

ANNUAL ACTIVITIES REPORT

BELARUSIAN NATIONAL PLATFORM DECEMBER 2015 – END OF OCTOBER 2016

KEY TOPICS/ISSUES OF FOCUS FOR THE BELARUSIAN NATIONAL PLATFORM



The activities of the Belarusian National Platform (BNP) were concentrated on the several main topics:

- the Human Rights Situation in Belarus and the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue
- freedom of speech and freedom of association
- monitoring of the implementation of the EHEA Road Map of reforms for Higher Education in Belarus
- the Implementation of the Convention on the rights of people with disabilities
- a secure information space in Belarus and the EaP region
- gender equality as a part of CSF agenda
- pension reform

The recently adopted BNP Strategic plan identified the following objectives for the period 2016-2018:

- Increasing the extent and quality of CSO participation of Belarus in the BNP to consolidate the positions and advocacy interests of civil society as well as the building of solidarity through joint concrete public campaigns and the work of the thematic groups, taking into account the [EaP CSF policy document on advocacy](#).
- Increasing the impact of the BNP on the state and the development of Belarusian-European relations through direct or indirect talks, public campaigns, public hearings, and the use of any windows of opportunity for public participation in decision-making, including independent assessment and monitoring.
- Strengthening the capacity of participating organizations to implement activities aimed at democratic transformation in Belarus, and integration with the EU.
- Development of BNP capacity to ensure its ability to implement the previous goals.

ACTIVITIES AND KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

In general, during the reporting period, the BNP, its Coordination Committee and member CSOs organized 53 events (conferences, negotiations, consultations, round tables etc.), which were attended by 442 people. This activity resulted in an increase in the interest and confidence of civil society organizations within the BNP and their more active participation in the planning and implementation of activities. Seven public statements and a common position was released by CSOs on behalf of the BNP. However, a significant challenge remains for the development of joint advocacy activities between the organizations participating in the thematic working groups.

The Government of Belarus is paying greater attention to civil society as a result of systematic policy campaign on the implementation of the Bologna process in Belarus (through the advocacy and lobbying of the Road map for reforms in Higher education both at national at EaP level with active involvement of EaP CSF and other NPs)

Civil society expanded its presence and strengthened voice in EU-Belarus relations via proactive participation in the formats of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group and the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue

Concrete achievements at the National level in recent year 2015-2016:

- Adoption of new Strategic plan and Regulations of the Belarus National Platform for 2016-2019
- The renewal and development of institutional relations with key partners (EU, UN, Ministry of Foreign Affairs);
- Participation of civil society representatives in the formats of EU-Belarus Coordination Group and EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue;
- The holding of two conferences of the Belarus National Platform (23 April 2016 and 22 October 2016)
- Preparation and adoption of 7 BNP statements and appeals
- Participation in a series of consultations and working meetings to systematise the sectorial work of the BNP (human rights, information policy, think tanks, children rights, economic development, environment etc.)
- International conference on the reform of higher education with the participation of experts of EaP countries (23-24 September 2016, over 80 participants) and further advocacy actions



Involvement of BNP actors in CSF activities at multilateral level:

- Ensuring the participation of Belarus civil society representatives in 3 regional events EaP CSF in 2016, notably the conferences on: Security issues (Tbilisi, July 2016 – 5 participants from Belarus), Human Rights (Chisinau, September 2016, 5 participants), and the Bologna Process (Minsk, September 2016, over 60 participants from Belarusian civil society and expert community)
- Initiating the idea of a monitoring mission of the EaP Civil Society Forum to Armenia under the leadership of the HR expert and activist Elena Tonkacheva, as well as the participation in further advocacy activities in Brussels around the resultant findings and recommendations.

THE RELATIONS OF THE NP WITH THE AUTHORITIES AND EU DELEGATIONS/EU INSTITUTIONS/EU MEMBER STATES

The development of a new NP strategy provided a good basis for the development of communication and cooperation with key stakeholders on the issue of participation of civil society in policy negotiations in Belarus.

Over the past year, the BNP has improved the nature of communication and relation with the EU Delegation in Minsk. The Head of EU Delegation Ms. Andrea Wiktorin participated in one of the BNP conferences, a regional EaP CSF event on Higher education reform as well as in several thematic events arranged by BNP members. Belarusian civil society is always invited to meetings with the EU officials coming to Minsk on various missions.

During this year, the BNP has also succeeded in improving its communication with the Belarusian MFA with a series of meetings both within the EU-Belarus Coordination group but also at bilateral meetings (MFA-BNP discussion on participation of the government in civil society events etc.). This improvement become possible thanks to both a more open position of the MFA regarding contact with civil society and to the role of the EU Delegation in Minsk in facilitating dialogue between the two entities.

The Coordination Committee of the BNP held regular meetings with representatives of the UN and UNDP with the aim to coordinate efforts and establish a relevant format for cooperation with the goal of strengthening civil society and improving its role in stakeholder dialogues domestically and internationally.

The BNP conducted an analysis during meetings with stakeholders and a project on the BNP information strategy has been developed with expert assistance and wide involvement of media actors and Belarusian Association of Journalists.

OUTCOMES OF ISSUES RAISED BY THE NATIONAL PLATFORM

Given the present state of affairs in Belarus, civil society is still barely able to contribute to decision-making processes or changes in legislation. At the same time, there have been some promising steps as a result of BNP efforts in improving communication and cooperation with the key stakeholders in Belarus and at EU level:

- The BNP has holds a relevant and significant position in the format of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group. The BNP monitored data and the implementation of concrete proposals, and offered suggestions for the improvement of the format of EU-Belarus Coordination Group in the future through a more intensive dialogue between meetings as well as an expert discussion between the authorities and civil society on a number of issues.

- The dialogue established between representatives of BNP and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus has progressed. The first meeting was held in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in June 2016. After the last meeting of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group in Minsk on 16-17 November, 2016 it was agreed to have more regular discussions between the MFA and BNP representatives regarding a number of thematic issues related to EU-Belarus agenda.
- The BNP Ad-hoc Commission on Higher Education Reform succeeded in developing recommendations for changes and additions to the Educational Code of Belarus. The Commission (in coordination with CSF Secretariat in Brussels) also delivered key messages and concerns of civil society and the independent expert community to the AG 2 of Bologna Follow Up Group regarding the implementation of the EHEA obligations of Belarus.
- The EU Delegation and BNP are in the final stage of negotiations regarding the creation of a three-year plan for cooperation.

NATIONAL PLATFORM PRIORITIES FOR 2017

- Strengthening Civil Society and the BNP as an institutional partner in the EU-Belarus dialogue
- Institutionalized participation of civil society in Belarus-EU bilateral programs format
- Systematic and targeted work on key thematic areas

BNP aims to broaden the spectrum of roles that civil society can influence in multilateral dialogues with stakeholders during the policy process, such as:

- Stakeholders: evaluation of the real needs of target groups, participation in goal setting and development of criteria for feedback;
- Experts: concepts, technology, expertise (including international level);
- Partners: joint contribution (human, financial, information, intellectual resources), horizontal communication;
- Watchdogs: public control, monitoring and evaluation;
- Promoters: public discussion and promotion of best practices and successes, access to citizens;
- Consumers: the use of results of reforms, guarantee the stability of change (if happens);
- Service providers: offer of a specific range of services and projects for different target groups.

GENERAL INFO ABOUT THE NATIONAL PLATFORM

The Belarusian National Platform was established in July 2010 with the mission of strengthening the solidarity, participation and influence of civil society organizations in

democratic transformation and the European Integration of Belarus by ensuring a dialogue with the public and the European institutions in the bilateral and multilateral formats.

The BNP sees itself as an open and democratic platform for dialogue, promoting common positions, advocacy and any other joint actions described in its Strategic plan and Regulations.