

Association of the Local Democracy Agencies

ACSOBE: ACTING • SOCIAL • RIGHTS • IN • BELARUS

This book was published by The Association of Local Democracy Agencies

with the support of



MUNICIPALITY OF MONFALCONE



AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE OF TRENTO



MUNICIPAL TRAINING CENTRE



AID PROGRAMME ADVISORY CENTRE



LEV SAPIEHA FOUNDATION

Supported also by the Voluntary Contribution of Italy, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe



Association of the Local Democracy Agencies

Contact

Director: Antonella Valmorbida

antonella.valmorbida@aldaintranet.org

Tel. +39 335 5236341

External relations: Stefania Toriello

stefania.toriello@aldaintranet.org

Tel. +39 347 350 9887

www.alda-europe.eu

Office in Strasbourg

ALDA c/o Council of Europe

European Palace - 67000 Strasbourg (FR)

Tel. 0033 3 90214593 - Fax + 33 3 90 21 55 17

Office in Brussels

ALDA, Rue des Confédérés 47

1040 Brussels (BE) Tel: 0032 2 7420161

Office in Italy

ALDA, Viale Mazzini 225 - 36100 Vicenza (IT)

Tel: 0039 0444 540146 - Fax: 0039 0444 231043

Office in Serbia

ALDA c/o LDA Subotica

Trg Cara Jovana Nenada 15 - 24000 Subotica (SRB)

Tel. 00381 24 554 587 - Fax 00381 24 553 116



EUROPEAN UNION



This document has been produced with the financial support of the European Union. The contents are those of the Association of the Local Democracy Agencies and its partners and can therefore under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union

Imprint

This brochure was published by
The Association of Local Democracy Agencies

Texts written by all partners

Chapters 2 and 7 written by Stefania Toriello

Coordination and texts arranged by Stefania Toriello

Proofreading in English by Stanka Parac

Translations into Russian by Lev Sapieha Foundation

Layout Gipsi - Comunicare cooperando

ACSOBE: Acting Social Rights in Belarus

| | | |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Introduction | 4 |
| 2 | Belarus: a difficult country in Europe | 8 |
| 3 | Social and cultural rights in Belarus | 14 |
| 4 | The project ACSOBE | 26 |
| 5 | Exchange of best practice to foster democracy in Belarus | 28 |
| 6 | Successful experiences of cooperation between NGO-s and local authorities | 32 |
| 7 | Conclusions | 44 |
| 8 | Overview of the ACSOBE Partners | 46 |



The Association of Local Democracy Agencies appointed me as the coordinator of the project ACSOBE in October 2006. The programme ended up in March 2008. In the course of 18 months, I had a chance to visit Belarus several times. It was a tremendously interesting experience. I had the opportunity to meet human rights activists and to get an idea of the situation in Belarus.

When one lands at the Minsk airport and only drives across the city by taxi, there is a strong impression that the social control is very high. The Police cannot be seen anywhere, but a feeling that they are everywhere is strong and, as if they are ready to respond to any action that might be considered as against the government. Belarusian authorities implement a strictly centralized model of government, which prevent any social, economic, cultural and, most important, democratic development in the Belarusian society. I met a number of students who told me that they were witnesses of harassments against the individuals being expelled from the University, or excessive use of force against those who would participate in public manifestations (even in peaceful demonstrations). It is well known that many students leave Belarus in order to go to study to Poland or Lithuania, or other countries if possible. The University teachers who addressed “too advanced” lessons on administrative law, lost their job. The same happened to political opponents to the regime.

ALDA, who is working to promote democracy and human rights since 1993, started to expand its activities in Caucasus in 2005. In particular, in Belarus, our project “ACSOBE” was very much focused on social and cultural rights and on the strengthening civil society and to set up the basis for cooperation among local authorities and NGOs. Most of the population, who was educated in the Soviet time, is still not educated in the field of social and cultural rights. State policy understands social and cultural rights as a political topic. Low level or a total absence of participation has become evident, while there is a lack in promoting social and cultural rights and even more, specific knowledge about how to promote and to protect the rights of vulnerable groups in everyday life. Last but not least, the actual political situation in Belarus generally does not favour positive relations among NGOs and local authorities.

The core problem we met, during the implementation of the activities was that the Government did not seem to be in favour of the project itself. Our local partner, Lev Sapiuha Foundation, faced different difficulties. First, they rarely succeeded in involving local authorities in the project (only in Orsha). Moreover, they had to leave the apartment where their office was

located since the rent fee was arisen. They also encountered many obstacles in finding a venue for the first training, which was held near Minsk. They presume there are political reasons behind these two facts. For these reasons the partners of the project, upon the request of Lev Sapieha Foundation, decided not to give much visibility to the project on the Internet to avoid any kind of reprisal. Moreover it was decided not to start up the procedure to register the project, which is compulsory according to Belarus law, in order to make the State aware of all the funds, which are entering into the country. This decision was due to not take the risk of waiting more than one year and not seeing the project's registration refused.

Despite all these difficulties, the project achieved a number of tangible results: One training and five networking meetings among NGOs in three pilot countryside areas (Grodno, around 200 km West from Minsk; Gomel: around 300 Km South East from Minsk; Orsha: around 200 Km East from Minsk; Verhnedvinsk). 48 NGOs and 120 people were reached thanks to the activities.

It has to be mentioned that the participants appreciated all the meetings since their capacities for social and cultural rights, on civic initiative methods were deeply improved. Reciprocal



Exchange of best practice with the municipality of Monfalcone, Minsk March 2008



knowledge and networking among the NGOs who attended were encouraged. Moreover, during the last training, the basis for a strong network of local NGOs were put in place. There was an interaction and active exchange among the participants, enriching each individual and giving a chance to the participants to elaborate ideas for a future project.

Another interesting approach of our project was the fact that the municipality of Monfalcone (Italy) participated to some meetings. This fact was seen by the local population with enthusiasm, and allowed an exchange views on how local authorities in Italy involve citizens and civil society organizations in the decision making process at local level. Moreover Monfalcone promoted the project at local level in order to raise the awareness of the situation in Belarus, which is not that considered by the mass media.

During the meetings I had an impression that the civil society is really demanding a change. People seem to be eager to receive information and seek ways for getting out from isolation. They strongly demand on one side to travel abroad and visit other countries in order to exchange experiences, and on the other, to start up civic initiatives in order to contribute to change their own country. Moreover, it is amazing how, despite the negative government attitude, there are many citizens who gather together, organize themselves in order to promote civic initiatives and participation to solve local problems.

ALDA, in the context of its commitment for promoting good governance and human rights, after the project ACSOBE is increasingly active in Caucasus areas (started with two project in Belarus in 2004 and with the launching of LDA in Kutaisi, Georgia in 2005) and wishes to reinforce its activities in Belarus. At the moment, there is a strong commitment in order to find new financial resources to launch new activities in the country, based on the previous experience. Since there is a strong demand from Belarus NGOs to establish and an LDA in Belarus, this possibility will be in future evaluated by ALDA together with the Council of Europe. Furthermore, ALDA's main focus will be to strengthen the role of grass-root organizations. Their participation remains essential in developing and implementing local sustainable development strategies, while the promotion of their interaction with local governments helps fostering local democracy in support to achieving a more democratic society in Belarus. We are aware that if we succeeded in realizing some initiatives, it is because our partners in Belarus are not so in opposition with the Government. We do believe that a persistent work with grassroots organizations and acting also at institutional level, with a more delicate approach



Inauguration of the condominium

is an efficient way to get more results. We do believe in small drops, which are the ones that at the end contribute to make the ocean.

Stefania Toriello,
Responsible of the ALDA external relations
Co-ordinator of the project ACSOBE



The Republic of Belarus is a young state, created after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its declaration of state sovereignty was adopted by the Parliament in 1990, followed by the passage of the Constitution in March 1994. According to the Constitution, Belarus is a sovereign democratic social state where the rule of law prevails. The Constitution establishes the separation of powers and the institution of the presidency as both head of state and the head of executive power in the country. The mass media call the country “the last dictatorship in Europe” since the government of the President Lukashenka is tightening its authoritarian control over the country. Between 1995 and 1996, the Republic experienced a period of political crisis, manifested in the confrontation between the President and Parliament. In November 1996, Lukashenka initiated a national referendum in support of his policies, as a result of which a new version of the Constitution was adopted, stipulating a bicameral Parliament, the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus. While the president is no longer the head of executive power under the amended Constitution, that prerogative belongs to the Government, namely, the Cabinet of Ministers. Nevertheless, as the head of state, the President has not only preserved, but also expanded his powers-legislative, organizational, staffing and control-over the functioning of executive bodies. These powers extend to issues of territorial management. The President has broad competencies in regulating the administrative-territorial structure of the state and enjoys the authority to establish or dissolve oblasts and rayon, to determine or change their borders, to create or dissolve city districts and to combine administrative-territorial units into a single administrative centre.

Geographically, Belarus is located in the heart of Europe, between Poland and Russia, and is traversed by major East-West transportation routes. This is not, however, reflected in the degree to which the state is included in European coordination and integration processes. Al-



Interactive exercises among the participants during the training session near Minsk, June 2007

though Belarus has been included in the European Neighbourhood Programme (ENP), the involvement of Belarus in Europe remains marginal. As other former Soviet republics, Belarus suffers the competition of external political actors: on the one hand, the EU and the US and, on the other hand, Russia. But at variance with Georgia or Ukraine and Moldova, Belarus has not undertaken any political or economic reforms. Within the country the opposition forces are still too weak and fragmented to promote a veritable change. Large strata of

the population are quite satisfied with the current situation and fear that any reforms may provoke hard social consequences. Lukashenka's abuses are then tolerated in the name of security and stability. So far the slight breaches of the regime have been caused by market logic. In particular, Russian decision to increase gas prices might in future destabilize the whole Lukashenka's model. As far as the relations with the EU are concerned, it is well known that Belarus is not aspiring to a membership or to a closer cooperation. Additionally, the ENP seems unfit to eventually sustain Belarus transition to market economy considering, in particular, the high social costs it implies in a still "socialist" country.

Development of cooperation with the Council of Europe, as well as obtaining full membership in the Organization, has been one of the priorities of the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus. The path of good relations between Belarus and CoE has never been easy. On the 16th September 1992 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has granted the special guest status to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus. On 12 March 1993 Belarus has applied for membership in the Council of Europe. But, since the Belarus national legislation still provided for death penalty and the national authorities persecuted the opponents to the totalitarian regime, the status of special observer was revoked. In January 1997 the Bureau of the Assembly decided to suspend the special guest status of the Parliament of Belarus, which was also some kind of reaction for the results of the national referendum in 1996. Consideration of Belarus application for membership in the Council of Europe was suspended and bilateral programmes of cooperation were frozen. Today Belarus is the only European nation, which is not member of the Council of Europe, since it does not fulfil the requirements of protection of human rights, democratic system with multi party parliament and respect of rule of law.

On the other side, it was possible to insure cooperation with the Council of Europe within the framework of a number of Conventions to which Belarus is a party, firstly to the European Cultural Convention. It allows Belarusian experts to attend the sessions of the specialized committees and working groups covering a wide range of activities. In addition to the above-mentioned Convention, the Republic of Belarus is also a participant to the European Convention on Information on Foreign Law and its Additional Protocol, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region and the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption. Activities in the field of the environmental protection in the Republic of Belarus have been highly appreciated by the Council of Europe. The Republic of Belarus is the only non-member state awarded the European Diploma of Protected Areas. The diploma was awarded to the Berezinsky reserve in 1995, and to the National Park "Belavezhskaya Pustcha" in 1997. The Council of Europe grants the diploma to the territories, which are particularly important in respect to their natural heritage and which are adequately protected (now 22 Council of Europe member states have been awarded by this diploma). The result of recent initiatives from the Belarusian side was the resumption of dialogue between the Republic of Belarus and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council



of Europe (PACE). Since 2001 the delegation of the National Assembly regularly are invited at the occasion of the PACE sessions. Within the framework of improvement of the National Assembly activities directed to bring Belarusian legislation in compliance with the Council of Europe criteria on 30 May 2002., parliamentary hearings have taken place with the participation of the PACE representatives. As a result of these hearings the Parliament has elaborated concrete recommendations. Further more, the Congress which long contributed to the establishment of ALDA and is supporting its activities, has recently granted observer status to the Council for Co-operation of Local self- governance bodies under the Council of Republic of the National Assembly. Meanwhile, the Congress has close and longstanding relations with the Sapieha Foundation which already enjoyed observer status with the Congress.

Over the past eight years, the CoE is trying to engage in a dialogue with the authorities, the opposition and civil society, including students. The perspective is to encourage democratic development and promote Council of Europe values in the country; to address the main concerns of the Parliamentary Assembly with regard to Belarus, including the functioning of the opposition, free and fair elections, imprisonment for allegedly political reasons, freedom of expression and the death penalty; to discuss areas and methods of possible concrete assistance programmes to Belarus.

The dialogue is to start also because of increasingly cold relations between Belarus and Russia, which has withdrawn some of the economic support that has helped shore up Lukashenka's government. It seems that it is not in the interests of Belarus to remain isolated. It seems from the Belarusian part that there is more willingness now from the authorities to move closer to European structures, in particular the Council of Europe. The Belarusian Government is showing interest in a dialogue, but it seems that any improvement in relations with Europe would not come



A Participant to the training in Minsk, June 2007

at the expense of ties with Russia, which is considered a strategic partner of the country. Nevertheless, the future status of Belarus within the Council of Europe is still an open issue.

Lukashenka does not recognize nor allow any forms of democracy, practically, there is no self-government in this country. The country is divided into two parts: supporters of Lukashenka and his regime, and supporters of democracy and democratic governance.

In all state, regional and local governments - in administrations by 99% - there are people of Lukashenka (anti-democracy people), while in local councils (and in very few cases in administrations) there are quite a few people with knowledge and skills necessary for implementing the methods of democratic governance. They underline also the absence of any regional policy; the only plans mentioned by the government were written when the country was ruled by the Soviet Union.

The Constitution contains a number of principles and norms intended to guarantee the development and strengthening of democracy in Belarus. However, the Constitution does not contain provisions to clearly determine either the political and legal nature of local government or its place in the system of public administration. Nor does the Constitution establish the status of local communities as legal subjects or even discuss the autonomy of local governments over issues within their competence. Furthermore, there is no constitutionally established right to judicial protection for self-governments if state bodies pass illegal acts. Local governments are not even granted the recourse of initiating legal proceedings in the Constitutional Court.

Public administration in Belarus is divided into four types of administrative-territorial unit, including the central government; regions and districts; large and medium cities; and villages, townships (municipalities) and small towns. Many local communities have no autonomy, neither elected bodies or a local budget. Even in cases where the local elected bodies do exist, their independence and a factual impact in resolving the local issues are usually symbolic, as is the involvement of local residents themselves. The administrative apparatus dominates the political landscape and is created by the central government according to a strict hierarchy. The president directly appoints the heads of regional executive committees and approves the appointment of heads of district executive committees. Local executive bodies are not accountable to either the local representative branch or local citizens. Legal basis of the local and regional administration in Belarus is granted by the Law on Local Government and Self-governance (adopted in 2000), which is together with the government's policies firmly oriented towards the bureaucratisation and centralization of local government. Belarus has numerous forms of community self-government, such as committees established in neighbourhoods, village committees, street and house committees, elders in the rural localities and even elders in apartment blocks. These units have the right to submit proposals to the local authorities and participate in the subsequent discussion on those issues, although the local councils and executive committees would never assign these institutions the right to autonomously resolve any issue on behalf of the local government. The role of community organizations has not been reinforced to any further extent, due to their own lack of professionally trained staff and shortage of funds as well as conservatism among local government bodies.

Under the centralized system of government, which prevails in Belarus, there are no factual



preconditions for the development of public initiative and the effective participation of citizens at local level. Citizen participation in local decision-making is very low. The institution of local referenda is recognized by the law, however no local referendum has yet been held in Belarus. The right of citizens to attend even the open council sessions is not guaranteed by law since the respective regulations stipulate that individuals must be invited in order to attend.

The role of NGOs is also very limited due to the system described above and to the obstacles coming from the state authorities. Although some NGOs are involved in the development of self-government and local democracy, they are very few. An increasing number of NGOs is deprived of the right to register. About two thirds of all NGOs in the country are not able to obtain an official registration. Moreover, the projects, financed by the foreign donors are submitted under the regime of a strict control. These projects including a certain amount of funds entering into the country, should be registered. Of course, it is an extremely difficult procedure to get this registration. In addition, a preventive detention is increasingly used in order to hinder such initiatives.

The Lukashenka regime systematically curtails press freedom. Only about 10% of the population has an access to independent media. Libel is both a civil and a criminal offence. State media are subordinated to the president, and harassment and censorship of independent media are very frequent. Belarusian national television is completely under the control and influence of the state and does not provide coverage of alternative and opposition views. The State Press Committee issues warnings to publishers for unauthorized activities such as distributing copies abroad or reporting on unregistered organizations; it also can arbitrarily shut down publications without a court order. The news bulletins and daily play lists of all FM radio stations are censored. Only about 30% of the population uses Internet regularly and Internet sites within the country are under the control of the government's State Centre on Information Security, which is part of the Security Council, and their impact is limited. The authorities have filed criminal cases against bloggers and online media sites for alleged defamation and slander.

Regulations introduced in August 2005 ban foreign assistance to NGOs, parties, and individuals who promote "meddling in the internal affairs" of Belarus from abroad. Independent trade unions are subject to harassment, and their leaders are frequently arrested and prosecuted for peaceful protests and dismissed from employment.

Although the country's constitution calls for judicial independence, courts are subject to significant government influence. The right to a fair trial is often not respected in cases with political overtones. The police in Belarus use excessive force. Human rights groups continue to document instances of beatings, torture, and inadequate protection during detention in cases involving leaders of the democratic opposition.

An internal passport system, in which a passport is required for domestic travel and to se-

cure permanent housing, limits freedom of movement and choice of residence. Lukashenka lifted a requirement for citizens to obtain a travel permit before going abroad, effective from the beginning of 2008. At the same time, the government created a database that will include nearly 100,000 people who cannot leave the country. The country's command economy severely limits economic freedom.

Ethnic groups and Roma often face discrimination. Women are not specifically targeted for discrimination, but there are significant discrepancies in income between men and women, and women are poorly represented in leading government positions. As a result of extreme poverty, many women have become victims of the international sex-trafficking trade.

Democratic reform is required in order for social and cultural rights to be promoted and protected, and civil society must be strengthened. However, political instability and the absence of strong, democratic institutions impede such reform. More economic freedom could mean more political freedom, gradually leading to a democratic regime. According to some analyses, contrary to the process of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe, the pattern in Belarus might be reversed, while the economic liberalization could boost the political reforms as it might be anticipated in case of the so-called Asian tigers. But, it is evident as, in the context of today's Belarus, an essential condition for further social and economic progress in the country is creating democratic governance at all levels of government, assuring the implementation of democratic reforms for a better future of the country. It is also fundamental to strengthen the role of grass-root organizations in order to develop and implement local sustainable development strategies and to promote their interaction with local governments.

It is these issues that the 'Acting Social and Cultural Rights in Belarus' (ACSOBE) project sought to address through a series of organized activities. This booklet will set out in some detail the objectives and results of this pilot action, as well as provide practical information on the implementation of such a project. Finally, it will illustrate best practice emerged by the exchange of experiences held during the activities of the project. These best practices will be a useful instrument at disposal of the readers as a good example to learn from.



Participants during the training session near Minsk, June 2007





Winter at the condominium

Belarus has signed and ratified several international treaties on the subject of social and cultural rights of citizens, including the United Nations' International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and others by the International Labour Organization. However, as Belarus is not a member of the Council of Europe it is not a party to the European Social Charter. The Constitution of Belarus determines certain economic, social, and cultural rights including the right to work and to a fair remuneration, to join a trade union, to enjoy rest from work, to social security, to education, to use one's native language and choose a language of communication, and to partake in cultural activities. However, despite these legal instruments, the situation concerning social and cultural rights in Belarus is inadequate.

Trade unions' freedoms are severely restricted in Belarus: a recent report of the ILO Commission of Inquiry concluded that the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus is not independent, and that basic civil liberties of trade union members and leaders, in particular the right to freedom of opinion, expression, and assembly, have been seriously infringed.

The overwhelming majority is employed in State-owned enterprises and is submitted to a fixed-term contract system. At the end of a contract term, one can be dismissed without any reason. "Political disloyalty" which is, in fact, the reason for most dismissals, is decided by "deputy managers for ideological work", whose main responsibility is to control the participation of workers in actions organized by the political opposition and check subscriptions to independent media. Regular "days of political education" have been introduced to ensure "a proper understanding" of the President's policies. According to the law, the Labour Contract is an agreement signed between the employee and employer, under which the employee undertakes to execute a certain work in one or more professions, specialities and positions of the

appropriate qualification according to the staff list as well as to comply with the internal labour regulations. On his side the employer undertakes to ensure labour conditions foreseen by the labour legislation, local regulatory acts and agreements between the parties, as well as to pay to the employee his/her salary/wage in due time. The “Labour Agreement” has been in practice since the 80s – 90s. It was connected above all with the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. New quite different labour conditions emerged. Higher salaries/wages and social benefits were proposed to the workers in order to assign specialists to jobs in contaminated areas or to prevent from outflow thereof from such areas. It is worth to mention that following categories of employees are included in specific provisions of the Labour Agreements:

- a) directors of any legal entities;
- b) government employees;
- c) research workers;
- d) workers employed abroad;
- e) migrant workers.

In Belarus the labour employment system is governed by:

- the Labour Code of the Republic of Belarus, dated July 26, 1999 (hereinafter LC);
- Decree No. 29 of the President of the Republic of Belarus, dated June 26, 1999, On Additional Measures for Improving Labour Relations, Strengthening Labor and Executive Discipline (hereinafter Decree No. 29).

The following two kinds of labour employment are provided for in LC:

- the unlimited Labour Contract – i.e. a labour contract entered into with the employee for an indefinite time;
- the fixed-term Labour Contract – i.e. a contract entered into for execution of a certain work which is not of a permanent nature.

Decree No. 29 was adopted simultaneously with LC and introduced (as against LC) another form of the term Labour Contract. According to Decree No. 29, the term Labour Agreement (Contract) may be signed for execution of any work, which is of a permanent nature.

Thus, two documents conflicting with each other are in force in Belarus. At present, all employers are guided in their activities by Decree No. 29.

The following elements distinguish the Labour Agreement from the customary Labour Contract:

1. The Labour Agreement always refers to a limited period of time, while the Labour Contract may be signed for an indefinite period.
2. The Labour Agreement contains certain peculiarities as compared to general norms of the labour legislation. Such peculiarities can both improve or deteriorate legal status of the em-



ployee as against general norms of the labour legislation. Temporary nature of the Labour Agreement, impossibility for the employee to discharge of his/her own accord, inclusion of additional grounds for termination of the Labour Agreement on the employer's initiative, special cases of non-awarding bonuses to the worker shall be deemed the peculiar features which deteriorate employee's status. Nevertheless, deterioration of the employee's legal status due to the Labour Agreement exists to the extent it is permitted by the laws of labour agreements. It means that no ground for termination of the Labour Agreement may be provided therein if such ground is not stipulated in the Labour Code, Decree No. 29 or other legislation. Also certain provisions improving legal status of the employee as against general norms of the labour legislation are included in the Labour Agreement: extra leave for the period of up to 5 days, up to 5% tariff rate increase, other labour incentive measures may be provided for.

3. Labour Agreement provides, that it should be terminated ahead of schedule due to non-fulfilment or improper fulfilment of its terms by fault of the employer, a minimum compensation shall be payable to the employee for deterioration of his/her legal status. But such criterion does not apply to the persons to whom labour pensions are paid (except for disability pension and pension for loss of a breadwinner).

Decree No. 29 has entitled the employers to enter into Labour Agreements with any workers. It is allowed to sign the Labour Agreement both with newly employed workers and with the workers who have been employed earlier under the unlimited Labour Contract – through a special procedure, namely: change of material labour conditions. Article 2 of Decree No. 29 specifies mandatory conditions which shall be included in the provisions of the Labour Agreement: time and regularity of salary/wage payment, additional incentive measures in the form of incentive extra leave up to 5 calendar days, tariff rate increase, and about 10 new additional grounds for early termination of the Labour Agreement on the employer's initiative.

In pursuance of Decree No. 29, two important Ordinances of the Government were adopted in relation to Labour Agreements entered into with any employees.

By Ordinance of the Council of Ministers No. 1180 dated August 2, 1999, minimum amounts of compensation were specified to compensate for early termination of the Labour Agreement due to non-fulfilment or improper fulfilment of its terms by the employer's fault. The same Ordinance approved the Sample Form of the Labour Agreement concluded with any employee.

Ordinance of the Council of Ministers No. 1476 dated September 25, 1999, approved the Regulations of procedures and terms of signing Labour Agreements between the employers and employees, wherein many of the norms contained in Decree No. 29 were worked out in detail.

Ordinance of the Council of Ministers No. 287 dated February 28, 2002, cancelled minimum compensation fixed earlier to compensate the employees for:

- transfer from the unlimited (termless) Labour Contract to the Labour Agreement (in the

amount of the average two-week salary/wage);

- expiration of the Labour Agreement (in the amount of three average monthly salaries/wages).

The amount of minimum compensation for early termination of the Labour Agreement for non-fulfillment or improper fulfillment of its terms by the employer's fault was reduced from 6 to 3 average monthly salaries/wages.

Thereafter, in November 2003, the President gave oral instruction to the Council of Ministers to ensure entering into Labour Agreements with 100 percent of employees in the state-owned organizations by June 1, 2004.

Any signed Labour Agreement shall contain the following:

The Labour Agreement shall have details which are standard for any agreements (date, number, place of signing, information on the parties, and signatures).

Indication of a job place, with specification of a structural subdivision wherein the worker will be employed is a mandatory condition of any Labour Agreement.

Labour function for which fulfillment the worker is employed. Labour function shall be specified using the following four characteristics: profession, specialty, qualification, position.

Specification of major rights and duties of the employer and employee is mandatory.

Time for which the Labour Agreement is concluded (from 1 to 5 years) shall be indicated. Should such time be not indicated, the Labour Agreement shall be deemed not concluded.

Specification of the labour-and-rest routine is a mandatory condition of any Labour Agreement, but only to the extent such routine related to a certain employee differs from general rules established by the employer.

Remuneration of labour is a mandatory condition. This is the amount of tariff rate (rate of salary), as well as any extra charges, increments, and incentive payments. Time and regularity of salary/wage payment shall be specified.

Conditions contained in Article 2 of Decree No. 29 shall be included in the Labour Agreement. They are: responsibility of the employee, additional incentive measures, additional grounds for early termination of the Labour Agreement on the employer's initiative.



Common services at the condominium



The Labour Agreement may be terminated on the date of expiration thereof by wish of either party. Either party shall notify the other party on its unwillingness to extend the Labour Agreement at least within two weeks prior to expiration thereof.

The legislation currently in force fails to contain obligation of the employer to notify the employee of the causes of termination of labour relations in case the employer makes a decision to discharge the worker by reason of expiration of the Labour Agreement signed with the same.

The Labour Agreement may be early terminated on the employer's initiative on additional grounds provided for in the Labour Agreement. Violation by the worker of his/her labour duties for two or more times within six months shall be deemed multiple violation.

Any Labour Agreement may be early terminated:

by consent of the parties;

in connection with transfer of the employer – of his/her own accord – to any other employer or to any elective position;

by request of the employee.

The Labour Agreement may be early terminated by request of the employee in the event of non-fulfillment or improper fulfillment of its terms by the employer's fault. Should this be the case, the fact of violation, by the employer, of the terms of the Labour Agreement, shall be established (ascertained) by the governmental body supervising compliance with the labour legislation (namely, the State Labour Inspection Department under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Office of Public Prosecutor, the court or trade union).

In this case, the employer shall pay to the employee the amount equal to three monthly salaries/wages. No compensation is payable to the workers who have reached pensionable age (60 years for men, 55 years for women) and are entitled to be paid the full pension, as well as to the workers who have not reached such age but are paid pensions (excluding labour pensions for disability, for loss of a breadwinner, and social pensions).

It is then evident how the legislation in Belarus affect the rights of workers. Legislative reforms in sphere of labour relations in Belarus have led to the situation where



Networking meeting in Verhnedvisk November 2007

the contract system became the repressive tool for suppression of dissent and civil active people.

Starting from 2005 tens of active citizens who are participating in political life have been fired out. Hundreds of people have been dismissed or refused from participation in public and political campaigns or independent trade unions activity. The fear of dismissal after entering into force of the labour contract is very high.

Few examples of cases of human rights infringements, by means of contracts rules, follow.

CASE 1

On November, 21st, 2005 the administration of 1 city bus company of Gomel has refused to prolong the contract with the head of independent trade union. The Deputy Director of a bus company has declared that this person cannot work in the company as being a member of the independent trade union. The labour contract was used as the instrument at disposal of trade-union active workers who are members of Belarus Free Trade Unions on Polotsk and Novopolotsk thermal power station, JSC "Polotsk-fiber glass", Pinsk secondary schools #5, and also for members of Free trade union of Metal workers on Minsk Motor Factory.

CASE 2

Mr. Jury Bachishche was employed as senior lecturer of the Faculty of Slavic History and Methodology of Historical Science at Belarus State Pedagogical University of Maxim Tank, Minsk. In 2006 he was the observer at presidential elections in Belarus. The administration of university demanded from him to refuse this status. Since he did not follow the request, on December, 07th 2006., Dean of Faculty Mr. Kosmach G.A. notified the rector of University «The official note» in which testifies that Jury Bachishche «has condemned the policy of the President of Belarus and advised students to run political actions against existing government». On March, 23rd, 2006 Jury Bachishche was fired out for «immoral offence incompatible with position of lecturer». Jury Bachishche was obliged in distributing in



Exchange of views in Minsk December 2007



e-format the video data which contains the «conscious discredit of professional honor and reputation of the President of Belarus and representatives of authority in public opinion in form of slander; violation of the state symbols and attributes; appeal to violent change of constitutional statehood and mass disorders leading to socially dangerous consequences».

CASE 3

Mr. Lazarenkov Valentin Dmitrievich

Mr. Lazarenkov V.D. has worked at the Brest State University of A.S.Pushkin, for 27 years since August, 1979. He stayed on position of senior lecturer on the basis of labour contract concluded 27th December, 2001 for the period of 5 years. The contract has expired on 26th December, 2006. Valentine Lazarenkov headed the primary organization of Belarus Free Trade Union of the Brest State University of A.S.Pushkin, was a member of Belarus Social-Democratic Party “Gramada”, actively participated in campaign on presidential elections in Belarus. On March, 20th, 2006 Valentine Lazarenkov was detained by militia and condemned for 7 day of administrative arrest together with three colleagues for ostensibly hooliganism acts. This arrest led to his discharging from office «for his blameworthy actions as considering them immoral and incompatible with the further work as the teacher of High School» (April, 12th, 2006, the Order 325).

CASE 4

Sudalenko Leonid Leonidovich

Leonid Sudalenko worked in the Gomel branch of JSC “Beltransgaz” as the legal adviser since February, 17th, 2005. He was the chairman of the Gomel City Association of Republican Public Association «Legal initiative», member of the Joint Civil Party, member of the Belarus Association of Journalists. Mr. Sudalenko actively participated in the election campaign at presidential elections. He was fired out for reason of the contract termination on February, 16th, 2006. As he found it politically motivated decision he tried to claim it in court. Leonid Sudalenko has passed national judicial instances down to the Supreme Court, but all his complaints were rejected.

In the course of this year: Alexander Meh, member of BNF Party, has been dismissed since he intended to be the candidate for the Local Council election and sign up for the list of the Joint Democratic Forces, in Kobrin city. Leonid Avtuhov has lost his job in town Gorodok (he is also member of BNF Party). There are close relatives of politicians under threat of dismissal too. Prospective candidate Svetlana Ponomareva from Klezk has been compelled to refuse participation in campaign after she has been warned about possible dismissal from work. In Gomel, Ales Sivakov has been discharged from office for his being of the head of initiative group on promotion by candidate Konstantin Zhukovskiy. Alexander Galavach has been discharged from

teacher position at secondary schools #207, Minsk for his political affiliation. Elena Kuchinskaja, the worker of a kindergarten, has refused participation in election campaign after threat of cancellation of the contract for the head of city education department (Orsha).

Considering the situation of cultural rights, it is worth mentioning that there is an evident lack of tradition in pluralist civic education and cultural rights. The first educational State programme for Human Rights was started only three years ago in the public schools, but the main topic was the children's rights. The whole population, which was educated in Soviet time, is still not educated in the field of social and cultural rights. State policy understands social and cultural rights as a political topic. That is the reason why they do not provide special services to educate population. Considering the actual political situation in Belarus, which generally does not favour effective relations between NGOs and local authorities, it is still possible to establish cooperation between NGOs and local authorities mostly thanks to direct contacts in the social sphere.

A particular problem relating to cultural rights in Belarus is the state's policy of russification, disguised by an alleged common official status of the Belarusian and Russian languages and by the historical and cultural unity of the Belarusians and Russians. The availability of Belarusian-medium education is in constant decline: for instance in Minsk, among 200 secondary schools, only 10 provide teaching in Belarusian language, while none of 100 colleges and several dozens of higher education institutions provide instruction in Belarusian language. As a result of changes in education system of Belarus during the last 10 years, there are no any Belarus speaking classes in any elementary school and no groups in kindergartens with training and education programs on Belarusian language in city of Grodno. In the 1995, only



Networking meeting in Verhnedvisk November 2007



50% of Grodno schools provided education programs on Belarusian language. In the 2007, 35 out of 36 high schools of the town, are Russian speaking and only one focused on Polish language. On the other hand, the number of pupils who choose Belarusian language tests in graduation classes is quite high. This situation means that parents and their children at pre-school age cannot realize their constitutional right to education in Belarusian language. Even if there is such an opportunity in theory, in practice the instruction in Belarus language was stopped by national education system and concrete officials of education departments. The process of establishing Belarus classes is very complicated and requires a lot of documents preparation and appears to be a time-consuming operation. The other negative aspect is the lack of knowledge among the parents who often even do not know the opportunities of choosing of one language instead of another. On the other hand, recent initiatives to revive Belarus language teaching and education were promoted by local NGOs. These initiatives were occasional and need to be coordinated and managed on a well-organized base. The Belarusian language is not used as a working language in the majority of state institutions and is not used at all in private firms as well as in local authorities. The representatives of state authorities by means of official mass media and through the state bodies within their jurisdiction and their officials cultivate negative attitude towards the Belarusian language, Belarusian history, national traditions. An indicative example is that a common conversation in the street in Belarusian language can be a ground for detention of those speaking Belarusian, since it is considered as a potentially dangerous for the public order. The media, including



Animation at the inauguration of the condominium

mass state newspapers and TV and radio channels, is monopolized by the state and is provided mostly in Russian – most Belarusian-medium media have been banned by the state. In church life, where more than 60 % of the population culturally follow the Belarusian exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, liturgy is held in the Church Slavic language. The sermons, the communication of the priests with parishioners, the church informational materials and documentation are only in Russian. The attempts to use the Belarusian language in church are limited by the episcopacy. The state poses obstacles for authors writing in Belarusian, while actively supporting, also financially, those writing in Russian. Belarusian popular culture is losing its national characteristics and is becoming increasingly similar to that of Russia; many talented Belarusian performers are not allowed to give concerts at the official festivities in state concert halls, and they are also deprived of the possibility to be broadcasted on TV and radio. Interesting lyrics of many authors writing in Belarusian are rejected by the musical editors as “having no prospects” in show business. A large number of national historical memorials require restoration; the state is very selective in evaluating the importance of the architectural memorials, financing primarily those who are connected with orthodox religion. New orthodox buildings are constructed without taking into account the national architectural experience, which has been gained for centuries. It is substituted by the architectural style in line with the canons of the Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow patriarchy. National cultural minorities are often deprived of the right to celebrate their culture; especially the Polish minority, whose leader has been politically persecuted by the State. The Belarusian diaspora is deprived of a voice and is often discredited by the government. National Belarusian diaspora, which is widely represented in Europe and other continents, is deprived of normal communication with Fatherland, its voice and capacity are not taken into account by the state in functioning social and cultural processes. Many representatives of the Belarusian diaspora are discredited as enemies of the Belarusian people in official mass media.

It is therefore necessary that the right to use the Belarusian language in all areas of public life be strengthened, promoted, enforced. Furthermore, it is necessary to preserve and develop the spiritual and material cultural heritage of Belarus, to protect national cultural minorities, and to promote the right of the Belarusian diaspora to participate in the cultural life of the Nation.

The standard of living is falling and the rate of poverty is increasing in Belarus. As a result of the decreasing birth-rate (due mainly to high infant mortality) the population of Belarus is ageing, which will entail economic problems and will also necessitate the provision of additional medical and social care services. According to the National Human Development Report 2004-2005, 27 per cent of the population live below the official poverty line; however, poverty is higher in rural areas, where the incomes of some 50 per cent of the population are below the national subsistence level. In the same report, UNDP noted that the rural-urban disparities in demography, employment, incomes, education, and access to services emerged during the Soviet era and have deepened during the transition period. The official unemploy-



ment rate is 3.1 per cent. Other authors, however, estimate that the number of unemployed is nowadays two and a half to three times higher than the official data shows.

The health of the population is worsening as evidenced by the decreasing life expectancy, particularly amongst men. Drug and alcohol abuse is increasing. The rate of drug abuse has increased by 12.5% over the past 3 years to affect directly 2% of the population. According to UNDP, the Belarusian health system has an emphasis on quantitative expansion and a limited focus on quality. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the total 2002 expenditure on health represented 6.4 per cent of GDP, placing Belarus in 34th position out of 52 European countries. Investments in the health sector are low, while the high prevalence of tuberculosis and the increase of HIV/AIDS raise serious concerns. It is therefore necessary to take steps to ensure an effective system of social insurance, social security, and social services.

Belarus is still facing the effects of the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe. According to UNDP, in 2004, 1.5 million people (15 per cent of the total population), live in contaminated areas in Gomel, Mogilev and Brest oblasts, where life expectancy rates are unusually low and the incidence of cancer is abnormally high. The handling of the consequences of the catastrophe by the Government has been an object of criticism from many sides.

According to UNDP, accomplishments of the education sector included high adult literacy rates and high educational enrolment ratios. Educational contents infringe article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, according to which the right to education implies that education should be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Instead, the Belarusian regime developed an official State ideology, essentially based on Soviet nostalgia and President Lukashenka's cult of the personality. Compulsory courses on State ideology were also integrated in the curricula of universities and colleges. According to UNDP, Belarusian women are severely affected by unemployment. Women are vulnerable to discrimination in appointment and dismissal, especially since the introduction of fixed-term contracts and contracts of limited duration. Gender disparities are also visible in the disproportionately high number of women employed in low-paying sectors and in the existence of barriers to women's promotion. On average, women's salaries are 20 per cent lower than men's.

Thanks to the exchanges held during the activities the partners developed few proposals on both social and cultural rights:

It is necessary to improve the social security system of the citizens in Belarus. Such a system includes the following forms:

- 1) social insurance;
- 2) addressed social aid;
- 3) social security;

4) social service.

It is more and more necessary to improve the system of protection of social and cultural rights of the citizens of the Republic of Belarus. Such a system should include the following rights:

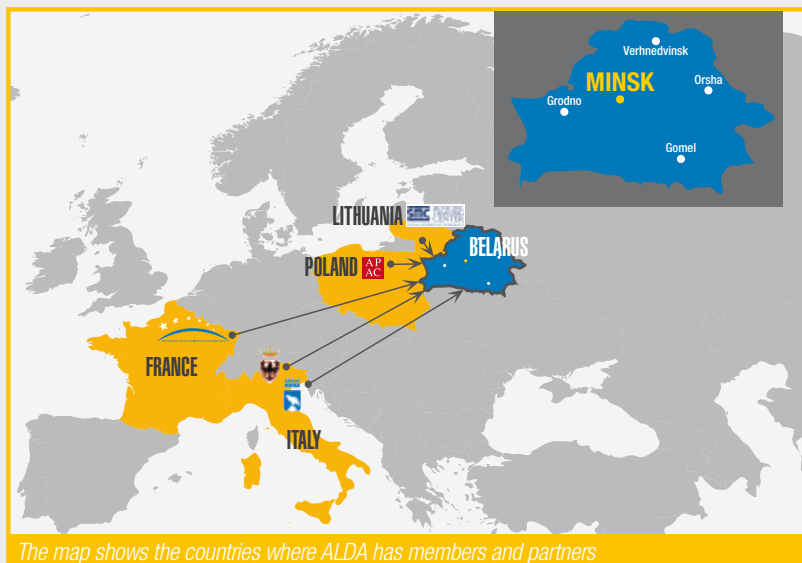
- 1) The right to upbringing and education in native language;
- 2) The right to use native language in business and daily communication;
- 3) The right to use native language in interaction with authorities;
- 4) The right to receive and distribute information in native language;
- 5) The right to use native language in religious life;
- 6) The right to preserve and develop spiritual and material cultural heritage;
- 7) The protection of national and cultural minorities;
- 8) The right for the national diaspora to participate to the cultural life of the nation;
- 9) The right to spread national and historic views on the state and the society.

To create the effective system of protection of cultural rights of the citizens it is necessary to take into account historical, national and cultural specificity of the development of the Belarusian people resident on the territory of Belarus and also the characteristics of the development of Belarus as a state.



Networking meeting in Minsk December 2007





The map shows the countries where ALDA has members and partners

The project ASCOBE has been conceived in the framework of the cooperation between the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) and Lev Sapieha Foundation. ALDA, based in Strasbourg, France, was established in 1999, in order to coordinate 10 the Local Democracies Agencies (today 12). Today its expertise is strengthening local democratic processes, developing capacity building of civil society and local institutions, promotion of human rights and active citizenship at international and local level. Lev Sapieha Foundation based in Minsk, Belarus, has been working in the field of self-government, civil education (including publishing activities e.g. bulletin “Local self-government”). Lev Sapieha has a branch organization in Grodno region, which, besides self-government issues, is specialized, among others, in social and cultural rights. Indeed, the Foundation cooperated with the Congress of Local and Regional authorities of the Council of Europe in many occasions. That adds another link to its co-operation since ALDA is also based in the Council of Europe building, even if it is an NGO completely independent from the Council of Europe as regards decision-making, budgetary control and the appointment of staff. In particular in the period of 1994-2001 Lev Sapieha Foundation” took part in the Congress’s meetings with the rank of invited status, and from 2001 NGO “Lev Sapieha Foundation” was given the rank of status of observers. Sapieha has a large structure all over Belarus and realized more than 40 projects including 20 regional ones. There were educational and research projects in the field of civil society building and functioning local self-government. Manuals on local self-governments were published.

ACSOBE represents a strong follow up of the ALDA’s programme currently implemented in

Belarus for the support of democratic processes: a) definition of strategic regional planning b) management of communal properties. These two programmes were implemented in full cooperation with a member of ALDA, the Municipal Training Center, Kaunas Lithuania.

ACSOBE was realized thanks to the strong commitment of all the partners. ALDA was the leader of the project with the main partner Lev Sapieha Foundation, Belarus. The other partners were: the Municipal Training Center (MTC), Lithuania; Aid Programs Advisory Centre (APAC), Poland; the municipality of Monfalcone, in Italy; the province of Trento, in Italy. MTC and APAC are ALDA partners for 10 years and implemented several projects in strict cooperation with ALDA. They have experience in Belarus and they have a geographical interest in cooperating with Belarus. The municipality of Monfalcone and the province of Trento are members of ALDA network, which counts more than 160 members at international level and are willing to reinforce projects of decentralized cooperation in Caucasus.

The overall objective of the ACSOBE project was to strengthen dialogue between civil society groups and local authorities in Belarus through the strengthening of capacities and the provision of opportunities and tools for communication between both the stakeholders.

More specifically, the project sought to develop the skills and capacities of local authorities representatives, NGO actors, and representatives of vulnerable groups in society. It fostered communication between these groups, in particular concerning the exercise of social and cultural rights. A further aim was to encourage the development of networks of NGOs and civil society groups working in this field in Belarus, thanks also to the exchanges of experiences with European partners. It also sought to encourage grassroots participation and democracy through concrete examples of the exercise of social and cultural rights, thus ensuring the long-term impact of the project.

In order to achieve these objectives, various activities were organized. Different visits to Belarus served as an opportunity to assess the situation in Belarus concerning social and cultural rights. The core activity of the project were the trainings, preceded by a training needs assessment exercise, which allowed target groups and their needs to be identified. One training session and one workshop were held in the suburbs of Minsk, whose content was based on the findings of the needs assessment. Subjects dealt with during the training sessions included social and cultural rights, advocacy within local communities, and labour legislation (rights relating to contracts, maternity, disability), and there was a particular focus on the transmission of skills and capacities. The workshop, held in Minsk, dealt with concrete means to promote social and cultural rights, and resulted in the identification of models for co-operation between civil society and local and authorities, and the drafting of a memorandum of understanding. Five networking meetings took place throughout Belarus (Grodno, Gomel, Orsha, Verhnedvinsk, and Minsk). They served as the fora for discussion and debate, and the exchange of best practice on a wide range of issues relating to the promotion and protection of social and cultural rights.





Animation for children at the inauguration of the condominium

The following is a selection of regional civic initiatives conceived as a result of discussions and exchanges of ideas throughout the ACSOBE project. These civic initiatives provide concrete examples of the action that can be taken by civil society to promote and protect social and cultural rights. The relevant aspect is that these initiatives were promoted directly and spontaneously by groups of citizens, who managed to put into practice the realization of some of the social and cultural rights, which are otherwise neglected in Belarus.

5.1 THE FOREST OF DEATH: BREAKING THE SILENCE IN BELARUS

Talaka, based in Gomel, is a public organization focused both on studies about Belarus culture and history on youth issues. In 2007 Talaka has been engaged in producing documentary films about history, culture and social problems of Gomel-City and Gomel region. This activity is very interesting, useful and responding to a social demand considering that in Belarus the official institutions do not pay attention and do not invest in research on local history and culture. Moreover, social problems are ignored by the government. Nevertheless young students are committed enthusiastically in video activities.

The documentary film “The Forest of Death” is one of the most successful projects. In autumn 2007, several activists started working in places of mass graves of killed citizens in the forest near Gomel. From the reconstruction period this place has been known as the place of mass burial. Communist power was shooting innocent citizens (the so-called “political prisoners”) there till 1941. Majority of them were absolutely innocent. As soon as the democratic activists became interested in that place, the officials started excavations. The remains of bodies were excavated and transported elsewhere. In addition, a broadcast was on the

local TV, informing that fascists killed those citizens during the occupation. Of course, that was a lie, which was not accepted by many Belarus human rights activists. Active workers started traveling across local villages and interviewing local inhabitants about killed people. All interviewed people, unanimously, were telling that mass executions took place before the World War 2 and innocent people were killed there in the nearest villages. It is important to note that, they were rehabilitated during the reconstruction period. All conversations were recorded for a future video, which as result became a documentary film "The forest of Death". It was distributed among local population free of charge. Under the pressure of local community, municipal authorities had to show some action and memorized this place. A big cross was constructed there with an inscription on it – "To All Martyrs of Belarus", without mentioning the responsible of the murder. There was no any real commitment in promoting a scientific research on that issue. Since autumn 2007, a pray for the dead forefathers has taken place there.

Today Talaka is still active in spreading the Documentary, informing the citizens and making an awareness campaign in order to put into practice the human right to know its own history.

Talaka realized another documentary film about the concentration camp, which was located at Halch village near Gomel, and was actively functioning even after the World War 2. It is focused on interviews to several old people who are resident in that area and on shooting on the place where the camp was located, barracks, auxiliary buildings, the place where the prisoners were buried and so on. Today, there is not a single memorial sign at the place of mass burial of innocent victims of communism. Active workers are pressing in order to get the installation at least of a cross on prisoners burial place in the camp.

Another initiative realized is a film about the Chernobyl disaster. The film will be devoted to the workers of oil station in Rechitsca. In May 1986 they spent three weeks at the nuclear power station, building the foundation for the sarcophagus of the 4th power unit. Half of those 100 people have already died, while an absolute majority of the others are today disabled. Recently, Belarusian government has deprived them of social privileges, careless of these people who lost their health because of the nuclear accident in order to protect the lives of Belarusian citizens!

5.2 A SPECIAL CONDOMINIUS

The most successful program of "BOTZH", Belarusian Organization for Working Women, is directed on development of the home-owners' councils (condominiums) as one of basic elements of local self-government. "BOTZH" has started to pursue the problems related with the quality housing since January 2003, when the costs of housing-and-municipal services have grown up for 36 %. «Why have the expenses of the house maintenance increased so much, but quality of services remained the same?» This question was the point of 22 seminars in various cities of Belarus where experts from Association "Home owners" have made



presentations. Thanks to this work it became obvious, that the local population wants to own the comfortable houses, rather than to be treated only as tenants.

In 2003 the state Concept of development of housing and communal services for 2015 had been accepted. It was devoted to the state priorities in housing sector, which includes demopolization of sector and development of market relations. Thanks to accepted regulatory legal acts “BOTZH” and experts of Association have decided to direct all their efforts on the home-owners who are interested in efficiency of the housing reform. For this purpose and on the basis of 32 pilothouses, BOTZH members started to create permanent home owners associations in 16 cities of Belarus (condominiums house comities etc.). Soon, the activity was extended much wider than the initially planned number of cities and home owners .

During the passed two years BOTZH members prepared 6 thematic brochures, providing guidelines for support in mobilization, creation and adjustments in functioning of home-owners’ associations (condominiums). They disseminated these brochures among all of 16 established executive committees in the cities where the initiative groups were created. Preparation of brochures and other information materials was based on requirements of the leaders of home-owners’ councils. They kept in touch with all the leaders in the form of personal contact: correspondences, seminars, and questionnaires.

The final meeting held on 23rd December 2007, was devoted to the discussion of prospects of the further cooperation. We have come to a conclusion that it is necessary to create a public organization in the next 5 years (with 2008 for 2013) , capable of influencing the process of housing and communal services reforms, and also the state housing policy in general.

In order to achieve this objective , the following steps will be initiated:

- To provide regular consulting support to the condominiums;
- To develop a pool of experts;
- To create a network and dissemination of ideas on home-owners’ councils;
- To adjust corporate interaction in housing sector;
- To support functioning of information channels (web site, mass-media).

One excellent example of successful condominium was the Youth Residential Complex (YRC) “Solnechny”, which was created in Gomel at 1984. It was the first housing co-operative (condominium) in Belarus. The story started on October 20th 1987, when Gomel Regional Executive Committee took the decision of transforming of 6.3 hectares of land into a construction site in micro district #52, Gomel. The plot was released in order to build six blocks of flats and other social services The construction started on July 30th 1988. The first block of flats was settled in 1989.

The key point of this case is the institutional status of YRC “Solnechny” since it was registered as the municipal public organization. In this way, the maintenance of buildings was organized

as in public companies, non-state owners. It was very unusual for those times. Nowadays, the cooperative manages the six blocks of flats. The cooperative counts 641 flats, more than 2000 persons, and more than 700 children. The last sixth block of flats of our organization was built at the end of 2005. It allows a significant improvement of the living standards in respective blocks of flats. Several social activities started like evening kindergarten, athletic club, cable TV studio, women's club for carving and sewing, radio study group and others. There is a whole range of traditional residential feasts: New Year, house warming, YRC anniversary, schools of neighbors' aid, arranging the backyards, all contributing to harmonious relations in the condominium. The members keep contacts with similar organizations from the Aberdeen City (in Scotland) in the framework of program "Young family today".

Personal impression from one member of the condominium: "This experience of condominium building has helped us understand the importance of prosperous and healthy environment among our residents. The key point is the promotion of our concept of "My Home". "My Home" is a wider definition than house or apartment. It means that the living space does not finish at the doorstep one's flat. We have succeeded a lot in motivating our residents for active decision-making process and participation in public affairs. The results are incorporated in a more careful and wiser management of the houses, lower consumption of gas, water, electrical power etc. We are pioneers in applying new (incl. environment friendly) residential housing technology in Belarus. We were realizing general principles of local self-government in practice. The permanent message of our housing policy is "You are able to resolve the problems of your house by yourself. Nowadays we are celebrating 20th anniversary of our local best practice.



New buildings for new life... MZHK "Solnechny, Gomel, Belarus





Participants to the training in Minsk, June 2007

The following experiences of cooperation between NGOs and local authorities have been presented during the activities of the projects and have been a very interesting basis for discussion and comparison with the situation in Belarus, where the such kind of collaboration is really difficult and even hindered.

6.1 CIVIL SOCIETY AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES: EXPERIENCE OF DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN MONFALCONE

The city of Monfalcone (Italy) has established forms of democratic participation and relations with the local community through an approach known as the horizontal subsidiarity. Such a methodology implies the services offered by the public administration are externalized and administered by private entities entitled with a specific mandate. Owing to this, the participation of civil society in the life of local community whose members reside on a specific territory is not limited merely to an opposition, but serves rather as a substantially new, quality relation based on trust and responsibility. In this way the associations and the volunteers acquire a more active role in cooperation with the local public body.

The City Council of Monfalcone is implementing this policy in three different areas: youth groups, elderly people and immigrants. In 2006, the day care centre for elderly citizens was open, soon followed, in 2007, by the opening of a youth centre. The two facilities that required a high investment were obtained after the reconstruction of an abandoned police department building. Once the works for the centre for the elderly were completed, the City Council of Monfalcone decided to involve the representatives of the local associations in order to run the centre and to take the responsibility for organizing its activities, like gymnastic courses,

meetings and cultural events. The most important associations involved are Pro Senectute, Third Age University, the Federation of retired workers and trade unionists. All of them have taken their share of responsibility for the fair management and organisation of the centre's activities, dealing with education, assistance and social care.

The City Council is of course always there in case of need and sometimes engages extra personnel to manage peaks of activities. Nowadays the centre counts as many as 20,000 people using the facility every year. In this way a large number of senior citizens can certainly avoid the feeling of loneliness and sadness that they are likely to encounter at a certain age. At the same time the centre organizes a number of meetings with the themes ranging from social issues to local events and problems that these citizens want to debate about in a truly democratic manner.

In 2007 the Youth Centre opened its doors to the young people of Monfalcone and surroundings. Its management was externalised in the same way as the elderly centre was. The city council insisted to install also a youth information centre within the same structure as an Information desk for the questions and issues of interest for many young people. The centre organizes and manages a number of meetings dealing with youth themes and issues that young people consider important. At the same time it is the place where youth workers and volunteers, entrusted by the mandate of the city council, organize hobby and sports course, like dancing, music, graffiti-writing and work orientation.

Last but not least, the City Council of Monfalcone has established a public space for a facilitated intercultural dialogue and communication with the immigrants. Namely, a large community of immigrants from India and Bangladesh has moved to Monfalcone over the last years to join the workforce of the Fincantieri shipyard. Two cultural associations were set up in order to help preserve their culture, language and habits, while the town council ensured the facility where they can organize their meetings, cultural and religious events.

At the level of local self-government, a special committee for immigration and integration was set up as the main instrument for dialogue at political level between the administration and the citizens. In close co-operation with the representatives of immigrants' community, the committee have initiated the language courses, intercultural events and other activities in support to facilitated integration of the immigrants.

6.2 INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY: THE AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE OF TRENTO TOGETHER WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

The Autonomous Province of Trento, as an institution but above all as territorial community is traditionally very active in the field of cooperation to the development or international solidarity. This commitment has been recognized and established by a Provincial Law (LP 4/05), which foresees that at least the 0,25% of the provincial budget should be allocated for activi-



ties of international solidarity. Beyond the financial aspect (around 10 millions of euro per year), this law is important since it states that the international solidarity is a commitment and a political responsibility: it is neither an optional nor a charity act.

The reasons of this commitment are the awareness that the international solidarity is, in a globalized and interdependent world, is a way to face mondialization processes, which is fundamental for the community of Trento and for other territorial communities. The presence of particularly active civil society in this context (more than 200 associations), of strict links with the world because of a numerous community of progenies from Trento who live abroad, of a noteworthy community of immigrants, simulated and favoured the commitment of the Provincial Government. The relation between the Provincial government and the associations, given for granted the clear distinction of roles and functions, is based on transparency and participation principles and it is finalized to build up territorial partnerships, in all its phases. Each action, each project, each initiative is born and develops giving a value to the participation of all stakeholders, in all its phases. In each case (for example, either in planning a new Centre for the education to international solidarity – mentioned below- or in starting up a small solidarity intervention), the intention is to favour the highest level of dialogue and active participation of all the involved people. In fact, a “dialogue table” (tavolo di concertazione) is activated for each strategic issue. This approach favours the construction between the Provincial Administration and the Associations.

In this context, the most advanced experiences lived by the Trento Community are certainly the “Tables for the decentralized or community cooperation”.

The Tables for the decentralized cooperation

The Tables for decentralized cooperation (the Tables, from now onwards) represent the most advanced expression of “territorial partnership”. They are a coordination instrument aiming at managing integrated intervention programs, focused on a delimited territory. Thanks to the Tables, it is possible to organize the meetings among organizations for international volunteering, local authorities, schools, training centers, Universities, trade unions, in order to promote coordinated and strategic non-profit-making interventions in favor of similar territories of developing countries. Similar coordination experiences have been realized in the partner territories.

Trento table with Kosovo

The Trento table with Kosovo is active since 1999. In December 2009, the Association “Trentino with Kosovo” has been established. It coordinates all the activities both in Trentino and in Peja-Pec. Today the Table gather ten associations, the Province of Trento and the municipality of Trento. Different actors cooperated with the Table: the agriculture institution of San

Michele all'Adige, the Provincial Federation of the volunteer firemen, the Observatory on the Balkans, the Photographic Club "The Image" of Rovereto, the Art Institute "Vittoria" of Trento, the association of beekeepers ATAS, the Centre "Thousands voices", Cinformi.

At the beginning of 2003, in Kosovo, a Local Democracy Agency (LDA, which is part of the LDAs promoted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities) has been established. The Table developed relations with the LDA. During 2006 a process started, which ended up with the cooperation between the Faculty of Engineering of Trento University, the Pristina University and the municipality of Peja/Pec on field of common interest such as territorial planning, collection, management and disposal of waste, quality of waters. On the 30 of May 2006, a protocol of understanding has been signed between the Province and the Municipality of Peja-Pec.

During 2007, the Table worked in 4 areas: young, sport and media, local development, welfare and gender, elaboration and transformation of the conflict. In the first field, a great commitment has been lavished to support the activities of the Youth Centre "Zoom". Sport activities, journalism courses, informatics, summer camps have been realized. About local development, several initiatives have been implemented: training, consulting and technical assistance activities in favor of local associations of farmers and breeders; a promotional campaign in favor of local products; a project for the sustainable tourist relaunch of the Rugova Valley; a study on the quality of waters in cooperation with the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Trento. As for the welfare and gender area, activities in favor of disabled people have been implemented and a Centre for reciprocal aid has been started up. In particular, some groups AMA have been created. As for the conflict area, training activities have been addressed especially to groups of different ethnic groups, a local working staff has been trained and supported, a School for peace has been created.

Trento Table with Mozambique

Trento Table with Mozambique, active since 2000, counts today ten associations and acts on the basis of an understanding protocol, which has been signed by the President of the Provincial Council and by the Governor of the Province of Sofala and updated in September 2005 during a visit of a Delegation from Mozambique to Trentino. Five out of the Associations which belong to the Table, founded the "Consortium Association Mozambique", which the Province devolved the coordination upon. The Trento Table has relations with its counterpart established in the District of Caia, whose activities are planned together with local administration.

The multi-year relation between Trentino and the District of Caia is facing a phase of careful consideration and relaunch. With the three-year period 2008-2010, we will arrive to 10 years of presence of Trentino in Mozambique. In 2007, we chose to reinforce the initiatives especially in two key-sector: microcredit and rural development.



In the agricultural field, the vocational agri-animal husbandry school and the connected farm. In the sector of micro-credit, a process to open a credit institute, similar to the “cassa rurale”, has been started up.

In parallel, Community activities have been continued in other sectors: urban and territorial planning, the community radio, activities in social, health and educational field, with the aim of guaranteeing sustainability to the initiatives and reducing gradually the direct commitment.

Besides to the activities realized in Caia, the project “the Mozambique in Trentino” has been continued. It is a programme aiming at promote, increase the value and spread the communitarian approach to the cooperation, bases on the construction of a network of relations with Caia community. Cultural initiatives to know the situation and the culture in Mozambique, and opportunities of dialogue have been proposed. In particular, the following public debates have been proposed, on the topics of development, decentralized cooperation, historical-political situation in Mozambique, literature seminars, photograph exhibitions, courses on language and culture of Mozambique, courses on Mozambique cooking, dinners, parties and cinema festivals. Moreover, exchange travels have been organized in order to deepen the knowledge among the two communities. Besides to the Associations which constitute the Consortium, the Trento Federation of cooperatives, the Federation of the breeders, a “Cassa rurale”, the vocational training system, the University, have been involved.

The Prijedor project

The programme of decentralized cooperation which connects Trentino to the Municipality of Prijedor, in Bosnia Herzegovina, started in 1997. In the Association which promote the Project, 19 municipalities, a district, some associations, citizens are represented. The project intends to promote dialogue and reconciliation, local democracy and active citizenship in Prijedor community; to intervene in the situation of extreme poverty and need, giving responsibility to the local community; to promote a sustainable local economy, which emphasizes the resources of the territory, to promote relations among the community of Prijedor and other communities in Europe in order to contribute to European integration; to promote the growth, the openness and the exchange of knowledge in the community of the Province of Trento. In 2007, activities have been realized in the following areas: reconciliation, memory, culture, local development (with activities in rural area, especially in the sector of small fruits, with the project “Become entrepreneur!” and with activities of sustainable tourism), environment protection (with initiatives for the management of plastics, for the quality of air and water, for the disposal of waste, for the promotion of solar panels and alternative energies sources and with the construction of a naturalistic path in the Kozara Park), youth and reconciliation (the project “Youth and Active Citizenship” foresaw meetings, training, planning, exchanges and support to the youth centers of the Prijedor territory and to youth information point), poverty and human promotion (the relation between the retirement home of Prijedor and the Spes

of Trento and other activities of reciprocal aid). Lastly, activities of distance adoption and emergency humanitarian aid have been continuing.

The Trento Table with Kraljevo

The programme of communitarian cooperation, active since 2000, is realized through integrated interventions in different areas: local development, social development, gender approach, young, civil rights, the culture. The responsible association of the programme has several members: five municipalities from Trentino, some associations, a cooperative and various individuals. During 2007, cooperation with public and private actors have been activated, such as with Ingegneria Senza Frontiere, Lega Italiana Lotta ai tumori, Docenti Senza Frontiere, l'Associazione giovanile Calma Piatta, la cooperativa La Rete, l'ASUT, l'ITEA, la Cooperativa Sant'Orsola, la SAT, la Casa di soggiorno per anziani di Rovereto, l'Istituto Comprensivo di Aldeno e Mattarello.

As for local development, the Table worked in order to increase the value of typical products, to promote the responsible tourism, involving hotel managers, restaurateurs, farmers, thermal workers, monastery guardians, scholars, sportsmen, local administrators inside the Consortium Put Vode (the street of Water). Tourist guides on the Area of Put Vode have been published. An educational farmhouse has been planned, where the process of the production of the kajmak cheese, a typical Serb cheese will be reconstructed.

As for social area, the integration of disabled people has been favored through opportunities of aggregation with schools and local youth, through exchange among association from Trentino and from Serbia, through distance adoption in favour of elderly people in state of need.

As for the gender issue, the SOS line, activated in 2006, has been supported. The activities of consulting have been continued and an awareness campaign on domestic violence, a training on domestic violence for the police department, for the centre of social affairs and for the judicial system of Kraljevo have been realized. Exchanges among Italian and Serb young and initiatives concerning the civil and cultural rights, have been activated. Lastly, information, cultural and cooking events have been realized in order to promote the Serbian culture in Trentino.

Other successful experiences regarded the field of training and research and equal opportunities. In this context two best practices should be mentioned: International Institute for Development Cooperation and the Women's International Network for solidarity.

International institute for development cooperation

In September 2008, International Institute for Development Cooperation has been formally constituted. The initiative, together with the University of Trento, the Federation of Trentino cooperation, the Federazione Fondazione Opera Campana dei Caduti from Rovereto, the Trentino Forum for peace and human rights, the Trentino Associations of international solidarity,



the Centre OCSE Leed from Trento, intends to systematize the various training proposals on the topic of international solidarity, peace, human rights. The Centre would like to be a center for training, research, at local, national and international level. The idea is to create an excellence centre, on both sides of training and research, which should be able to emphasize the value of the experience of the Trentino territory expressed in several years, especially the building of territorial partnerships.

The working group, composed by a representative of each involved institution and two representatives of the Associations, drafted the project proposal of the Center and the Statute of the Association which will be responsible of the management of the Center. The project drafting group is at the moment working on the action plan 2009.

The women's international network for solidarity, WINS

The Autonomous Province of Trento is strongly committed to actions in the field of international solidarity. This commitment has given rise to an ambitious project: the women's international network for solidarity, WINS (www.donneperlasolidarieta.it), which has received the support of Unifem Italy, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Council of Europe and the Trentino Alto Adige Region. The objective of network is to use the Internet to connect women in the "North" and the "South" of the world, in a peer to peer relationship. The base of the network is the awareness that knowledge is disseminated everywhere and that there is a need to develop common relationships, exchanging good practice and reinforcing the partnership between organisations involved in the empowerment of women. In May 2008, 57 organisations (NGOs, networks and associations) from 20 countries, Italian and European Members of Parliament and political representatives from developing countries participated at the first international meeting of WINS. This meeting took a closer look at the issue of gender mainstreaming in development cooperation projects and the identification of tools, methods and strategies for the construction of networks and partnerships, in collaboration with the Gender Unit of ILO ITC. The event served as an opportunity to summarise the ideas, needs and expectations of organisations and the potential of the partnership.

6.3 COMMUNITY CENTERS AND COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES: EXPERIENCES IN LITHUANIA

In Lithuania the non-governmental organizations' (NGOs) mission in a democratic society is conceived as the mediators between the government, local authorities, business structures on one side, and the citizens on the other. Also, their role is to help solve the problems through fostering the participation and involvement of citizens. Non-governmental organizations play a very important role in the promotion of social cohesion and in the process of the democratic development of the society of Lithuania. Moreover, their variety is an important aspect in forming pluralistic society.

Usually active citizens are cooperating with municipality in social affairs, women rights, youth problems, cultural, environmental topics, etc. They usually take part in NGOs, **Community Centers** or as **Community representatives**. These forms of active citizenship take place at different municipal levels: municipality and neighborhoods.

At the municipal level closest to the citizens – neighborhoods – active citizens from every village are electing their representative called “Community representative”. The Community representative is like a mediator between municipality and community in communicating and solving problems they have. It is a new way of acting citizens encouraged by a new amended Law on Local government.

At municipal level NGOs and Community Centers are active. NGOs can be considered the oldest experiment to support citizen participation. The foundation of the first NGOs in Lithuania took place in 1991, when Lithuania recovered its independence from the Soviet Union. At that time many non-governmental organizations started to be operational. In 1994, the Law on public organizations, that included NGOs, was approved. Later on, a debate about the differences among NGOs allowed the Seimas (the Lithuanian Parliament) to approve specific laws for organizations active in the non-profit sector. This allowed the non-governmental institutions to be segmented into four separate spheres. Until the beginning of 2004, there were four regulatory laws for nongovernmental organizations:

- Public organization law (Since February 2004 is no longer active)
- Association law
- Public institution law
- Charity and aid funds law

Experience of cooperation of NGOs with the municipalities in Lithuania shows the existence of two models – a bilateral one (local community cooperates with every NGO directly) and a sectoral one (joining the communities and representing them in negotiation with the authority). A forthright answer to ‘which model is more suitable’ is difficult, because both have advantages and disadvantages; for this reason, the most suitable is probably the one that will be chosen case by case by the local authority and the NGOs. Referring to the experience of cooperation of NGOs and municipalities in Lithuania, the most popular methods to set up cooperation are: dialogue; round-tables; conferences; preparing standard documents (regulations, rules etc.) valid for both of them; implementing projects together; preparing strategic plan of the municipality (proof-sheet).

There is no doubt that seeking to develop activities of the NGOs in cooperation with the local authority, the NGOs themselves have to develop strategies, which consist of the following actions: researching the potential of the place, defining positive and negative actions, defining allies, determining needs, specificity of activities and determining the intensity of cooperation. It has to be noted that in Lithuania NGOs activities attain more and better results in



the regions where local authorities understand the significance of the NGOs existence in the democratic-civil society and stimulate the activities of the NGOs and the establishment of new NGOs. This is manifested by financial support, premises or equipment and support in order to prepare and train the NGO-professionals.

In recent years establishment of NGO's in Lithuania increased. This process was determined by changing attitude of local authorities towards NGO's. Through NGOs, municipalities have a chance to extend the spectrum of services, which are not provided by other institutions. In some Lithuanian local governments, there are established positions for cooperation and connection with NGO's. In all local governments there are local budget resources allocated to maintain NGOs. Some local governments provide for free the offices, telephone and internet connection for non-governmental organization's information centers. Round table discussions for various problems and programs are organized by NGO's and local communities. Together they also organize projects and a big part of them gets sponsorship from various foundations. Moreover citizens are involved in preparing the strategic plan of their municipality.

Šiauliai city municipality is one of the best practice example of cooperation between NGO's and municipality. In Šiauliai city cooperation between municipality and NGO's is rather tight; a very good mechanism of representing non-governmental organizations has been created. In this city there is a **confederation of NGO's** which helps co-ordinating the non-governmental organizations with different policies. The confederation delegates its representatives to various commissions and councils of municipality; it also represents interests of its members by delegating representatives to the Consulting council, which was established by Šiauliai City Council. The most important objective of the Consulting council is to strengthen cooperation between municipality and NGOs. In Šiauliai city an Association of youth organizations and Union of women organizations are active. NGOs have their representatives in Šiauliai city municipality councils of community health, youth, culture and education. It is also important to mention, that the city council has approved the program for NGO's and municipality cooperation. Policy of expanding cooperation between municipality and NGO's is verified in city's strategic plan of development (2006-2017 year).

Moletai municipality is one of the Lithuanian municipalities, which have close cooperation with active citizens. This municipality has established the Development union, which operates as an association of the non-governmental organizations in the region. In order to make decisions the municipality cooperates and consults with Development union's representatives. This Union is the main organization in town, which delegates its representatives to various commissions of municipality. This city also has an association of Community centers.

In Lithuania, most of NGOs are operating at municipality level. At the neighborhood level Community Centers are functioning. First **Kaunas Community Center** was established about 10 years ago, but closer cooperation with city municipality started in 2003, when the neighborhoods in Kaunas were established. It became clear that cooperation among various Communities' Centers is essential due to their wish to make contact with Kaunas public

officials, especially from the smallest local government units - neighborhoods. Kaunas municipality's and NGO's Cooperation Council was established. Chairman of this council became Prof. R. Navickas. Kaunas municipality collaboration with NGOs and Community Centers is one of the few municipalities, which can be proud of its best local practice in established mechanisms of representation. On 15th July 2004, Kaunas City Council approved an act about Kaunas municipality and non-governmental organizations cooperation and allocated a fund to maintain Communities' Centers. In 2006, over 200 000 Lt (around 58 000 EUR) were assigned to various projects. Moreover the development strategy of Kaunas Communities' Centers (2006-2013 year) was approved.

Coordinative Council for Kaunas city municipality and citizen's organizations cooperation is functioning in Kaunas, whose cast and activity regulations are validated by municipality's Council. This Council elaborates policies about NGO development and cooperation with the municipality. There are special mechanisms and specific procedures in Kaunas city municipality concerning who, when and how municipality should cooperate. In addition there are ground rules about the representation of NGOs at the municipality and for their reciprocal accountability. Various projects of cooperation and partnership between municipality and citizens' organizations were implemented after the Cooperation council was founded.

Almost all NGOs in Kaunas region, according to their policy, are incorporated in associations. In Kaunas city there are also Youth Council, Communities' Centers and Youth Fund Council, Public Healthcare Council, already mentioned Kaunas municipality and NGOs Cooperation Council etc. To all these Councils, public committees and working groups, representatives from NGOs or other citizen's organization are delegated by umbrella organizations. Therefore there is certain representation from all the different policy fields. In Kaunas municipality there are also: a Youth Council, communities' centers and youth maintenance fund council, public health care council and Kaunas municipality. Representatives of NGO's in all these councils are delegated by organizations. Different council's policies are coordinated by specialists according to their capacities. Furthermore, Kaunas city authorities have signed an agreement of cooperation with association with Kaunas communities' centers. Also, Kaunas district municipality is famous thanks to its cooperation with NGOs. Active citizens' organizations are involved in decision-making process of the municipality. Community delegates are involved in the Commissions, which are formed by the Council (see scheme No. 1). For example there are 4 representatives from the NGO's in Politician's Ethics Commission, 1 – in municipalities civil servants work evaluation commission etc.



Scheme No. 1. Structure of Kaunas district municipality

Another form of cooperation quite well-known among the municipalities and NGOs regards international projects, (e.g in the framework of LEADER initiative) in fields such as social services, culture, environment. Municipalities offer their expertise in drafting, planning and writing projects and the NGOs usually implement the projects thanks to their experience on the field.

Surely all municipalities also gives direct financial support to NGOs, but it is only a small part of all NGO's budget. (See chart No. 1).

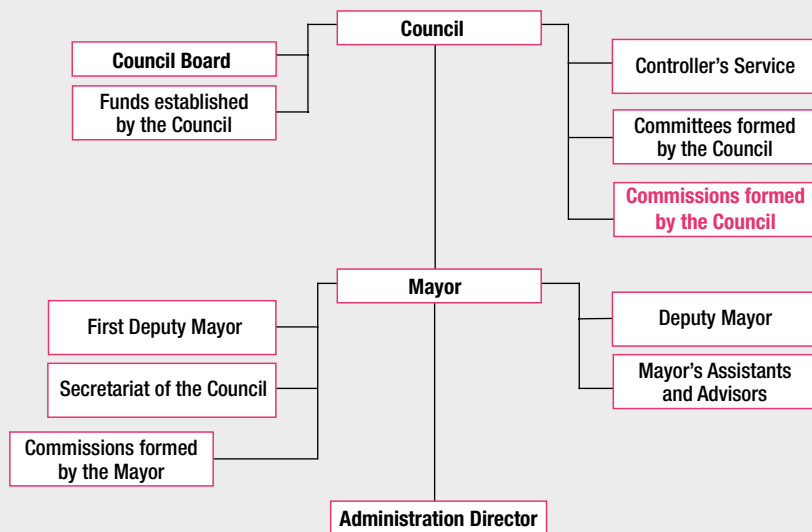
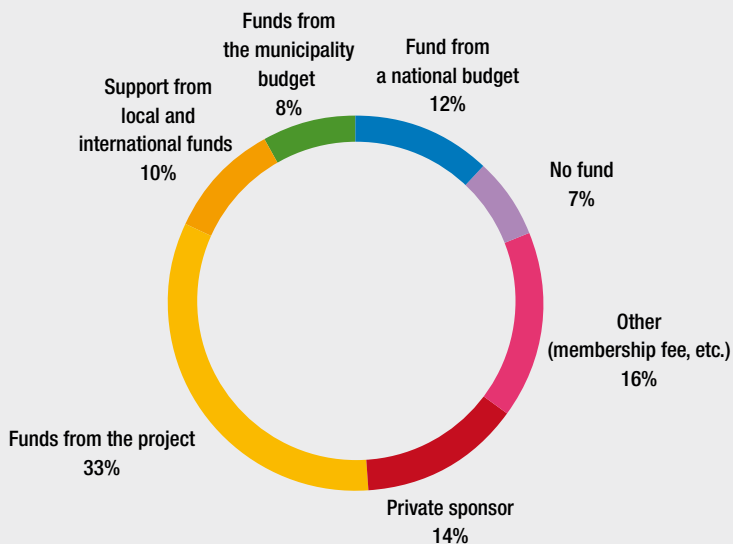


Chart No. 1. Structure of the budget of NGOs in Kaunas region (average)

For example in Kaunas region there are special procedures to get support from the local government. Municipality organizes a competition to choose the best ideas or projects and then gives a support to NGOs to implement them. The winners are chosen by the jury, which includes NGO's representatives too. The bilateral agreement is signed with the winners where specific service, which should be implemented by the NGOs, is defined. After all the projects are finished, the best one is awarded to encourage community to initiate more various projects.

In conclusion we have to state that non-governmental organizations bring an important input developing a democratic society and keeping it vital by increasing awareness and participation of citizens in Lithuania.





Participants to the training in Minsk, June 2007

The project ACSOBE was designed as a pilot action since it addressed a specific and limited number of beneficiaries: representatives of civil society groups and non-governmental organizations, with a special focus on those working with vulnerable groups of society; representatives of local authorities. An unforeseen positive aspect of the Action was the number of participants in the training sessions, which was far higher than expected. In particular, the project activities reached: in total, **34 representatives (men 21, women 13) of 18 different NGOs and civil society groups**, who benefited from the training sessions provided. In total, **55 people (men 38, women 17)** benefited from the various networking meetings: 49 representatives of 30 different NGOs and civil society groups and 6 representatives of political parties and local government benefited. There were **46 beneficiaries (men 23, women 23)** of the workshop. More precisely, there were 45 representatives of NGOs and civil society and 1 representative of local government. It can be estimated that there are **120 final beneficiaries**.

NGOs benefited from the trainings because they acquired new capacities in the promotion of social and cultural rights to vulnerable groups and also in the representation and advocacy of human rights. NGOs also benefited from improved skills in networking, and in the implementation and supervision of international co-operation projects, and they enjoyed international support for their work. Moreover, the interesting aspect of the networking meetings is that each of them resulted in the development of ideas. These ideas will serve as a basis for the follow-up after the conclusion of ACSOBE. All the activities offered to the target groups improved their ability to play an active role in social and civic life; these new skills open new perspectives in participative democracy. The project increased social partnership

at the local level, and local organizations got new specific knowledge of how to promote and protect interests of their target groups. For these reasons in the long term, this pilot action will encourage viable democratic change in Belarusian society and consequently will benefit Belarusian citizens.

The impact has been effective from local point of view. A lot of NGOs, very active at the local level, on the field of human rights, came from small towns located in the countryside, which are usually more isolated. The fact that they felt international support was a real relief for the situation they live day by day. The activities have been constantly monitored by ALDA, as coordinator of the project, through Lev Sapieha foundation. The beneficiaries expressed enthusiasm despite the fear of repression and personal reprisal. They all stressed out the importance of trainings. Moreover the networking meetings gave them the possibility of fighting against the sense of loneliness and powerlessness.

The overall objective of improving the capacities of civil society was reached. In particular, awareness of social and cultural rights has been raised and capacities to deal with related issues have been strengthened. Such capacities were strengthened through training sessions, in which 18 NGOs took part. Social and cultural initiatives were promoted at the local level so as to encourage essential participation at grassroots level. As a result of the various activities organized involving NGOs working in the field of social and cultural rights, important networks between these organizations have developed. By communicating and co-operating with one another, the actions of civil society organizations will be more effective.

Despite the overall success of the project, some difficulties were encountered. Although it was foreseen that difficulties would be encountered in engaging with Belarusian local authorities, the extent of these difficulties was such that they were often impossible to overcome. Due to pressure from national government, only two representatives of local authorities participated in the project and only to the main training. Although it was planned that a project website be added to the website of ALDA, it was later decided that, due to the hostility of the Belarusian government towards the project and fear of reprisals, the visibility of the involvement of the local partner, should be minimized.

Nonetheless, through the activities above, the project succeeded in transferring capacities to non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, and few local government representatives. These capacities allow, for the opinions and interests of citizens in the field of social and cultural rights, to be better represented and taken into consideration throughout the decision-making process. Communication amongst non-governmental actors was enhanced, and the creation of networks was encouraged, as was communication between such actors and local government representatives. This process encouraged participation and grassroots democracy in Belarus paving the way for a more democratic society.



LEAD PARTNER



PARTNERS



AID PROGRAMME ADVISORY CENTRE

FRANCE



AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE OF TRENTO



LEV SAPIEHA FOUNDATION



MUNICIPAL TRAINING CENTER



MUNICIPALITY OF MONFALCONE



SMC MUNICIPAL TRAINING CENTER
KAZIMIERZ UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

LITHUANIA



BELARUS

AP
AC

POLAND



ITALY



Contact details

**ASSOCIATION OF THE LOCAL
DEMOCRACY AGENCIES**

Director: Antonella Valmorbida
antonella.valmorbida@aldaintranet.org

External relations: Stefania Toriello
stefania.toriello@aldaintranet.org

Office in Strasbourg
ALDA c/o Council of Europe
European Palace - 67000 Strasbourg (FR)
Tel. 0033 3 90214593 - Fax 0033 390 21 55 17

Office in Brussels
ALDA, Rue des Confédérés 47
1040 Brussels (BE) Tel: 0032 2 7420161

Office in Italy
ALDA, Viale Mazzini 225 - 36100 Vicenza (IT)
Tel: 0039 0444 540146 - Fax: 0039 0444 231043

Office in Serbia
ALDA c/o LDA Subotica
Trg Cara Jovana Nenada 15 - 24000 Subotica (SRB)
Tel. 00381 24 554 587 - Fax 00381 24 553 116

www.alda-europe.eu



Offices of ALDA in Europe

The Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA) is an international non-governmental organization, based in Strasbourg. Established in 1999 as an initiative of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, ALDA focuses on, and has extensive experience of, the promotion of active citizenship and participative democracy in all areas of local governance, and human rights at all levels of government.

ALDA has a particularly close relationship with the European Commission, being a member of its Strategic Group on active citizenship, and has maintained strong links with the Council of Europe. The Association has also established good relations with the UN and OSCE, as well as civil society organizations and local and regional authorities. ALDA has extensive experience of project management and

of providing expertise and support to civil society actors, in particular through its coordination of 12 Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) situated in the Western Balkans and in Georgia.

The LDAs were created to provide assistance and foster reconciliation in war-ravaged regions in the former Yugoslavia. After the war, the LDAs became 'laboratories for peace', contributing to the difficult task of re-building local communities, restoring respect for human rights, and re-establishing understanding and good relations between ethnic groups. The LDAs focus on democratic reform and capacity building so as to guarantee peace, and a smooth and stable transition towards democracy and European integration. Emphasis is placed on the promotion of tolerant and trust-based relationships within local communities. A key activity of ALDA is to coordinate the 11 LDAs in the Balkans and in the Southern Caucasus, and to provide them with administrative and political support. Furthermore, training sessions for trainers on conflict prevention and reconciliation have been provided for local authorities and NGOs. As a result, over the past 15 years, ALDA and the LDAs became one of

the most important European networks fostering peace and democracy.

ALDA uses its expertise gained from working with the LDAs to promote tolerance, human rights, and participative democracy in other European and not European countries. For example, by promoting human rights in Belarus, ALDA is fostering peace and stability there. With its wide, diverse network, ALDA has developed numerous projects to foster peace through the exchange of best practice and capacity building. Various projects on peace and democracy have been implemented, including the very successful "Cities for Peace and Democracy in Europe" campaign.

ALDA's main partners and members include local and regional authorities, civil society organizations, and universities, giving it a wide network of contacts. Through its headquarters in Strasbourg and offices in Vicenza and Brussels, ALDA ensures its visibility and influence. Furthermore, its international status gives international impact to the projects in which it is involved.



The map shows the countries where ALDA has members and partners

the smaller map shows where the LDAs are located

Contact details

AID PROGRAMME ADVISORY CENTRE

Marcin Konieczny, APAC President
Rzemieslnicza str 3 - P - 13-100 Nidzica
Tel. +48 501 630 738
Tel./Fax +48 89 625 3662
cdpp@wp.pl - mkon@cs0.pl
www.nida.pl



The Aid Programmes Advisory Centre (APAC) is an independent, non-governmental organization based Nidzica, Poland. APAC has been an operating programme of the Nidzica Development Foundation, and has enjoyed the sponsorship of the Stefan Batory Foundation, since 1998. However, in 2004, APAC became an independent and sustainable organization. The aim of APAC is to foster the efficient use of financial and methodological assistance by NGOs. The Centre's activities include training and study tours, with emphasis placed on tripartite co-operation among local businesses, NGOs, and local authorities. It supports all those NGOs in the Region of Warmia and Mazuria (north-east part of Poland) who needs support and training activities. APAC has a relevant experience in Kaliningrad Region, in Georgia and Russia.



Networking meeting in Verhnedvinsk November 2007

AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE OF TRENTO

Contact details

Via Romagnosi, 9 - 38100 TRENTO

Tel. +39 0461 495324

Fax +39 0461 495362

serv.europa.sviluppocale@provincia.tn.it

valeria.liverini@provincia.tn.it

franca.dalvit@provincia.tn.it



The province of Trento is situated in the autonomous region of Trentino in the north of Italy. With a strong agricultural sector and popular as a tourist destination, the province is also investing in other economic sectors including culture, scientific research, and industry. With a total population of approximately 460,000, the province is composed of 223 municipalities of which only 5 have a population of over 10,000.

The Autonomous Province of Trento, together with the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, makes up the Trentino - Alto Adige Region. Both the Trentino - Alto Adige Region and (a unique case in Italy) the two Trento e Bolzano Provinces are granted special autonomy by Italian law and the Special Autonomy Statute has been approved as a constitutional law. The autonomy recognised by the Special Statute involves: political autonomy, legislative autonomy, administrative autonomy and financial autonomy.

The region is also autonomous in the following matters: environment management: town planning, safeguard of the landscape and of the historical-artistic richness, toponymy, road system, public works that interest the province; social services: hygiene and health, education, subsidized housing, assistance and beneficence; economic activities: agricultural, manufacturing, commerce, tourism, industrial production; culture and education: artistic events, defence of local cultures; administrative organisation: direct undertaking of public services. The financial autonomy is granted under the form of transfers from the State, which returns the 90% of the civil taxes cashed at the local level and moreover the region can impose other rates. The politics of the Autonomous Province of Trento involve varied subjects like internationalization, environment, mountain and energy.

The Province has one Department responsible for European affairs and another one in charge of International cooperation. Both of them, with its own specific competence, are active in international projects, in networking at international level and in promoting democracy and human rights all over the world. The Province is also member of the Association of Local Democracy Agencies.

Given its experience of local governance, the province is eager to share its expertise.



Contact details

LEV SAPIEHA FOUNDATION

9-506 Kulamn Str.
 220100 Minsk - Belarus
 Tel. +375 17 237 44 30
 Fax +375 17 210 13 22
 sapieha@iptel.by



The Lev Sapieha Foundation is a non-governmental, non-political, non-profit organization. Founded in 1992, Lev Sapieha is one of Belarus' oldest NGOs. The Foundation's objectives are to foster democratic ideas and reform, and to encourage the development of civil society.

More precisely, Lev Sapieha brings together members from all over Belarus. These members include well-known lawyers, economists, sociologists, historians, representatives of local authorities, cultural associations, the media and business. Their aim is to bring about reform in the fields of local self-government, economy, science and culture.

Lev Sapieha seeks to develop proposals re-

lated with the reforms and improvement of local self-government, and analyses both Belarusian and foreign legislation so as to assist in the drafting of statutes for this purpose. Lev Sapieha encourages the exercise by citizens of their rights within local communities so as to strengthen grassroots democracy. To this effect, the Foundation co-operates with Belarusian local authorities and supports regional non-governmental organization; it also co-operates with national and international non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, the Lev Sapieha offers support for civil initiatives and for publications promoting the national culture and historical heritage of the people of Belarus.

The organization has successfully implemented over 45 projects, including over 20 regional projects. These projects have benefited over 5 000 people, and have involved the training of about 400 specialists in self-government and civil leadership. The projects have been supported by well-know foreign organizations such as the Soros Foundation, TACIS, the Eurasia Fund, MATRA, the Ebert Foundation, the Adenauer Foundation, SIDA, USAID, ALDA, and the European Commission. Furthermore, the Foundation has established partnership relations with municipal associations and educational centres in over 10 countries of Europe, and a number of



Experiences of cooperation among civil society and local authorities in Lithuania

NGOs and newspapers have been established upon the initiative and with the assistance of members of the Lev Sapieha Foundation.

The methods used by Lev Sapieha in order to achieve its objectives are innovative. The Foundation carries out research and analysis in partnership with both Belarusian and foreign experts; it organizes educational seminars, lectures, conferences, round-table discussions, meetings, and exhibitions; it publishes both Belarusian and foreign scientific, educational, and methodological titles, as well

as reference materials; it creates information centres in Minsk and throughout Belarus; it co-operates with international organizations.

The Lev Sapieha Foundation has enjoyed official observer status since 1996 at the commission of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of the CIS member-states for studying the experience of state construction and self-government. Also, since 1994, Lev Sapieha has been the only Belarusian organization to enjoy participative status in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.



*Networking meeting in Verhnedvsk
November 2007*



*Networking meeting in Verhnedvsk
November 2007*



Contact details

MUNICIPAL TRAINING CENTER

Raguvos st. 4 LT - 44275 Kaunas - Lithuania

Tel. 00370 37 407720

Fax 00370 37 40 77 19

Mob. phone 00370 8 687 815 20

smc@savivalda.lt

www.savivalda.lt



The Municipal Training Center (MTC), an NGO established in 1993, is a multi-faceted independent institution committed to strengthening local governments in Lithuania. MTC is focused on practically oriented training and consulting. Most MTC's trainings have been designed as in-service professional development programs for public institutions and NGOs. MTC also conducts researches in public administration, and seeks to foster democratic reform in Lithuania by empowering citizens to exercise their rights and become active participants in decision-making process. MTC conducts researches public manager courses and seminars for NGO leaders, hosts professional conferences and participates in various international projects.

MTC started its activities in Belarus in 1998. A number of projects have been implemented since then. The main initiatives implemented by MTC in the country. International Project "Strengthening Co-operation between Lithuania and Belarus" (Supported by U.S. Embassy in Vilnius, 1998). Main objective of the project was to establish working relations with Belarusian NGOs. As a result of this project, participants were introduced to the Lithuanian public administration system and non-governmental sector. MTC established contacts with Belarusian NGOs and defined the framework for future co-operation. International Project "Development of Co-operation between Lithuanian and Belarussian NGOs" (Supported by U.S. National Endowment for Democracy, 2000-2001). The main objective of this project is to strengthen civic society in Belarus and Lithuania through establishment of partnerships between Lithuanian and Byelorussian NGOs. A number of training events, consultations and conferences for Byelorussian NGO representatives were carried out. The Belarussian and Lithuanian NGOs initiated joint projects. International Project "Promoting Democratic Reforms in Local Governance in Belarus" (Supported by U.S. National Endowment for Democracy, 2003-2004). Main objectives of

the program - to improve skills and knowledge of local decision-makers, administration and community leaders in democratic local governance methods and techniques, to share the best Lithuanian experience in building and strengthening democratic local governance and to facilitate collaboration among Belarusian and Lithuanian local government representatives. International Project "Training-Study Tour to Lithuania on Local Sustainable Development" (Supported by UNDP, 2004). In July 2004 a group of 25 representatives of local and regional authori-

ties from different regions of Belarus will visit Lithuania to get acquainted with programmes and initiatives undertaken by Lithuanian authorities aimed at sustainable development of their communities and territories. International project "Strengthening of community activism in Belarus through development of communal property management skills" in partnership with the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (Supported the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Council of Europe). Project duration: November 2004-May 2005.



Winter at the condominium



Contact details

MUNICIPALITY OF MONFALCONE

**8, Piazza della Repubblica - I
34074 Monfalcone (GO)
europa@comune.monfalcone.go.it
www.comune.monfalcone.go.it**



Monfalcone is an industrial town located in the autonomous region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia in the north-east of Italy. The town is well known for its shipping industry – with the Fincantieri shipyard being one of the largest in Europe. The town itself has a population of 27,652 inhabitants, but, including the surrounding villages, the municipality has approximately 50,000 inhabitants. Due to its location, the municipality of Monfalcone has a rich culture and history, and seeks to share its experience of multiculturalism with other regions. The municipality has thus become increasingly involved in international activities over the past few years. Activities have involved the exchange of best practice in the field of public administration, transparency and innovation exercises with municipali-

ties in the Balkans region, and development co-operation with regions in south-east Asia and the Middle East. Co-operation with these regions is of particular importance to the municipality they are the regions of origin of a number of migrants to Monfalcone. The municipality has also strengthened its partnership with ALDA by supporting the Local Democracy Agencies in Kutaisi (Georgia) and in Mostar, (Bosnia Herzegovina). The municipality is very keen to be involved in the dissemination of skills and capacities to be used for the promotion of human rights and democracy.

The municipality of Monfalcone is particularly eager to share its experience of the 'horizontal subsidiarity' model of local governance. This model entails the sub-contracting of certain public services to civil society. In particular, services in the fields of youth, the elderly, and immigration have been provided by civil society actors. Centres for the young and the elderly have been opened and are run by the public, with local authorities on hand to provide support where required. The rich culture of immigrant groups is fostered through the establishment of cultural associations, which immigrants themselves manage. A special local authority committee on immigration and integration has been set up so serve as an instrument for dialogue.

