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INTERNATIONAL AID AND POSSIBILITIES OF COMBINING SOCIAL AND DEMOCRATIC ISSUES IN NGO ACTIVITY IN BELARUS *

Устатті аналізується міжнародна допомога Білорусі у соціальній сфері, у тому числі соціальним недержавним організаціям (НДО). Автор розглядає питання про застосування населення Білорусі до будівництва громадянського суспільства через "неполітизовані" соціальні питання, потенційно посилюючи таким чином перспективи демократії у Білорусі. Наголошується, що міжнародні фундації мають мати "людське обличчя": тобто їхня допомога має бути наочною для пересічних громадян. Утой же час, "неполітизована" соціальна сфера не може бути лише єдиним фокусом активності донорів. Необхідно підтримувати поєднання соціальних і демократичних аспектів у секторі НДО, так само як і активність структур, які безпосередньо атакуються владою (профспілки, правозахисні організації, незалежні мас медіа).

Introduction

Despite the offensive of Belarusian authorities on the civil society after 1994 and especially after the November 1996 "referendum" and dissolution of the XHIIth democratically elected parliament, they have not managed to put all the NGO sector under control. A lot of NGOs supported by international community, including those with clear democratic orientation, continue its activity.

At the same time, NGO sector is not united. There are sharp ideological, organizational, and personal contradictions, as well as competition for grants. In fact, there are few persons who could be of moral authority for all the segments of NGO sector. Moreover, NGO activity as well as Western assistance to the third sector are not understood by the majority of Belarusian population; authorities could easily discredit them.¹ A lot of population simply do not understand why it is important to be active in the process of civic participation, thus helping authorities to conduct its non-democratic policy. Some democratic activists argue that one of the reasons lies in the fact that Belarusian democrats were engaged into politics without having built the background of the civil society.

Therefore, the question arise: how could Belarusian population be educated and involved into the building of the civil society? When most of the population distrust the politics and politicians, it is easier to reach it through NGOs than through political parties. When the policy process is not election-centered, when political parties are weak,

their functions are played, to a great extent, by the third sector, creating objectively the trend for its "politicization". Historically the emergence of the third sector in the West was based on the social issues, while in Belarus, as in many other former Soviet republics, extremely important role was played by the organizations dealing with human rights, independent mass media, national, language, and cultural issues (the vivid example is the fact that even speaking Belarusian, stressing Belarusian identity is becoming in the present situation, to a great extent, a political choice). Under these circumstances, the opposite forces are afraid of the politicization of NGO sector: on the one hand, President Lukashenka and his command, on the other, those Belarusian NGOs which distance from the issues politically sensitive to the government. Different approaches within Belarusian NGO sector create certain problems for international donors as well.

There is a lot of articles on NGO sector in the journals and newsletters of independent Belarusian think-tanks.² However, there is only one publication in which data on international aid to Belarus was collected. It covers the period of 1992— 1996.³ Moreover, even in this very useful edition prepared by UNDP information on the activity of some foundations is missing. The analytical assessment of donors aid to NGO sector was provided in the report prepared for the Belarus Funders Meeting in Brussels (November, 1997).⁴

This article is based on the paper prepared for the workshop "Broadening of the Social Base of NGO Sector in Belarus" (Warsaw, 1998) organized

* The article was submitted in December 1998.

by the EastWest Institute (formerly Institute for EastWest Studies). Its main aim is to discuss the question of involving Belarusian population into the building of civil society through "non-politicized" social issues, thus strengthening potentially the prospects for democracy in Belarus. The author is thankful to the activists of Belarusian NGOs and, especially, to representatives of donor organizations who shared information on their aid to Belarusian civil society.

International Aid to Social Services NGOs

In general, NGOs dealing with rehabilitation and social work comprise almost 9 % of all NGOs (the third largest group after sport and tourism NGOs — 10 %; art and culture NGOs — 10 %), NGOs dealing with disabled and handicapped — 4 %, health care — 3 %, environmental — 3 %, Chernobyl — 3 %.⁵ The tragedy of Chernobyl is one of the factors which contributes to the activity of NGOs in this sphere. 3 million people (almost 30 % of Belarusian population) suffered from Chernobyl. Together with handicapped, elderly people, large families they comprise up to 50 % of the whole population. On the one hand, the level of the state support to this group decreased significantly in 1990—94 during democratic *perestroika*. On the other, President Lukashenka is striving for monopoly on all social programmes and is moving towards the model of the *state corporatism*, searching for involvement of large socio-professional groups in the support of its regime (creation of Belarusian Patriotic Youth Union; congresses of teachers and judges held last year). However, attempts of the authorities to build monopolist structures created in NGO sector the trend to consolidation and coordination: creation of the Assembly of Belarusian Pro-Democratic NGOs, Association of Independent Think-Tanks, resource centers for NGOs such as "United Way" or "Ratusha" (in Hrodno region), and, finally, such civic initiative as Charter'97.

These two trends are visible in social sector as well. According to the classification provided by Gennadiy Grushevoy, deputy of the legitimate parliament and chairman of Belarusian Charitable Fund "For the Children of Chernobyl", social services NGOs could be divided into the following categories:

- 1) Organizations associated with the executive branch of power or with the system of the Soviets (around 40 NGOs). Their activity is targeted, first of all, to reducing the influence of independent NGOs.
- 2) Those associated with political and corporate organizations such as parties, youth and women's organizations, trade unions etc. (around 100). These

NGOs are not very active but they have large potential for developing.

3) Church humanitarian organizations (Karitas, Samaritans etc.) which are very active in providing humanitarian help. They do not face the resistance from the authorities.

4) Charitable foundations (around 20). Unfortunately, only small part of them created regional structures which are able not only to collect and to distribute humanitarian aid, but to rely on its own additional capabilities. For example, Fund "For the Children of Chernobyl" (officially registered in 1990) has around 60 district (*rayon*) organizations. It delivered foreign humanitarian aid (up to DM 700 million) to 240,000 families, and organized vacations abroad for about 100,000 children. However, even in this case its chances to support this network are limited if the efforts are not combined with other NGOs.

5) The last group comprises local self-help groups and civic initiatives (around 200). Many of them are not registered and consist of 3—5 persons, they do not have information about each other or even knowledge about the main principles of NGO activity, they are not connected to democratic movement, but they could be very active.⁶

When authorities are on the offensive on the civil society, international aid to NGO sector in general, and social NGOs, in particular, is becoming extremely important.

The author of this article realized that it is sometimes difficult to collect generalized information on international aid to Belarusian NGOs (not to say, figures for concrete grants). To some extent, it is understandable: the atmosphere of suspicion created by the authorities and the closure of Belarusian Soros Foundation in 1997 influence donors desire to share information as well. That is why, we do not intend to cover all international activity in social sphere. Rather, we try to use the examples of this activity in order to highlight the main trends (Russian aid is not covered as it is not targeted to social sphere and NGO sector).

The figures provided in the UNDP study could serve as the starting point in analyzing general picture. In addition to multi-profile projects, which represented in 1992—1996 19.1 % of total commitments, principal areas of donor activity are social welfare and development — \$43 million (14.4%), and human resources development — \$24,6 million (8.2 %). The main recipients are state structures. During the same period \$11,4 million were spent in the sphere of human rights, \$3 million — to support business development, \$2,4 million — for mass media, and only \$1 million — to support NGOs.⁷ In 1996 emergency and relief assistance/humanitarian assistance (including food

aid for humanitarian/emergency purposes) comprised 31.4% of the official development assistance to Belarus.⁸ Thus, despite the stereotypes which are supported by the authorities interested to describe the Western activity as anti-governmental, social sphere is one of the main spheres of international aid. It is important to stress that Belarusian Soros Foundation, accused of anti-governmental activity, in reality, paid great attention to social issues as well through Medical and Health Programme (in 1996— \$519,000), Step by Step Programme (\$433,000 — on pre-school education), Environment Programme (\$141,000 etc.), Health Education Programme (\$68,000), Chernobyl Programme (\$34,000), in total — \$1,195 million or 23.5 % of all expenditures of Belarusian Soros Foundation in 1996. ⁹*

Naturally, different organizations pay different attention to social sphere. The TACIS programme is the Belarus' largest multilateral donor (and, in general, the second one after the US), accounting in 1991—96 for 70 % of the total aid provided by multilateral donors. Actual disbursements for the above period totalled \$56 million. However, after the events of 1996 its National Projects were closed for the new applicants, while Inter-State, Cross-Border, and Democracy Programmes continue to be open. TACIS aid to Belarus in 1997 was around 8 million ECU, and in 1998— around 7 million ECU. Social sphere did not dominate in TACIS activity, as the overwhelming part of the aid was targeted to the restructuring of state enterprises and private sector development, energy, agriculture, and transport. Nevertheless, some of the projects in social sphere were large, for example, \$2 million project with Ministry of Labor "Assistance in Strengthening the State Employment Service in Belarus" (1994—96).

The UN system provides 18 % of the aid by multilateral donors. UNDP coordinates the activities and assist in the implementation of projects of such organizations as UNESCO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNEP, UNDCP and others. The focus of UNDP activities are poverty reduction, job creation, advocacy of women's rights and environmental protection. Apart from UN organizations which activity is coordinated by UNDP, one should also mention UNICEF and WHO. The last one is, in fact, the largest donor within the UN system (its commitments comprised \$9,8 million out of \$14 million for 1992—96). WHO provided \$8,5 million for minimization of Chernobyl disaster consequences. In 1996 WHO actual disbursements comprised around \$1,25 million out of \$2,21 million for the whole UN system official development assistance.¹⁰ In general, already

ongoing programmes of the UN system for 1997—2001 comprise \$7,2 million (as of September 1998).

Large share of aid to social sphere comes from bilateral donors (governments and governmental financed agencies and foundations). The United States spent \$1,7 million for health care improvement. The number of projects in social sphere comprise around 1/4 of German Transform Programme. NGO part of Transform is small which reflects very careful approach of official Bonn. Among other countries active in social sphere it is possible to point out Sweden, Italy, Austria, Switzerland.

This aid should not be underestimated:

- A) this is humanitarian help to population;
- B) *it creates possibilities to maintain dialogue with state structures both on national and local levels, to develop contacts with specialist and experts within bureaucracy.* These contacts are important as the chances for regime's abdication are low.

However, the fact that the overwhelming part of the aid is received under the control of state structures has negative consequences as well. Sometimes, people do not know that the aid is provided by international donors, sometimes it could be exploited by the authorities and viewed by the population as tacit support of the regime by international community. The programmes are paternalistic and they do not develop self-initiative. It is not surprising that Belarusian authorities welcome this kind of aid.

That is why, it is important **to differentiate between the aid through state structures and through NGOs** as activation of NGOs in social sphere contributes to strengthening the civil society in Belarus.

The latest 3-year programme of UNDP assistance to Belarus for 1997—1999 — the country Cooperation Framework — underwent a close scrutiny by the UNDP Executive Board. Additional clarifications were sought concerning UN's work in the area of human rights and democracy, and more emphasis was placed on cooperation with NGOs. In the absence of a strong NGO sector, a number of donors have approached the UN system, particularly those not present in Belarus, with a request for cooperation. Typically, these programmes were fairly small and concentrated in such areas as human rights, democracy, NGOs, independent media. This approach was also acceptable to the government of Belarus. "

Some NGO participation was due to the preferences of donors to implement programmes cost-shared by them through the NGOs. Examples include the AIDS prevention programme, where the first UNDP project executed by NGO ("Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs") has been

formulated, the UNICEF programmes in the area of child rights, the UNHCR programme of assistance to the asylum seekers, and programmes dealing with the issues of human rights and support to the independent media. According to UNDP, the major result in the sphere of social protection is the approval by the government of mechanisms and procedures for government and local third-party cost-sharing to UNDP-administered projects; through the creation of NGO Children Hospice the government has acknowledged high efficiency of NGOs in the social sphere.¹²

As it was mentioned above, TACIS has special LIEN (Link inter NGOs) programme. As LIEN is a part of National Projects, it is closed now for new applicants. All the 4 ongoing grants (for the general sum of 676,800 ECU) are in social sphere. Belarusian government did not sign this programme, nevertheless authorities are well aware of these grants. As in the case of UNDP, TACIS activity in this sphere could also be viewed as an attempt to maintain dialogue and cooperation between international agencies, NGOs, and state structures at the national and local levels.

One of the major problems to be solved is the future of the TACIS Civil Society Development Programme specially designed for Belarus and adopted at the beginning of 1998 with a budget of 5 million ECU. It includes the NGO Support Programme which budget is 2,4 million ECU. It targets more than 30 NGOs in the whole Belarusian territory to develop its capacities through different activities (youth, children, unemployed, women, environment, teachers etc.). However, it is understandable that Belarusian authorities are not in a hurry to sign Civil Society Development Programme which, according to TACIS procedure, is necessary pre-condition for its implementation.

The large share of international aid supporting NGO sector comes through USAID financed structures (below we analyze the activity of those structures which are actively involved in social sphere: Counterpart Alliance for Partnership, Counterpart Humanitarian Assistance Program, Eurasia Foundation). As to Eurasia, social sphere is not among the priorities of this foundation. However, one of the main directions of Eurasia activity is the support of NGO sector. In 1995–1998 Eurasia provided 32 grants in the field of NGO development for the total sum of \$359,179. 13 grants for the total sum of \$60,568 (17 %) were given to social sphere. In addition, some grants, awarded in other categories, deal with social issues as well. For example, under the category "New and Innovative Projects" the grant was provided to Union of Social Pedagogues and Social Workers. Within the programme "Rule of Law" the grant was given to

Minsk consumers society. Data collected by the society will be provided to State Committee of Standards as well as to law-enforcement agencies.

Counterpart Humanitarian Assistance Programme (CHAP) locates excess part of defense property at closing U. S. military bases and delivers it to hospitals, orphanages, and social services NGOs. In 1996 (the 10th anniversary of Chernobyl tragedy) CHAP provided commodities for the value of \$4,95 million, in 1997—\$2,511 million, in 1998—approximately \$4,3 million.

Counterpart Alliance for Partnership (CAP) offers training on management and project design, technical assistance and grants. The local authorities creates quite often bureaucratic roadblocks and changes documentation requirements. During the award phase of the first grants, Belarusian laws on equipment purchases changed. In response to these changes and to protect NGO grantees from paying taxes on equipment, CAP purchased equipment on their behalf. Counterpart-Belarus continues to work closely with CAP Partner agencies to facilitate the award and management of grants. This had been especially important to Salvation Army and Elwin (neither of which has permanent staff in Belarus). In FY 1998 CAP provided grants for 15 NGOs for the sum of \$225,96 (\$126,55 were spent in rural areas).

CAP experience is very important as *CAP manages to combine activity in the spheres of social services and public policy organizations*. Examples of this activity include support to "Poisk" Mogilev Club of Unemployed created by regional organization of Belarusian Free Trade Union; to Association of Lawyers-Consultants of the Brest region; to "Ratusha"—Hrodno Regional Public Amalgamation. Grant to "Ratusha" supports the newsletter "I have the right" (the supplement to independent newspaper "Pagonia" with the circulation of 30,000) as well as founding a school of democracy in the region.

The programmes of Christian Children's Fund (secular American organization founded in 1938) are aimed to overcoming the effects of Chernobyl; to developing women's and children's health care (including support of NGOs in this sphere); to preparing social workers. CCF received financial support from USAID, Soros Foundation, UNDP and cooperated with Belarusian Children's Fund and Ministry of Education. In 1997 CCF started the programme to revive volunteers movement "Hope for the Victims of Chernobyl" financed by CCF and UNICEF. Now CCF supports 19 projects of Belarusian NGOs. CCF also buys equipment for the use of NGO sector as the real exchange rate is 2 times higher than the official one.

CCF is "neutral" in political sense, it cooperates with official structures as well and it is not associated with the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs. Nevertheless, it also faced difficulties as one of its main partners — Belarusian Soros Foundation — was closed down. One of the constraints for CCF activity was increasing influence of Orthodox Church in the state institutions. The Head of Orthodox Church wrote an angry letter to President about education of children and youth in sexual transmitted diseases, contraceptions, abortions in schools.

Among other projects connected with social services NGOs there are Swedish, German, Dutch, British projects. For example, Swedish Forum Syd is active in connecting Swedish partners to Belarusian NGOs. Dutch MATRA projects include project on "Democratizing health care". The example of NGO international partnership is the cooperation of the German Association of Chernobyl Initiatives which embraces 260 German organization with the Fund "For the Children of Chernobyl".

Nevertheless, even if international donor choose to cooperate not with the state institution but with social services NGO, the question of effectiveness of its aid still remains. After the creation of the department on humanitarian aid at the Presidential Administration headed by Vladimir Kuchinsky it became easier for trucks with humanitarian aid to cross the border. *How ever, possibilities for executive branch to control and to influence the distribution of international aid increased as well. Belarusian authorities managed to put some NGOs under its control or even created pro-official NGOs. Some organizations with beautiful names or those having "Chernobyl" in their title exist on the paper. As the official exchange rate is twice as lower as the exchange on the black market, every dollar of the grant on official account subsidizes the state structures in proportion 1:1. One could hear not only from the activists of Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) but from some Western observers as well that international social programmes help to cover the inefficiency of the regime, its inability to provide social security to the people, thus, in fact, supporting authorities.*

Possibilities for Combining Social and Democratic Issues in NGO Activity

Despite all the difficulties, social services NGOs in certain cases (for example, organization of children's vacations abroad) seized initiative from state structures. Even according to official statistics, in 1995 almost 70% of medicine and medical equipment were received through NGOs. They managed to create more attractive image of democratic movement than it had been done by

politicians, independent mass media, and entrepreneurs. However, even in the most favourable period of 1992—94 potential of social services NGOs as well as the role of the third sector was underestimated by democrats. Meanwhile, authorities attempted to put under its control social sphere as well: decrees on humanitarian help, creation of the department on humanitarian help at the Presidential Administration, persecution of the Fund "For the Children of Chernobyl" organized by the Council of Security. International humanitarian aid through independent NGOs decreased by 80%. Since September 1, 1998 it is necessary to receive license for international humanitarian programmes.¹³

Now the self-government in Belarus practically do not exist. These functions are performed to the great extent by local NGOs. Thus, the activity of social services NGOs could influence local authorities and provide possibilities for dialogue with state structures at this level (at the national level these possibilities are very limited). In order to raise their effectiveness in the hostile environment *social services NGOs should be able not only to distribute international aid but to create mechanisms for self-help through which they could mobilize their own resources. The aid should be distributed not only by people from Minsk but by local activists as well.* In principle, involvement of the activists of political structures should not be neglected (BPF, for example, has organizations in all the districts). For donors it is important to create the mechanism of coordination (or, at least, consultation) in order to avoid duplication of efforts or even atomistic approach. *Donors activity could help Belarusians to become more interested in cooperation, in integrating resources.*

Grushevoy argues that in order to start its activity social services NGOs need, first of all, not grants but joint activity with foreign counterpart; to start helping people there is no need for computer or office. The grant could be given when one is already sure of the ability of the social services NGOs to perform its functions⁴ (however, there is also the opposite view: there is no real possibility for volunteering when the average salary in the country is less than \$70). The paradox is that the activists of self-help groups, who are well aware of the absence of rule of law in the society, psychologically could be easily influenced by populist propaganda. That is why *the development of nation-wide social programmes for NGO sector is becoming very important.* This idea put forward by the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs should be considered carefully.

Stressing the role of social services NGOs, it is necessary not to neglect "politicized" sphere of NGO

activity (human rights, independent mass media, trade unions etc.)- Surely, *it could be harmful to confuse NGO activity with their direct participation in politics (though it is clear that the developed third sector creates background for stable democratic process). At the same time, it could become possible to involve the population into democratic activity through social issues.*¹⁵ In social sphere NGO activity could not be viewed as political and, therefore, there are less obstacles created by the regime (author's interviews confirmed that some of influential donors are also in favour of this approach). True, it is difficult for the authorities to say that they are against environmental NGOs or accuse local issues NGOs (such as condominium associations) in the anti-governmental activity. *Social questions are easily combined with the problems of human rights, student, women, trade union organizations, creation of centers of legal help for different layers of population.*

YOUTH could be involved into the civic activity through economic, social, educational, cultural issues as well as through rock-concerts and rock-clubs. *In comparison to "old politicians", youth organizations "CivicForum", "YoungGromada" and "Young Front" managed to unite, having founded youth movement "Young Belarus". However, international donors are rather careful and prefer to use old channels and old contacts.* Meanwhile, it is important for donors to take into account the fact that among democrats there are few people (except small number of BPF members) who could systematically conduct organizational work among youth and there are no specialists on social pedagogy at all.¹⁶

Creating centers of legal assistance for student youth is of special importance. Youth is active in manifestations, but the authorities persecute the activists, especially the least defended part — those who come from the village. It is important to create special funds for help, to send those excluded from higher institutions to universities in Central-Eastern Europe (Prague, Warsaw, Vilnius or Kyiv).

Donors should take into account that democratic NGOs are not very experienced in grantseeking compared to pro-official structures. The vivid example is the well done leaflet of International Youth Center "Younost" "founded by several public organizations made up of more than 150,000 people." However, in one sentence instead of abbreviation "IYCY" there is "BYPU" (Belarusian Youth Patriotic Union created by Lukashenka — the so-called "Lukomol") which explains who in reality is standing behind IYCY. Another example: one of the Vitebsk komsomol apparatchiks— Mikhail Arda— created association of international youth exchanges and

tourism which received the right to spread International Students Identity Cards in Belarus. Later it transformed into de-facto commercial company selling the cards not only to students. Then Arda became the deputy leader of the BYPU.¹⁷ At the same time, social democratic "Young Gromada" did not receive grant for propaganda against AIDS because it was viewed as political organization. The question arises: *is it necessary to create phantom organization with different name to receive grant?*

HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES. Few people outside of Belarus, even in its neighbours, know that Belarusian lawyer Aleksey Filipchenko committed self-immolation in front of the Novopolotsk Court House on July 8, 1998, in protest against intentions of the authorities to arrest him. Authorities were annoyed by his behaviour as the public defender of a pensioner, whose apartment the regional government was trying to procure.¹⁸

There are several structures in Belarus defending human rights. It is important for them to concentrate not only on political freedoms but on social issues as well, especially taking into account that unemployment will raise. One of the most recent and interesting structures is Charter'97 which is the system of collective defence of civil rights. This movement exists since November 10, 1997 and, with the help of international partners, is represented in Brussels and New York. Charter is signed by around 100,000 people.

Charter is not directly committed to social issues, but by flexible approach it could draw attention of people not interested in politics. The example is Charter's reaction to the fact that according to the order of Lukashenka the Day of the union between Belarus and Russia and the Day of state emblem and flag (that replaced historical Belarusian symbols) where proclaimed state holidays while Memory Day and Easter (!) are excluded from the list of holidays. Organizational Committee of Charter'97 distributed a statement that says: "We call to all the citizens of Belarus of different beliefs to express their protest, to stand up for the rights of Christian church and achieve cancellation of the shameful regulation."

Unfortunately, as in other spheres of democratic activity there are contradictions in human rights movement as well.²⁰ One would criticize international organizations stressing that they are not as assertive in their support of Charter'97 as they could be, the others say that nobody elected Charter's organizational committee, and Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC) is not represented in it, though it signed the Charter.

To stimulate cooperation in this field one could think of the possibility to create common fund for mutual assistance for a number of organizations.

In reality, Spring-96, BHC, Charter'97 add each other, especially in the regions. Human rights should be defended irrespective of parties or ideologies (for example, journalist Valeriy Shchukin who is active in this field is Communist by persuasion). Legal defense could not be only charitable. Sometimes, it is necessary to use academic grants to support lawyers. In *Narodnaya Volia* there could be a special page devoted to defense of concrete people (like Farmer in the same newspaper) which will be sent to state and parties structures, courts, law enforcement bodies, law departments of the universities, NGOs.

In general, seminars and conferences are not very effective now. *Donors should perhaps change its approach to their activity in Belarus. Charity and educational programmes are not enough, there should be a clear strategy, commitment as it was towards Polish Solidarity or Soviet dissidents.*

TRADE UNIONS. There are about 18,000 members in the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BCDTU). In "official trade unions" there are 4,5 million members. Nevertheless, independent trade unions are very active and dynamic. They receive support from a number of donor organizations, among them Free Trade Union Institute, Olof Palme Foundation, Jim Conway Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Open Society Institute (OSI), USIS Democracy Programme, MATRA Programme.

It is important to stress that one should not neglect the possibility to try to influence certain people or even organizations within official unions. Some donor organizations use this opportunity as well. Activity of BCDTU could also move official trade unions towards more assertive position in defending workers' rights.

With the help of Eurasia and OSI informational bulletin "The Worker" of the Belarusian Free Trade Union reached the circulation of 50,000. *Its publication is a good example of combining social and democratic issues. Another example is the creation of public centers of BCDTU.* They started to function in September 1998 in Hrodno, Brest, Homel. The main aim is legal consulting, free of charge, which is not limited to the members of BCDTU.

Of special interest is the support to "Poisk" Mogilev Club of Unemployed created by regional organization of Belarusian Free Trade Union. The main aim is to provide legal help to unemployed people. This NGO will also help unemployed people with social adaptation, rehabilitation, and psychological support. There will be no overlap with government services. The government should provide job places, NGO provides support services. Despite the strain in relations with Belarusian Free Trade Union, reaction of the authorities was not

negative as the club of unemployed takes off, to some extent, social strain in the town.²¹

Another examples of this kind are the so-called "Clubs of Labour" used in Europe against unemployment. Association "Our Capital" and the Center for Social Innovations conducted in 1997 within LIEN sector of TACIS programme a series of the seminars "Unemployed women with high qualification — the way to success". NGOs from Poland and Ukraine participated as well. Methods, developed as the result of the seminars, could be used as the model both for NGOs and State Employment Service."

However, as Gennadiy Bykov, the leader of the BCDTU puts it, *the opposite side of the activity in social sphere could be transformation of the "struggle" into "grantsucking" (the term is widely used in Belarusian NGO sector), when the activists are "withdrawing" from trade union activity to more neutral social services in order to receive a grant.* Nevertheless, according to him, if under conditions of the authoritarian regime, 80 % of the grants are used effectively, it could be considered as 100% result²¹ (in reality, in the hostile political environment the effectiveness of the grants could be even lower).

Conclusions

There is no panacea to the problem of effective international aid to Belarusian third sector. Donors should continue its work in different spheres. Aid in social services remains important. However, donors are not supposed only to provide aid, especially through state structures or state-controlled NGOs. They should try to support those NGOs who could develop its own base of support. In this case, social services NGOs could play important role in the development of civil society. Their activity preserve possibilities for maintaining dialogue with authorities (at least, at the local level).

However, "non-politicized" social activity could not become the only focus of donors' activity. It is important to support combination of social and democratic issues in NGO activity as well as the activity of the structures directly attacked by the regime (trade unions, human rights organizations, independent mass media). These structures need permanent aid to survive and to broaden its base. Donors should change its approach to them from "charity" to "clear commitment, long-term strategy".

To put the eggs in one basket is a wrong approach, especially in Belarusian situation. On the other hand, it is ineffective to spill the help over the large amount of small organizations. As donors are not sure about future development in Belarus and their financial aid is limited, grants should be

provided to those who demonstrated ability to effectively use it. The trend towards cooperation within both donors community and NGO sector has to be strengthened. Special attention could be paid to cooperation with partner organizations in Central and Eastern Europe, especially to multilateral projects (which could be helpful to overcome the

suspicious attitude of the authorities to certain countries, for example the USA and Poland).

Finally, foundations should have "human faces". It is important to make their help visible to common people. The situation when there were no manifestations to defend Belarusian Soros Foundation should not be repeated.

Примітки

The author is thankful to prof. Oleg Manaev for the data of the poll conducted in September 1998 by the Minsk-based Independent Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS). According to it, only 28.2 % of those polled consider it is possible for Belarusian NGOs to receive aid from American governmental structures, 21.3% answered "no", 50.5% — hesitated. It is interesting that the level of confidence to American non-governmental structures (Soros Foundation etc.) is higher (correspondingly 36.7 %, 13.3 %, 45.7 %). The highest level of confidence is to such international organizations as the UN, UNESCO etc. (correspondingly 51.8 %, 9.9 %, 38.3 %).

¹ This topic is regularly discussed in *Belarus Monitor*; *Bulletin of the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs*; *News of IISEPS*; *Open Society* and other independent editions.

¹ *International Technical Assistance to the Republic of Belarus, 1992—1996* (Minsk: UNDP, 1997) (in Russ. & Engl.).

¹ Oleksandr Pavliuk, Vasil Hudak, Stephen Heintz, Daniel Mucha, *International Organizations and the Development of Civil Society and NGOs in Belarus* (Institute for EastWest Studies, New York, 1997).

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¹ Author's interview with Gennadiy Grushevoy in September 1998.

¹ This view is eloquently articulated by Gennadiy Grushevoy. *Op. cit.* See also the views of Aleksandr Kotikov, political scientist and expert of Sapeha Foundation, expressed in the article "Belarusian NGOs: Problems and Prospects for Development", in *Belarus — Ukraine in the XXI Century As Viewed by Young People* (Minsk, 1998), p. 23 (in Russ.).

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INTERNATIONAL AID AND POSSIBILITIES OF COMBINING SOCIAL AND DEMOCRATIC ISSUES IN NGO ACTIVITY IN BELARUS

The article provides analyses of the international aid to Belarus in social sphere, including to social services NGOs. The author discusses the question of involving Belarusian population into the building of civil society through "non-politicized" social issues, thus strengthening potentially the prospects for democracy in Belarus. It is stressed that international foundations should have "human faces": it is important to make their help visible to common people. At the same time, "non-politicized" social sphere could not become the only focus of donors' activity. It is important to support combination of social and democratic issues in NGO sector as well as the activity of the structures directly attacked by the authorities (trade unions, human rights organizations, independent mass media).