (see Table 12).

Table 12. Rating of Sub-sectors in Impact Dimension

Sub-sector	Score	Rating
Culture	63.44%	1
Business	63.4%	2
Women	62.93%	3
Social	60.56%	4
Ethnic	59.01%	5
Human rights	55.2%	6
Education	54.74%	7
Ecology	54.53%	8
International	53.83%	9
Youth	51.34%	10

## Part III

### Conclusion

Belarus is not a black hole in the civil society map of Europe. Civil society organisations are working hard in many fields to make life better for the citizens of Belarus.

From the analysis of the data at the agenda-setting workshop emerge several specific areas of action needed, both internal and external. The internal issues relate to public accountability and transparency of civil society's activities, as well as fostering the geographic distribution of CSOs throughout the country. The external issues concern engaging the state and business sector.

Whereas there is a lot of debate on how — if at all — to engage with the state, it should also be noted that government is not a monolith, but a multifaceted entity with a wide variety of institutions, departments and individuals, at national, regional, and local levels, many of which are interested in and open to working with NGOs. The key is to develop trust and good professional relations. Existing institutions, including parliament and the courts should be utilised in a more systematic manner, in order to encourage authorities to respect the law, the constitution and international norms.

The findings of the *Index project* suggest that civil society should examine which policy issues should be targeted for further state engagement (impact). CSOs should also determine how they can convince the government of the importance of a more enabling legal and political environment for civil society (space), in order to access its full potential to promote the common good. However, to be able to convincingly argue for changes in state regulations and attitudes, civil society first has to bring its own house into order, i.e. to ensure accountability standards are met by its members.

In interviews with the journal *Social Economy and Law*, members of the *Index project's* co-ordinating group noted that co-operation and dialogue with government ministries, authorities, agencies, and officials at different levels was necessary and desirable (Dube 2001). This notion was reiterated during the agenda-setting workshop. In concluding this report, I would like to describe some of these already existing initiatives.

Marina Naranovich, director of the Belarusian Association of Social Workers (BASW), said her organisation found it imperative to collaborate with both non-governmental and governmental entities, and stressed the need for social partnerships between different sectors. So, for example, government representatives participated in an international fair on social projects organised by BASW in 2000. The association works with several ministries, such as the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education. Moreover, BASW participated in the development of a new law on social welfare provision. The law, which was enacted in 2000, begins to address the issue of social contracting and is perceived to be a first step in the right direction. BASW has signed a contract with the Minsk City authorities to establish a support centre for the homeless — many Minsk NGOs are interested in following this model. Indeed, Naranovich pointed out that local authorities, pressured by ministries to meet certain targets, often rely on NGOs for expertise and material assistance.

Another socially oriented NGO, the Center for Social Innovations (CSI), runs a variety of training programmes (e.g. labour market skills, civic education, and community building) and provides consulting services to both NGOs and small businesses. Taiana Poshevalova, Director of CSI believes that solving problems at the community level often means working together with local authorities. For example, in Novopolotsk, an industrial town surrounded by forests which are now dying because of pollution, citizens' groups organised meetings with local officials and managers of the town's industrial enterprises to draw up a plan to deal with the pollution problem and save the forests.

Elena Tonkacheva, Director of Independent Society for Legal Research indicated that her institute co-operates with the government on drafting amendments to the Civil Code. She admitted that, regardless of the government in power, there is always a bureaucratic side to this work, as government institutions and CSOs have different mechanisms of functioning. For example, government institutions are slower than CSOs in decision-making. CSOs that are not aware of this difference often try to solve their problems in a simple manner, often resulting in objections from the officials. She believes that CSOs need to be more proactive in lobbying for their interests and should make every effort to participate in the law-making process, despite all the obstacles. Parliament does not have much importance in Belarus, and deals mostly with draft laws presented by the government. This is partially due to the absence of civil society initiatives. Tonkacheva feels that CSOs in Belarus should develop a common strategy with respect to the government, like their counterparts in Georgia, and be less guided by the views and agendas of foreign funders.

The director of the Support Center for Associations and Foundations (SCAF), Yuri Zagumennov, advocated the 'Democracy Corridors' approach in dealing with the authorities. The approach seeks to find common ground between stakeholders in a particular problem, thereby establishing a corridor of co-operation, and then gradually widening the corridor as trust is built up. Zagumennov calls it a 'step-by-step approach to avoid unnecessary confrontation'. He cites SCAF's work on the civil society, education and peace-building issues as good examples of the 'democracy corridor' approach.

An umbrella NGO, the Belarusian National Youth Council (RADA), which comprises some 30 national youth organisations of both a political and non-political nature, participates in youth policy-making through its relations with a ministerial body, the State Committee on Youth Affairs. According to RADA Press Secretary Diana Manevskaya, relations with the Committee have improved over the past two or three years and RADA has managed to obtain some state funding.

A number of CSO leaders noted in their interviews to the editor of SEAL and at the agenda-setting workshop that certain funders are focused on rapid democratisation in Belarus and generally discourage co-operation between NGOs and the current government, an attitude which impacts on their funding patterns. One NGO representative drew upon the classical Marxist distinction between base and superstructure to indicate that these funders concentrate much more on the superstructure (i.e., political development) than the base (i.e., economy, society) and that ideally, a two-pronged, parallel approach would be better. It was suggested that funders need to take into account the general attitude of Belarusian citizens, who still need to develop a better understanding of the benefits of a free market economy, a parliamentary democracy and a strong and vibrant civil society.

At the agenda-setting workshop it was suggested that CSOs need to strike a balance between competition for limited resource and co-operation on issues of common concern. The promotion of a culture of co-operation and partnership between CSOs was identified by stakeholders as a primary challenge for the development of the civil society in Belarus. Linked to this discussion was the role of umbrella organisations and NGO resource centres. The majority of civil society

stakeholders stand for informal networking and temporary alliances with each other aiming at accomplishing common tasks rather than the establishment of top-down bureaucratic umbrella structures. They strongly object to umbrella organisations and resource centres serving as “filters” between Belarus CSOs and international community.

To avoid unhealthy competition between CSOs and control of the sector by politically biased organisations it is important to ensure transparency in the activities of CSOs and their accountability to the stakeholders. It is also important to enable alternative sources of financial support for CSOs activities. Local private funding is a potential new source to be explored for this purpose.

Belarus civil society stakeholders need to be introduced to international best practices in developing the structure of civil society, particularly on the activities of umbrella organisations and resource centres. A corresponding civic education curriculum needs to be developed and introduced in Belarus schools and exchange programmes need to be initiated for the transfer of expertise.

It was unanimously agreed by the participants of the agenda-setting workshop that the training of over 150 experts involved in the *Index on Civil Society* project in Belarus is much needed to develop a common vision and to raise their standards in measuring the health and strength of Belarus civil society.

The picture in Belarus civil society is by no means black and white. To meet the challenges of civil society development it is essential to identify the real problems that hamper this development and to set an agenda for their resolution. The pilot stage of the *CIVICUS Index on Civil Society* project in Belarus has proved the effectiveness of the *Index* methodology and the need of further research in the regions based on this tool.

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