SURVEY ON DEVELOPMENT OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP: A WAY TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES

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Abstract

On the initiative of the Mayor of the City of Gdańsk, The European Association for Local Democracy ("ALDA") was asked to conduct a survey that revealed local issues and opinions with the help of the Local Democracy Agencies in Georgia, Armenia, and Ukraine.

The questionnaire was distributed via ALDA's network in the Eastern Partnership ("EaP")". We included local civil society organization representatives and local authorities who shared their opinions on issues that address their countries' development.

Two types of questionnaires with 35 questions were developed for civil society organizations and local authorities. This report presents the results from the EaP countries.

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1.   The Main Concept

On the initiative of the Mayor of the City of Gdańsk, a survey was conducted with organizations and institutions that represent civil society issues, and have local offices in Eastern Partnership ("EaP") countries. The survey examines issues covered by the CORLEAP report and aims to address the following aspects:

1. Analysis of possible threats to development of a civil society resulting from the geopolitical situation in the region, together with analysis of the type of support from EU countries aimed at reducing the impact of such hazards.

2. Information on the role of modern communication techniques in the process of developing and organizing civil societies (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and other social media).

3. Data on possible support and real aid provided by local governments of EU countries, which could be effective in the development of local democracies and civil societies in EaP countries (best practices).

4. The most important instruments to stimulate the development of civil society in different EaP countries. Do such instruments exist at all in EU countries? If so, what kinds of tools can be recognized in the EU? Are these meetings with residents, public consultations, public information bulletins (including their variations in different countries), open data, participatory budgeting, or direct democracy? Or is it simply a practice or obligation to inform citizens about public expenditures, budgetary plans, and budget implementation?

5. Effective promotion of the idea of civil society and civic participation that could counter the negative propaganda campaign launched by media hostile towards development of the Eastern Partnership.

Methodology

The European Association for Local Democracy ("ALDA") was asked to conduct a survey that revealed local issues and opinions with the help of the Local Democracy Agencies ("LDA") in Georgia (Kutaisi), Armenia (Gyumri), and Ukraine (Dnipro). The questionnaire was distributed via ALDA's network in the EaP. ALDA's contribution to CORLEAP's report was to reflect local perspectives. We included local civil society organization ("CSO") representatives and local authorities ("LA") who shared their opinions on issues that address their countries' development.

Two types of questionnaires with 35 questions were developed for CSOs and LAs. This report presents the results from the EaP countries, except for Azerbaijan (because only one questionnaire was filled).

In total, 51 representatives of CSOs and LAs returned the survey. In focus group meetings organized by LDA Georgia, LDA Armenia, and LDA Dnipro, 25 people participated.

The first section describes the results per country. The second section includes trends and main findings. The third section has recommendations.

2. Survey results per country

1. Analysis of possible threats to development of a civil society resulting from the geopolitical situation in the region, together with the analysis of the type of support from EU countries aimed at reducing the impact of such hazards

In Georgia

The majority of participants respond that the geopolitical situation is non-stable in Georgia, and agrees that this influences the development of a civil society in the country.

1. How would you describe the geopolitical situation in your country?

- Stable, Fragile
- Non-stable
- Fragile
- Non-stable, Fragile
- Stable

6,3% / 50% / 25% / 12,5%
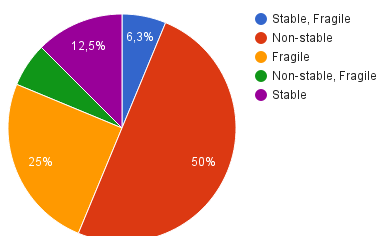
The focus group respondents stated that Georgia has always faced geopolitical threats, but today this issue is more exaggerated due to Russia's aggressive policy towards Georgia. They also mentioned that the Georgian government has a vague policy towards Russia, because they are trying to balance EU integration with not aggravating Russia.

4. Select one answer: My country's civil society is

- Weak
- something middle betwen S and W
- Developing
- Strong

15,4% / 53,8% / 23,1% / 7,7%
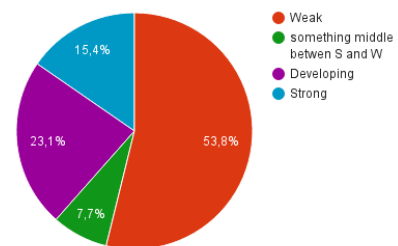
The majority of respondents describe their civil society as weak, and 23.1% describe it as developing.
The justification for their responses included:
"[Our] civil society does not possess the strength of influencing decision makers or lawmakers with enough capacity and quality."

"Civil society is not involved in as much as it is needed for more control on governmental decisions."

"Civil society do[es] not think that what happens around us everything is up to us. They do not think that they can have an opinion on the topic which is connected to the city management. They are relaxed, and most people have no idea what happens at City Council meetings. They do not think that they have the right to express an opinion on a building being built in a park, or moving the Parliament building from one city to another, understanding what is public information, etc."

"There are some crucial problems in the country, however civil society does not react adequately. For example, there have been some significant crimes in the country and the investigation has not been processed properly. Civil society did not follow up, unfortunately."

The focus group stated that it is very important to maintain stability and financial support for the sustainability of regional NGOs. The respondents believe that civil society is stronger compared to previous years, but civil society development is very slow. The respondents stated that the government perceives NGOs as their opponent. Limited funding possibilities for NGOs are a barrier for CSO development in Georgia. "There may come a time when NGOs will stay without funding." Unfortunately, there are no legal regulations that address State funding of NGOs for program implementation. "In Poland citizens can share their income tax of 1% or 2% for the development of NGOs. This can give NGOs more than 40 million GEL during the year." In Poland, the local government budget provides a specific amount of grants for NGOs, ranging from 10-12%, depending on the strength of the local self-government.

Lack of funding and education were the most frequently mentioned threats to civil society development in Georgia. "There is no special course on NGO management in Georgia."

"International NGOs fund many projects, but we are weak in sustainability if government officials are not interested in cooperation. Funding for capacity building, advocacy, and civil rights is low. [There is a] lack of qualified specialists in the education field (e.g., preschool inclusive education, health representatives, social workers, etc.)." They also cited lack of civic activism and enthusiasm, and pessimism among citizens as threats for CSO development.

The focus group respondents believe the main threats for CSO development are political instability, unsustainable CSOs, lack of active funding for regional NGOs, and international organizations leaving the country.

11. Do you have information about the financial support of EU countries to support local democracy in your country?
- Yes
- No
31,3%
68,8%
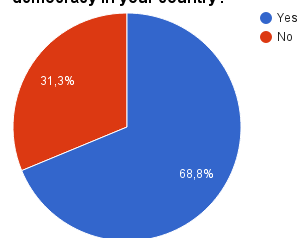
One hundred percent of respondents stated that EU countries do support civil society development

1. How can you describe the geopolitical situation in your country?
- non stable
- fragile
40%
60%
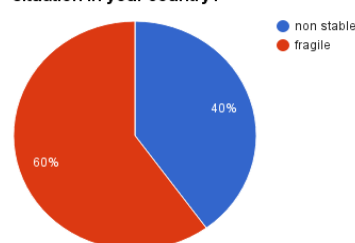
in Georgia. The majority of the respondents are informed about and have applied for financial support of EU countries. Nearly all of them consider the support significant and effective.

In Armenia

The survey was conducted two months after the recent Nagorno-Karanakh conflict. This led to the responses describing the geopolitical situation in the country as non-stable and fragile.

"April 2016, 4 days of fierce war on the Karabakh-Azerbaijan border greatly influenced civil society development as almost all active representatives were engaged in assisting the army with all necessary means thus putting under threat their financial sustainability that preconditions each organization's further development. After Armenia signed the Customs' Union, many international funds were reduced not visibly, but in a rather touchable way.

"Under these circumstances, the role of civil society is crucial: "The Nagorno-Karabakh issue creates a non-stable situation in the country, therefore peace-oriented projects, cultural

understanding, and conflict transformation issues become of utmost importance."

One hundred percent of respondents used the term "partially developed." The focus group report stated the geopolitical situation is influencing development. "Taking into consideration the "blockaded" geographical location of Armenia, having only one way to communicate with the world, and currently experiencing a fragile half-war/half-peace situation, CSOs' development is threatened, but also motivates CSO's to get engaged in more serious issues that will promote solutions to important problems. In Armenia, there are about 4,000 CSOs, but only 400-500 function according to their mission and objectives. The rest are either GONGOs (that also share a greater part of the grants) or CSOs on paper only, and are 'grant-eaters.'"

Threats include funding; almost full dependence on international donors; lack of NGO-related courses, such as project management, HR management, fundraising, and corruption; financial unsustainability, since most CSOs are donor-driven and there are not adequate provisions in legislation to protect CSOs (e.g., no right to make appeals in court); and lack of civic activism.

Like the respondents from Georgia, 100% of Armenian respondents are aware that EU countries support the development of civil society in Armenia. German, Czech Republic, Denmark, Sweden, and The Netherlands were named as donors to Armenia. Ninety-nine percent of respondents have applied for EU countries' funding, and 100% of them believe that EU countries' support is effective and significant. "EU support is essential for the development of CSOs in Armenia, as it will assist in improving their financial sustainability, promote capacity-building, and experience gain for CSOs' management."

Some of the respondents stated that it will be good for the EU to monitor the government. "It would be good if EU supported developed CSOs by monitoring government activities. The role of CSOs with the government must be promoted so that the latter feel CSOs' oversight and watchdogging."

The focus group wants EU countries to help CSOs ensure financial sustainability in the form of small-scale grants. In order to achieve global development and results, large EU grants are needed, but their application procedures are too complicated, and they are limited to small and new CSOs. This creates obstacles for CSOs to implement good ideas. EU grants have concrete objectives with no opportunity for CSOs to express local needs. EU should implement a study that takes into consideration local needs and policies, and obtain CSO feedback via meetings with CSOs. According to the draft amendments to CSO law, entrepreneurship will be allowed for CSOs to promote their financial sustainability. If a CSO engages in entrepreneurship activities and earns a profit, the CSO's mission and role will be changed and possibly misinterpreted.

EU countries supported projects like Women in Local Democracy, Local Governance Program South Caucasus, Support to Consolidating Local Democracy in Armenia, Support to CSOs' development, EAPTC support program, etc., that contributed to slight positive changes in CSO and LA empowerment and development.

In Ukraine

The geopolitical situation in Ukraine is non-stable and fragile. Only 14% of respondents stated that the situation is stable.

1. Please describe the geo-political situation in Ukraine

- Non-stable
- Fragile
- Stable
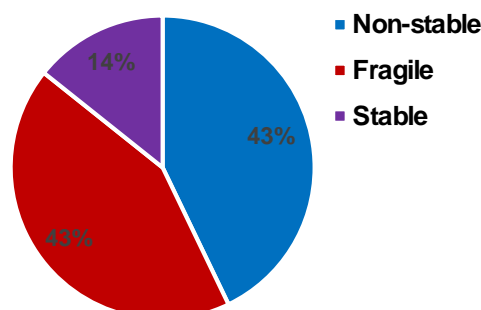
One hundred percent of respondents believe that the geopolitical situation is influencing the development of civil society in Ukraine. The war in east Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea were mentioned as reasons.

The majority of respondents (87.5%) describe the civil society in Ukraine as partially developed and 75% said it is weak.

Section Development Levels
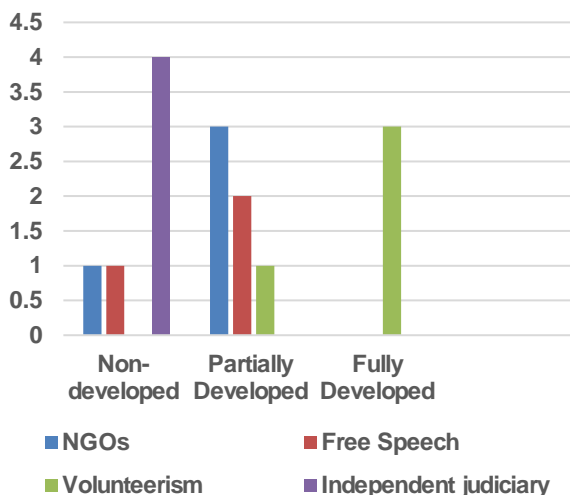
Threats to CSO development include corruption, lack of funding, lack of governmental will to support a civil society, absence of educational courses on NGO management, legislation, stereotypes, a lack of civic activism, fear to take the responsibility, and unsustainability of NGOs, since they are mostly dependent on donors.

Do you have information about financial support of EU countries?
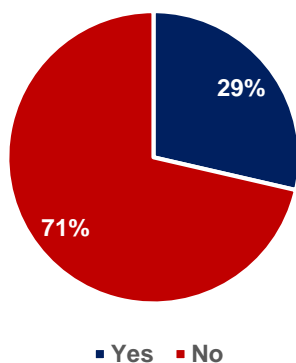
A majority of respondents state that EU countries support CSO development, including Germany, Sweden, Poland, and The Netherlands. Only 28.6% are aware of EU financial support. One example is the establishment of the Local

Democracy Agency in Dneporpetrovsk. One respondent commented that financial transparency is not guaranteed. Two-thirds of respondents have applied for financial support from EU countries, but only 57.1% believe that EU countries' support is significant and effective (in Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova, this number is 100%)
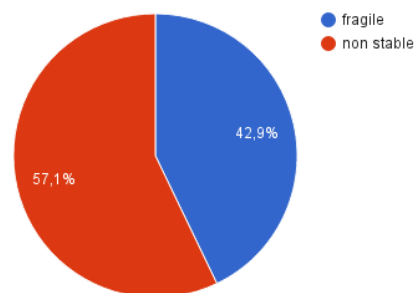
Do you consider their support significant and effective?
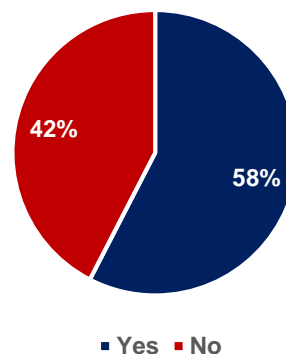
In Moldova

The geopolitical situation as non-stable and fragile.

The majority of respondents agree that the geopolitical situation influences civil society development in the country. Moldovan civil society is disengaged due to the Russian influence. The position of the EU is very delicate on this issue. Due to the political and economic crises, more international organizations refuse to continue their granting program.

One hundred percent of respondents describe the civil society as partially developed and weak.

Lack of civic activism was named as one of the main threats for civil society development, together with lack of funding, imperfect legislation, corruption, bureaucracy, and massive immigration. One respondent stated that larger funding programs could support development.

One hundred percent of respondents stated that EU countries support the development of civil society, including Great Britain, Norway, The Netherlands, Slovakia, Germany, Poland, Romania, and Sweden.

Despite the fact that all of them know that EU countries support Moldova, only 57.1% stated that they are aware of that financial support.

11. Do you have information about the financial support of EU countries to support local democracy in your country?
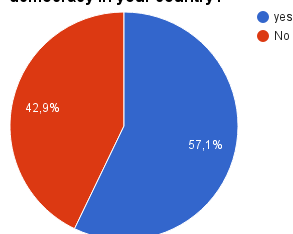
The respondents believe that the EU's support is important and significant, and most of them had applied for the funding.

"It helps to raise the voice and to improve the quality of public policies elaborated by public authorities."

"The support is mostly focused on big CSOs and totally overlooks small, but good CSOs, which are interested in implementing EU projects. The CSOs that receive funding are the same almost every year, because they have the financial capacity to provide co-funding for big amounts which the EU offers. The mechanisms can be improved by diversifying the topics of the projects and by offering smaller amounts, which can be more easily accessed and assimilated by other small to medium-sized CSOs."

"First, we consider them correct and fair in relation to the project reviews and allocation of funds among the organizations situated in Moldova. The organizations in Moldova have also become

corrupted since predominantly the local population works there and corruption has already infiltrated them. International donors are objective and at least for us their financial support is effective since we function by virtue of projects."

The Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM) recently approached their international partners to tell them that the support of the EU to the central government was not effective anymore:

1. International aid provided to the central government does not work anymore. The budget support modalities do not work. The aid provided to the central government only facilitates legal and illegal corruption and discourages any reforms in the country. It does not provide any support for European and global principles and values. The effect is just the opposite. People see what is happening on the ground with international support and lose trust in donors and international organizations. A better solution is through decentralized cooperation and a bottom-up approach of supporting local governments, local government associations, and civil society in reform advocacy, constituency building, and capacity building. Apart from considerations of efficiency, it is the only way to diminish authoritarian trends in society, destroy vertical power structures, reduce corruption, and improve justice systems.

2. International aid provided in conflict with national policy and the reform process does not work anymore. Any aid interventions not associated directly or indirectly with policy reforms are doomed. They are not sustainable and their effects are minor and short-term. If aid is delivered without a connection to the national or local policy processes, it does not build social capacity. In the best case, it builds some institutional capacities of particular actors, which are not sustainable without policy improvements. Higher institutional and personal capacities in the central public administration in Moldova are completely overshadowed by the disaster in each and every sector in competence of the central government, due to the lack of reforms and the extremely low systemic capacities of the entire system of central public administration.

3. International aid provided through implementing agencies and international organizations does not work anymore. We do not build any local or national capacities providing aid through implementing agencies and international organizations. To the contrary, such a delivery modality of aid destroys local and national initiatives and does not generate any aid ownership at local or national levels. More than that, profound understanding of the intrinsic country problems by international experts, implementing agencies, and international organizations is extremely rare. The only way forward is to provide aid and implement projects through national actors – governmental agencies and organizations responsible for specific fields, through local governments, local governments associations, and civil society organizations.

4. International aid provided on the results based criteria does not work anymore. There is never a guarantee that even if the results are reached it will lead to positive, sustainable results. Any results are not perfect, at least in the longer-term perspective, and should be changed, challenged, or at least adjusted. More than that, results formulated or even merely approved by the central government are generally quite doubtful, because of different considerations: lack of capacities, partial interests, lack of political will, corruption, etc. A process-based approach is better for policy, constituency building, and advocacy projects, while a results-based approach is good only for capital investment projects.

5. International aid provided for soft interventions and separate trainings does not work anymore. Trainings without any reforms on the ground for many years produce a strong reluctance on behalf of all the actors and do not motivate change. Any soft interventions, studies, draft laws, and policy papers in conflict with ongoing (not merely declared) reforms and advocacy actions do not build systemic capacities. What does work is (i) building constituencies of all national and local actors, (ii) communication and advocacy, and (iii) investment funds for national and local infrastructure. Only such interventions build sustainable capacities of national actors through participation and designing of the national

reform process. Only such interventions are streamlined for changes and reforms.

In Belarus

The majority of participants from Belarus responded that the geopolitical situation in their country is non-stable or fragile.


Please describe the geo-political situation in your country

- Stable
- non-stable
- fragile

14,3% 28,6% 57,1%
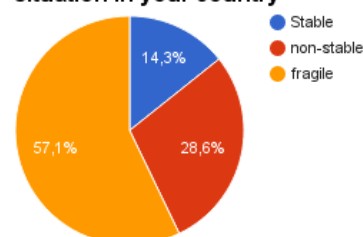
Most respondents think the geopolitical situation negatively influences the development civil society.

a. The government interferes with the reform and development of local government and civic participation at the local level.
b. There are no control mechanisms of power activities by citizens.
c. The law of civic engagement is purely declaratory and does not work in practice.
d. There are legal, financial, and bureaucratic obstacles in the creation of public associations, trade unions, religious organizations, and political parties.
e. There is direct repression from the government on activities of NGOs, trade unions, religious groups, and political parties.

Please describe the civil society in your country

- Strong
- Weak
- Inexperienced
- In the process of self-determination
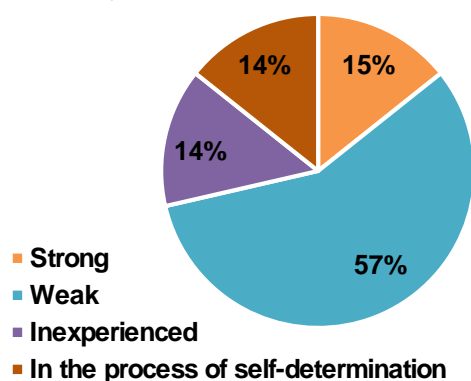
Most of the respondents believe that civil society in Belarus is weak, inexperienced, and in the process of self-determination.

A high level of control and censorship by the State, monopoly of power, and corruption are threats to civil society development.
"Legal pressure (however, having the character of the creation of illegal acts) and administrative and fiscal pressure on organizations and initiatives, as well as administrative, financial, and information-psychological pressure on citizens."

"Regular (and successful) attempt by the government to replace the independent civilian institutions affiliated alongside haphazard efforts of international donors."

"The lack of a full-fledged dialogue between the authorities and civil society, the restrictive environment for the action of civil society (political repression, legal restrictions, restrictions on funding opportunities, etc.)."

A large majority of respondents (83.3%) agree that EU countries support civil society development in Belarus. Two-thirds have applied for financial support of EU countries, and 71.4% consider that support significant and effective.

2. Information on the role of modern communication techniques in the process of developing and organizing civil societies

In Georgia

The modern tools of communication are playing a vital role in civil society development. Respondents state that social media is a good way to manage people and quickly spread information. Many forms of modern communication are free. It is extremely cost efficient to use a Skype video or phone conference with partners instead of everyone traveling to another city.

7. What kind of social media do you or your organization use for public relations?

- Facebook
- Facebook, Twitter, Blog, google+
- Facebook, TV
- Facebook, Twitter
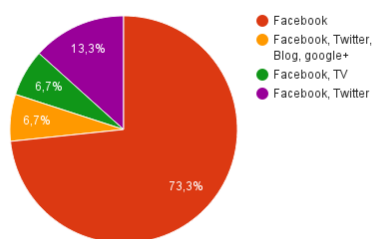
One hundred percent of respondents use Facebook for communication. Twitter, Google+, and official web pages are widely used. Information is updated more than twice a week, or as events occur. A majority of respondents have planned a social media campaign, and agree that social media is effective for their work. Many have significant results of social media campaigns. An ecology campaign involved youth and adults that resulted in improvement of a cleaning service in a municipality and positively affected 8,000 people.

The "It Concerns You, Too" campaign in Georgia, resulted in the law on eavesdropping being declared unconstitutional. The public education campaign, ''Don't Drink and Drive!'' resulted in the law being changed in 2014, which now requires the loss of a driver's license for 6 months after the first conviction for drunk driving.

In Armenia

Modern communication allows new developments in information dissemination for CSOs, LAs, and citizens. Webpages and emails of CSOs make communication easier among local CSOs and international stakeholders. This reinforces cooperation and partnership initiatives. Among the various social media possibilities, Facebook and a community webpage are the most useful and popular means for local authorities. One hundred percent of respondents use Facebook for communication, as well as Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. They update their information once or twice a week. Unlike the Georgian experience, most respondents have never planned a social media campaign. Only one respondent provided an example of a campaign for a petition for reducing plastic shopping bags in 2014. In this case, although many CSOs and individuals joined the campaign, and despite the support of relevant government officials (Parliament and Ministry), the campaign did not have any direct results other than building awareness, since the interests of oligarchs predominated.

In Ukraine

Which type of social media do you use ?

- mailing list
- Facebook
- Facebook, web page
- web page
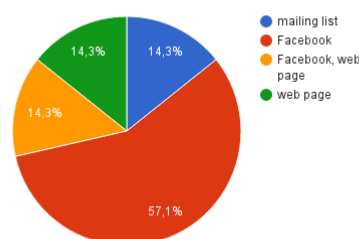
Most respondents use Facebook, followed by the webpages. Most respondents have planned social media campaigns with successful results. One organization prepared a draft law to support civic participation and as a result of the campaign some members of RADA started to support the bill and

more than 12,000 citizens received information about the draft law.

Information is updated twice a week.

In Moldova

One hundred percent of respondents use Facebook, as well as Twitter and websites. Information is updated once or twice a day, or twice a week. Most of the respondents have planned a campaign via social media. Examples include Europe for Education - Europe for You, ScoalaMea.md, BudgetStories.md, and Equal Pay Day, an annual campaign to support equal pay for men and women.

9. Have you ever planned a campaign using social media?

- No
- yes

42,9%

57,1%
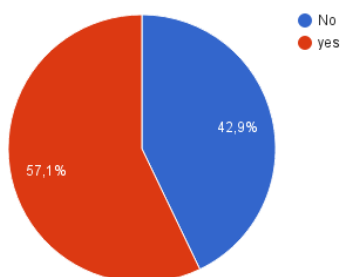
In Belarus

Most of the participants agree that social media is an easy way to solve some problems. Social networks can quickly assemble a group of several thousand supporters.

7. What kind of social media do you or your organization use for public relations?

- Facebook
- Contact
- Twitter

23,1%

15,4%

61,5%

Most respondents use Facebook for communication, together with Twitter and local

social networks. The information is updated once or twice a week and when events occur. Most respondents have planned social media campaigns, e.g., the announcement and holding of competitions for mini-grants for local initiatives. The vast majority of respondents agree that social media is effective for their work.
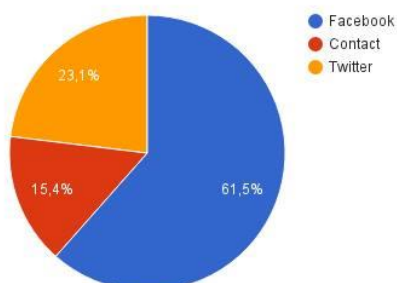
3. Instruments to stimulate the development of civil society

In Georgia

About 70% of respondents stated that they are aware of the laws on civic engagement in their country. The level of knowledge ranged from basic awareness to advanced knowledge. Most of the organizations that participate in the decision making process stated that they "monitor" the process.

21. Are you or your organization able to contribute items to the agenda?
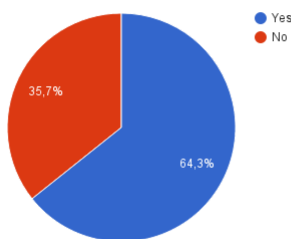

Respondents primarily get information about public meetings from television, Facebook, email, telephone calls, social media, and personal contacts. They attend budget planning meetings, NGO monthly meetings, and any other meetings organized by the government to report to CSOs. The venue of the meetings is affordable, but sometimes it is not accessible for people with disabilities.

22. Are citizens able to participate in the meetings?
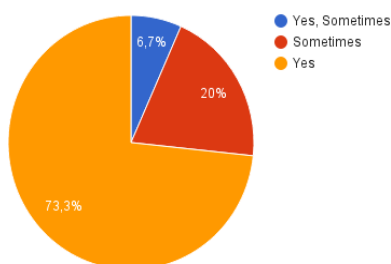
**23. Are citizens' opinions reflected in Meeting Minutes?**
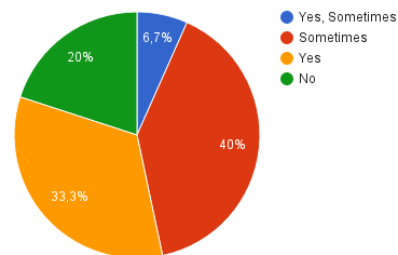
Organizers of public meetings are local governments, NGOs, political parties, and the central government. Over 90% of respondents say that the meeting agenda is prepared beforehand, and is drafted by the organizers.

Despite the fact that the overall trend on public meeting participation is positive, respondents stated that only some meetings are results-oriented. Many respondents did not answer this question. One commented: "The feeling is that if activities are not followed by some financed project…not much is getting done. A lot of resources need to be spent to create a feeling of community and networking."

One-third say that public information is provided in an appropriate and useful form (40% sometimes, 13.3% yes/sometimes).

25. Is public information provided promptly when properly requested?
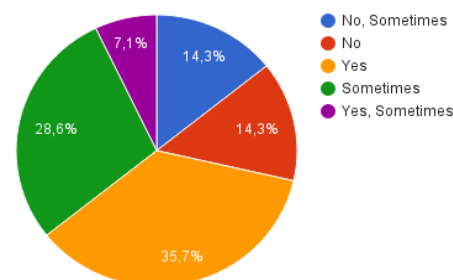

As indicated on the chart below the civil society organizations are mostly involved in Monitoring and Recommendations, with very little involvement in Implementation and Planning phases.

27. At which stage of the public administration/ decentralization reform are you involved?
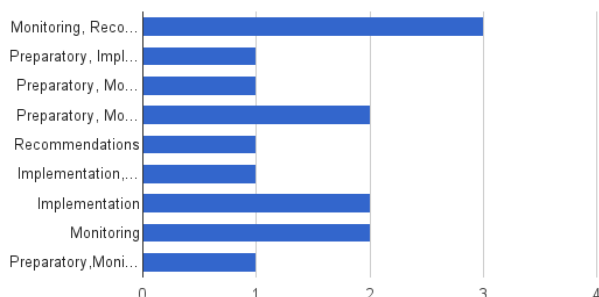
In Georgia, the most commonly used forms of civic participation are attandance at public meetings and requests for public information. Not all of these forms are used to involve citizens in the decision making process. "Usually petitions and open letters are the results of meetings led by NGOs. As regards to government, this is not the case. It is not clear if they are planning to address issues stated by the people."

30. Are citizens influencing government decisions?
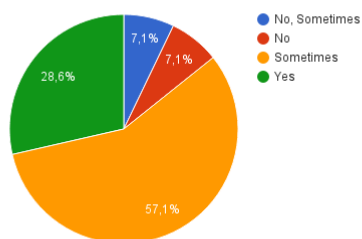
Focus group respondents think it is important for civil society to stimulate long-term projects and more financial stability to establish NGOs, and be informed and involved in different activities.

"In many European countries, such as the Baltic countries, Latvia, Riga, Estonia, public forums are held, and the population solves their problems." The respondents said that they had heard about the tools EU countries are using, like in the small town of Martin, Slovakia. In Martin, no decision is made without the involvement of the population. They have a one-space principle, and people can get information on any issue. "It is absolutely different from the example of Georgia's one-space principle". In Georgia, during the preliminary period of elections, citizens' engagement in the budget planning process is active, and differs from other times. Unfortunately, citizens are not interested in attending city council meetings.

In Armenia

According to the Armenian law on local self-government and NGOs, citizens and CSOs can participate in decision making processes. LAs are obliged to respect and implement some provisions of citizens' participation. Citizen and CSO participation includes public hearings, e-communication and social media, and online city council meetings. Currently, participatory budgeting is widely discussed, but is not widely used.

Eighty percent of respondents stated that they are aware of the laws on civic engagement in their country. Some of them take part in public hearings, open government partnerships, thematic meetings at local and national levels, evaluations of government programs, etc.

Most respondents find out about public meetings primarily via webpages and email, and secondarily through social media and personal contacts.
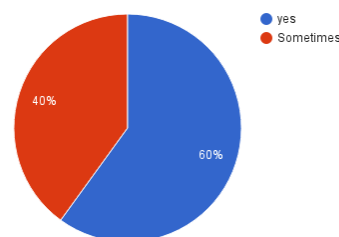
14. Are you aware of laws in your country about civic engagement?
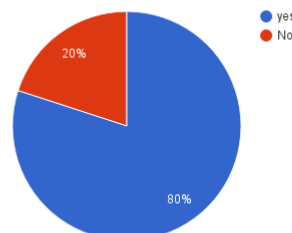
Most CSOs attend city council meetings, press conferences, interagency meetings, and international organization working groups.

23. Are citizens' opinions reflected in Meeting Minutes? –

25. Is public information provided promptly when properly requested?


They specifically mentioned attending meetings on ecological issues, election campaigns, and those

about a socio-economic, cultural, or local political topic.

Respondents evaluate positively the process of organizing public meetings. Public meetings are open for the public and CSOs, with prior notice about questions, and each citizen can express his opinion about the target problem. Mostly local government is the initiator. One hundred percent of respondents answered that the agenda is prepared beforehand. Either LAs or the organizer is in charge of drafting the agenda. Eighty percent of respondents state that they are able to contribute to the agenda. Forty percent say

25. Is public information provided promptly when properly requested?

- Sometimes
- No
- Yes

28,6%

57,1%

14,3%
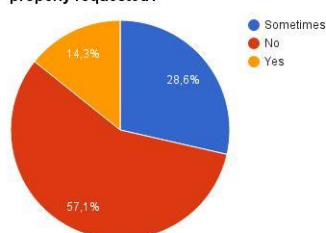
citizens sometimes are able to take part in the meetings. Sixty percent state that they have the ability to attend public meetings.

Results-oriented meetings depend on who is organizing them. Some questions are solved as a result of the meeting. Such meetings usually have positive results. As an example, there was a public hearing about trees in the city's central square, and the citizens' participation influenced the decision not to cut them.

The most discussed topic during the focus group meeting was the unsustainable city council institute. Citizens' participation is not limited to elections as those members of council are elected by the population and should serve the citizens for a certain period of time. But the council obligations are not implemented. Thus CSOs should guide the council and their everyday activities with EU support to formulate an independent council institution, policy documents, and defined salaries to engage capacity building of the councils.
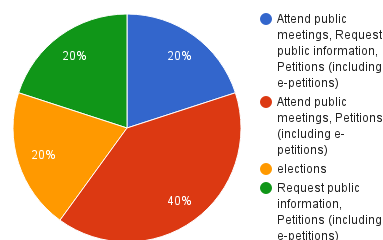
In order to enhance local democracy, the well-proven tools and procedures of citizens' participation, including local referendums and popular initiatives, should be promoted. LAs

should seek opportunities to stimulate local residents' interest in their work and achievements as there is a lack of trust and confidence by citizens in LA and CSO work.

About 70% state that sometimes public information is provided in appropriate and useful form.

Civil society is mostly engaged in the Recommendation stage. The most popular form of participation is attending public meetings, followed by the request of public information. Petitions are seen as a tool for civic engagement.

28. Which forms of civic participation are mostly used by citizens in your country?

20%

20%

20%

40%

- Attend public meetings, Request public information, Petitions (including e-petitions)
- Attend public meetings, Petitions (including e-petitions)
- elections
- Request public information, Petitions (including e-petitions)

Ninety percent of respondents believe that citizens can influence government decisions only sometimes. Two examples were provided: one about ecological issues and the second about the Electric Yerevan Protest Transportation tickets.
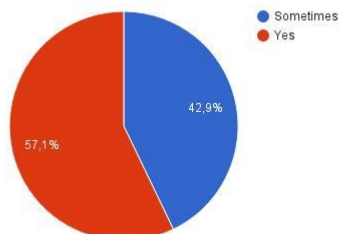
In Ukraine

22. Are the citizens able to participate in the meetings?
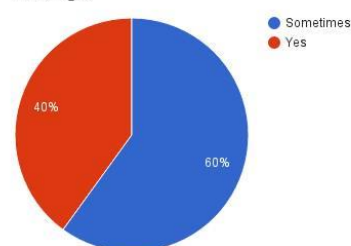
- Sometimes
- Yes

40%

60%

One hundred percent of respondents stated that they are aware of the laws on civic engagement in their country. They participate in public hearings, meetings, and consultative councils. Email, telephone calls, and personal contacts are the main sources for getting information about public hearings. NGOs are usually the organizer. The meeting agenda is prepared beforehand, and organizers are in charge of it. Ninety percent of respondents believe that they can contribute to the

agenda. Citizens can take part in public meetings sometimes (60%) or always (40%). More than half of respondents say that citizens' attitudes are reflected in the meeting minutes. It is difficult to determine if meetings are results-oriented. Attendance at public meetings, requests of public information, and petitions are common forms of participation.

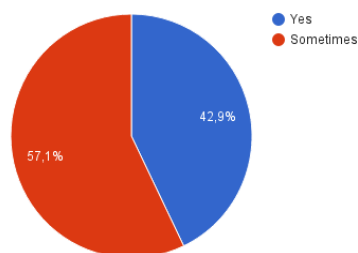**23. Are citizens' opinions reflected in Meeting Minutes?**

Public information is not provided promptly and properly according to the majority, and only sometimes is it useful.

Citizens are influencing government decisions sometimes (71.4%) or yes (28.6%).

In Moldova

One hundred percent of respondents are aware of the laws on civic engagement in their country. They take part in consultative councils, public hearings, and policy drafting. Email is the primary way to get information about public hearings, followed by websites, television, and other types of social media. All respondents stated that the agenda is prepared beforehand, and organizers are in charge of it. The majority of organizations believe that they can contribute to the agenda.

**22. Are citizens able to participate in the meetings?**

Only one-third of respondents say that citizens' opinions are reflected in meeting minutes.

When asked whether the meetings are results-oriented, answers contradicted each other. It is very hard to see a trend when respondents said:

a)   most of them are organized just to show that they were organized;
b)   in most of the cases meetings are results-oriented;
c)   mostly meetings are not results-oriented; and
d)   sometimes a more theoretical approach is focused on concrete inputs and deliverables.

One hundred percent of respondents state that only sometimes public information is provided on time and in a proper form.

**23. Are citizens' opinions reflected in Meeting Minutes?**
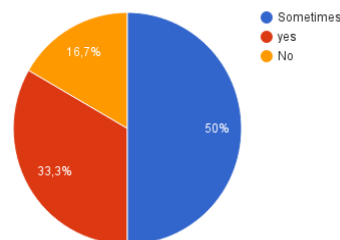
Civil Society is involved in PAR and decentralization reform on Implementation, Recommendation, and Monitoring stages.
Public meetings, petitions, and requests for public information are the most used forms of citizen participation. Only some of them are used to involve citizens in the decision making process.

In Belarus

Seventy-two percent of respondents are aware of the laws on civic engagement in their country.

14. Are you aware of laws on civic engagement in your country?
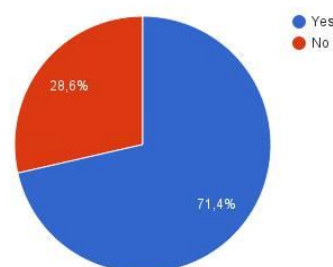
Respondents get information about public meetings from webpages, Facebook, email,

telephone calls, social media, and personal contacts with organizations. They attend: meetings with community residents; have public discussions with the participation of residents, experts, and representatives of the authorities; public lectures; public hearings; conferences; concerts; they initiate some meetings; and attend any other meetings organized to report to the civil society.

In general, the venue of any meeting is available to citizens, but it is not accessible for persons with disabilities (e.g., no ramps into the building, no elevator for meetings above the ground floor, etc.).
Sometimes, meetings are restricted if they are held in a military town, which is inaccessible to people who do not live in it.

One respondent said that at a public hearing on the construction of a nuclear power plant in Ostrovets few years ago, environmental activists were prevented from expressing their evaluation and opinion.

One hundred percent of respondents say that the meeting agenda is prepared beforehand, and it is drafted by the organizers.

A majority of respondents (57.1%) believe that they can contribute items to the agenda. Less than half (42.9%) state that citizens can participate in public meetings, and others think that citizens can only sometimes participate in public meetings.
One hundred percent of respondents agree that citizens' opinions are only sometimes reflected in meeting minutes.
Despite the fact that the overall trend on participation issues is positive, respondents stated that most often they are formal, and their purpose is not to obtain advisory results.

"Citizens Assembly in accordance with the laws do not make decisions that are binding. These solutions are referred to the local Council of Deputies or local executive committee, which is only required by law to consider them. It all depends on how much the decision of the meeting (i.e., the decision of citizens) agrees with the interests of the local representative or executive body. The only thing that is required of the

Deputies of the Council or Executive Committee, is to inform the citizens of the facts before the meeting of their own decisions and the decision taken as a result of discussion with the assembly of citizens."


26. Is public information provided in an appropriate and useful form?

- Yes 14,3%
- Sometimes 57,1%
- No 28,6%
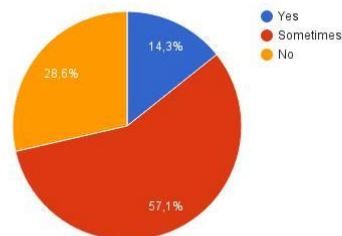
Only 14.3% say that public information is provided promptly, and 57.1% say sometimes it is promptly provided.

CSOs are mostly involved in Monitoring and Recommendations, with very little involvement in the Implementation and Planning stages.

27. At what stage of the public administration/ decentralization reform are you involved?
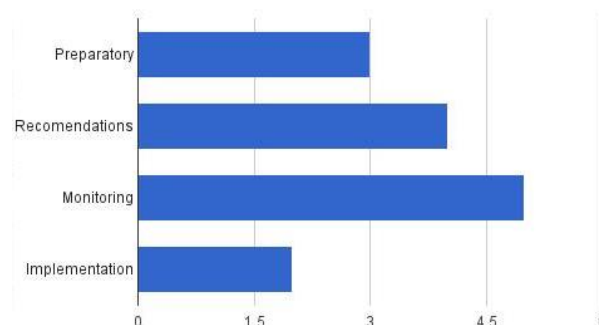
The most used forms of civic participation are petitions (including e-petitions) and requests for public information, even though a majority (71.4%) thinks that these forms are not used to involve citizens in the decision making process.

"1) Public meetings are held regularly and in most cases carried out on the initiative of local authorities in order to push through a decision favorable to the authorities. The citizens have no real levers of influence on the decision.
"If a meeting is initiated by the citizens, the authorities may not authorize the holding of this meeting. If it is unfavorable from the point of view of the discussed solutions or bureaucratic methods, authorities may propose another solution during the actual meeting, or initiate an appearance at the meeting via proxies. Therefore,

citizens are often skeptical about the conduct of such meetings.

"2) Civilian Advisory Councils are not used, because power on the one hand (in the absence of a proper democratic and of a supertsentralizatsii control system) does not experience the need to create such boards. On the other hand, the authorities are afraid of creating such advice, because they are not sure that only persons loyal to the current government will participate, so it is not democratically-minded, and it is "inconvenient" for the authorities' citizens.

"3) The collection of signatures, in accordance with legislation, requires the mandatory indication of citizen personal data (address, and sometimes a passport number, place of work, school). The conditions are not democratic, and often repressive. This scares citizens and puts pressure on them and their family members from the government by creating difficulties at work, school, etc. In this context, citizens prefer not to sign the petitions."
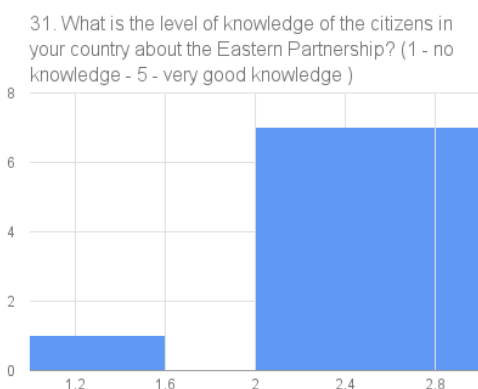
30. Are citizens influencing decisions?

- No
- Sometimes

33,3%

66,7%
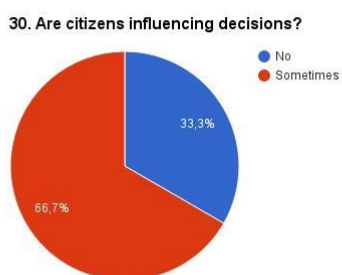
4. Knowledge about the Eastern Partnership

In Georgia

Television and social media were marked as the most important sources of information which would be effective to increase awareness.
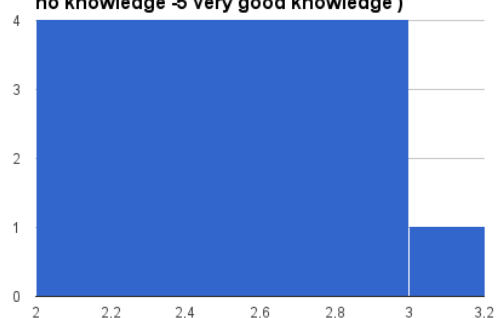
2.4/5.0.

31. What is the level of knowledge of the citizens in your country about the Eastern Partnership? (1 - no knowledge - 5 - very good knowledge)

In Armenia

The focus group report states: "Currently, citizens are less aware of EaP countries and the projects implemented within the program. CSOs that are involved in the National Platforms of CSF of EP contribute only in the form of statements and meetings. Correspondingly, the media has a bilateral approach towards those CSOs and EaP. If the institution is national, it should not be globalized. Platform creation was initiated by a group of CSOs without consideration of majority opinions and feedback, including the media."

Television advertisements and social media are the best ways to disseminate information.

2.2/5.0.

31. What is the level of knowledge of the citizens in your country about Eastern Partnership? (1 - no knowledge -5 very good knowledge)
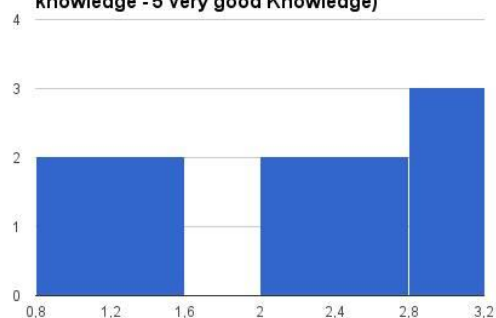
In Ukraine

Social media is the most popular way to disseminate information, followed by television advertisements and public meetings with the citizens.
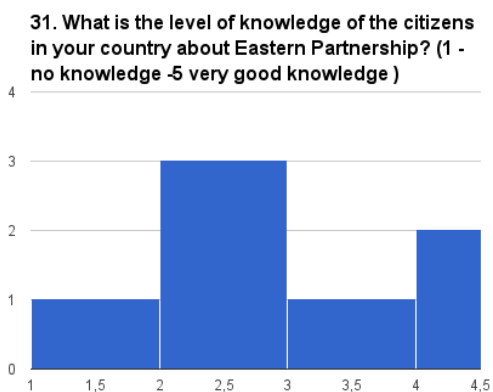
2.0/5.0.

31. What is the level of the citizens in your country about Eastern Partnership? (!-no knowledge - 5 very good Knowledge)

In Moldova

Television advertisements and social media were named as the main sources for effective information dissemination

2.5/5.0

31. What is the level of knowledge of the citizens in your country about Eastern Partnership? (1 - no knowledge -5 very good knowledge)

In Belarus

Every option for disseminating information was marked by every respondent.

2.0/5.0

31. What is the level of knowledge of the citizens in your country about Eastern Partnership? (1- no knowledge - very good knowledge)

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3. Key Findings and Trends

All five countries' representatives stated that their geopolitical situation is either non-stable or fragile. A majority of them agreed that this influences civil society development in their countries.

It is notable that the representatives referred to the conflicts (such as Nagorno-Karabakh, or annexation of Crimea) and Russian influence as a factor of their non-stable/fragile geopolitical situation. As an example, Georgian respondents stated that Georgia has always faced geopolitical threats, but today this issue is more exaggerated due to Russia's aggressive policy towards Georgia. They also mentioned that the Georgian government has a vague policy towards Russia, because they are trying to balance EU integration with not aggravating Russia. Armenian respondents admitted that "under these circumstances, the role of civil society is crucial. The Nagorno-Karabakh issue creates a non-stable situation in the country, therefore peace-oriented projects, cultural understanding, and conflict transformation issues [are] of utmost importance."

A majority of the representatives described their civil society as partially developed and weak. The threats to civil society development are:

- Lack of educational courses on NGO management
- Lack of funding
- Lack of civic activism
- Corruption
- Legislation

One hundred percent of respondents agree that modern tools of communication are playing a vital role in civil society development. Respondents stated that social media is a good way to manage people and quickly spread information. Many forms of modern communication are free. It is extremely cost efficient to use a Skype video or phone conference with partners instead of everyone traveling to another city. All the respondents named Facebook as the social media used for communication and public relations.

The majority updates their information once or twice a week, or when events occur. Belarus was the only country who reported that Facebook was followed in popularity by the Russian language social media "Vkontaqte."

Except for Armenia, the respondents stated that they have planned a campaign via social media, and believe it is a good way to approach society.

A large majority of respondents agree that EU countries do support civil society development, and this support is significant and effective. Notably, the percentage of respondents who think that EU support is effective and significant is much lower in Ukraine than in any other country (only 57.1%). It should be highlighted that despite the fact that almost all respondents are aware of the support, not all of them feel they have information about the financial support of EU countries.

The following countries and institutions were named as donors: Germany, Great Britain, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, European Commission, the European Endowment for Democracy, PASOS, and Sida.

Respondents provided recommendations toward improving the effectiveness of EU funding. Support is primarily focused on big and strong NGOs. Often the same NGOs receive funding from the EU, because they have the financial capacity to provide co-funding for the large grant amounts offered by the EU. This situation could be improved by diversifying the topics of projects and offering smaller grant amounts which can be accessed and assimilated by small-to-medium-sized SCOs.

All respondents are aware of the laws on civic engagement in their countries. The most used

form of public participation is attendance at public meetings and requests of public information. Everyone states that citizens are able to attend public meetings, but the majority states that citizens only "sometimes" influence decisions. Public information is usually provided promptly when properly requested, but only "sometimes" in a useful form.

Information about public meetings is primarily found on web pages, via email, on social media, or by phone calls. All respondents state that the meeting agenda is prepared before the meeting by the meeting organizers. Local authorities and NGOs were named as organizers of public meetings.

The level of knowledge of citizens about the EaP, on a scale of 1 (no knowledge) to 5 (complete knowledge) was described as from 2.0 max to 2.5 points.

Television and social media were indicated as the most important vehicles for information dissemination to increase awareness.

More on recommendations and per country description you can find here;

4. Recommendations

Survey participants recommend more communication from their governments (local/central) to help reform the public administration/decentralization process in order to gain the trust of citizens.

This communication can take the form of more open and transparent dialogues, social media information campaigns that involve as many stakeholders as possible, organizing meetings that involve more citizen participation, public debates, and public hearings that consider citizens' needs.

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