

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,  
my name is Susanne Müller, I represent the German organization “German-Russian Exchange” – a charitable organization, founded in Berlin in 1992 with the aim of assisting democratic development in Russia by cooperation with Russian NGOs and independent mass media.

The German-Russian Exchange supports NGOs and NGO support Centers since 1992 through the transfer of financial, methodological and professional assistance, through the organization of international conferences, study trips and trainee programmes.



Since last year the German Russian Exchange for the first time started to work in Belarus - within the “Tacis Civil Society Development Programme” we are working with 11 Belarusian partner-NGOs, who carry out their activities in five regions of the republic – in Minsk, Grodno, Vitebsk, Mogilev and Gomel.

The main and common goal of these 11 projects is to increase and to professionalize the activities of NGOs, to improve the cooperation as well among NGOs as with local authorities and the mass-media. And – last but not least - to make the Third Sector more popular and less threatening to the belarusian public and thus to rise the awareness of the manifold possibilities to take an active part in a vivid, developing civil society.

The majority of activities is not focussed on the big cities of Belarus, but on the small towns in the regions, where the awareness and possibilities of personal engagement in a circle of like-minded people are very low developed.

The various offers in the regions might promote the common understanding, that the Third Sector is not only a normal element of a democratic society, but a constituent and absolutely indispensable one.



Our partners are so-called “Resource Centers”, all of them are experienced Belarusian NGOs, who started to work within their field of activity already in the early 90ies. In order to obtain the named goals, our partners work with the following target groups:

- for members of already existing NGOs of all lines like social, cultural, ecological, human rights, youth organizations, our partners organize seminars and training-sessions on issues such as organizational development and sustainability, project and conflict management, communication, work with mass-media, work with modern technologies (above all modern communicational technologies), civic education, legal awareness and network-building.
- seminars are also conducted for potential members of NGOs – in the first place young people – on which they inform the participants on the structure and diversity of the Third Sector in Belarus and its meaning and role within a democratic, civil society. The above mentioned questions like organizational development, project management and so on also play a role on a more basic level.
- Seminars are carried out also for teachers to train new methods of civic education.
- Consultations are also offered to the general public – they have the possibility to get legal advice and support in court, get aware of there right as citizens and tax payers.

Before the projects started, the needs of the various target groups were analyzed. Only on base of the results the questionnaires, the programmes and offers were constituted. In order to develop and continuously improve the offers, seminars are evaluated by using questionnaires, which are handed out to the participants after each seminar. Without exception I can say, that all offers have been rated as to be of a very high quality, effectiveness and a very high degree of practical use for the participants own activities or solving of problems. The trainers received high ratings for their professionalism, convincing teaching and the introduction of new creative and interactive methods.

Besides the educational work, the Resource Centers

- publish monthly newsletters, which inform about activities of the Third Sector
- organize Conferences and Round Tables as a communication-platform for representatives of NGOs and local authorities
- they frequently give consultations and legal advice to NGOs
- collect material for NGO-databases

- offer their technical equipment like Computers and Internet-access to less equipped NGOs
- try to strengthen the relations between NGOs and to built regional networks

Representatives of two partner-organizations took part in a study trip to Germany – organized by the German Russian Exchange.

The participants were interested in the German “landscape” of civic education, in methods of civic participation processes, new techniques of moderation like Open Space or Future Search, modern techniques of collecting data and its recording (Archivierung?) and in the structure of NGOs and NGO-Associations in Germany.

They met representatives of German NGOs, various foundations, political parties, adult colleges, archives and federal institutions like the “Bundespresseamt”– on one hand to get informed about their activities and working methods, on the other hand to inform about their own activities and those of the Third Sector in Belarus, and – last but not least - to find potential partners for future cooperation.

Thus the study trips were one stepping stone in the effort to make the projects “survive” the end of the Tacis Programme, to make them more sustainable.

The relations between Germany and Belarus are well developed on the level of local initiatives in the field of humanitarian support, which started to grow after the catastrophe of Chernobyl. The cooperation between German and Belarusian NGOs in comparison is still on a low level – only one among seven Belarusian organizations had or has contact with a German counterpart.

I am personally very happy to have the possibility to work with 11 interesting organizations in Belarus, but to present them all within one lecture – is a big challenge – in the first place for the auditorium. Nevertheless, I would like to give you an idea of each organization, a very short portrait – with the support of power-point. Afterwards you will have the possibility to talk to the representatives of the organizations – they are all here and ready to answer questions.

I will start in order of the alphabet:

### **Aslona**

Aslona is an organization for the protection of the rights of consumers and taxpayers.

Within the project Aslona established a consulting office for legal advice for the local population of Volkovysk in the Grodno Region.

Till now, about 600 persons received legal advice or have been supported in law suits.

An inquiry among the population of Volkovysk showed, that the awareness of their rights as citizens and tax payers is very low. Rights are frequently hurt and possibilities to get help or advice are rare. Thus the trust into an independent advice office is high.

Aslona also is in direct and frequent contact with the local authorities to represent citizens concerns - Aslona’s work is well accepted and the direct exchange considered to be effective for both sides.

Above that Aslona spreads informational material among the local population, offers lectures in schools on legal issues.

Last but not least Aslona improved the cooperation with other human rights organizations and offers legal advice also to organizations and initiatives, who ask for support during the process of registration.

All activities are described and documented in the monthly bulletin "Vestki" ("News"), in which the most frequent questions of the legal consultations are also discussed.

### **Circle of friends**

Circle of friends is a resource Center and umbrella organization in Mogilev, which has been founded in 1994.

Within our common project, they established a database of Social Information.

To gather material for the database, Circle of friends worked with a wide range of NGOs, initiatives and single activists of the Mogilev Region. A network of nine informational points has been established in the Region, which frequently deliver "fresh" information about social, political, economical issues and events.

The database consists of the sections

- Social public initiatives
- Activities in the social sphere
- Donors and sources of financing

The database has about 300 units and blocks of information.

On base of the collected information, various materials have been published by a number of public organizations on ecological issues, health protection, radioactive pollution and the Chernobyl catastrophe and on human rights.

Journalists of the local press already started to use the database as a source of reliable information.

The gathering of data, information, its sorting and analysis will be continued also after the end of the project.

### **Crossroads**

Crossroads is a Resource Center for Youth Organizations in Vitebsk. On the base of the needs and wishes of Youth NGOs, a series of 28 one-day training-sessions has been established:

A complex of training-sessions for leaders of Youth-NGOs, for "beginning" activists and for activists, who are responsible for public relations within their organization.

The training-sessions are oriented on practical needs of young activists like "Effective communication with the public", "Work with volunteers", writing of project applications and "Coalition-Building among NGOs".

The training-sessions are at once a platform for network-building, cooperation and mutual support.

The monthly newsletter "Dyestvuy" ("be active") is part of a local newspaper. Participants of the seminars report on their activities, their experiences with the Tacis project and other issues, which are interesting for young people and which might rouse curiosity on the Third Sector.

Eight booklets of Youth organizations have been produced and spread among young people and Youth initiatives.

## **Fialta**

The Youth Education Center Fialta in Minsk focussed on the creation of new youth initiatives, which are supposed to deal with important problems in the community of small towns of Belarus.

Fialta conducted a competition among students of educational institutions in small towns. Each 20 students were selected to take part in a series of three level seminars:

A questionnaire among the students showed, that there are no Youth Organizations at all in the small towns. The problems, faced by young people are numerous: unemployment, drug abuse, lack of awareness of citizens right, lack of knowledge on culture and tradition, lack of opportunities to spend free time and of cultural offers.

On base of the seminars, during which the participants learned how to develop a sustainable initiative, to plan projects and to work in a team, they started to form initiatives, defined a mission and created ideas.

Several new Initiatives already started manifold activities like supporting young unemployed to find part time work, collecting material on right and law in Belarus, supporting handicapped children, publishing a newspaper especially for concerns of young people, support and conflict mediation for parents and kids and various free time and cultural activities.

It was not in all cases easy to recruit members for the seminars – prejudices are wide spread among the leaders of educational institutions and in some cases the access to the institutions has been denied...

## **Ecohome**

The ecological organization Ecohome established the first, one and only information Center for ecological initiatives

First step was the collecting of data on existing initiatives and organizations in all regions of Belarus and of all kind of ecological information concerning Belarus and global issues.

Ecohome “formed “ 20 regional groups and invited each one representative to take part in a series of five qualifying training-sessions.

A monthly periodical is published – each with a focal subject, for example: the national ecological strategy of Belarus until 2020.

Above that, the Information Center offers daily individual consultations, information, support and the use of technical equipment

## **The Open Society Foundation**

Open Society offered a series of 17 six-day seminars for leaders of NGOs from all regions of Belarus and for teachers, partly representatives of teacher’s associations.

Each participant joined two seminars – and thus 96 working hours.

The volume of the seminars made possible a very intense and detailed work on issues of political science and civic education. Teachers learn how to raise democratic awareness and responsibility and how to teach democratic “game”-rules and to promote “civic competence” through various subjects. A network of teachers’ associations has been established.

A big range of new didactic, interactive methods enables the participants to pass on their knowledge within their own organizations or associations.

The trainers of the seminars are teachers of various state universities, in the first place representatives of historical, political and sociological science, who also produced new teaching materials, which accompany the lessons.

### **Development of Youth NGOs in Belarus**

Open Society carries out a second project, which was designed by the Youth Information Center, which has been closed down in December 2001 and thus was not able any more to take part in the Tacis project.

In six weekend seminars, leaders of regional Youth Organizations are invited to raise their skills and competencies.

A monthly newsletter accompanies the project and makes the contents known to a wider public.

### **Orakul**

The project of the public organization Orakul aims to raise the legal awareness of youth activists and young teachers in the Gomel Region.

Orakul conducted eight seminars with each 25 participants on legal issues like human rights, civil law, constitutional and international law.

Elections, freedom of speech, gender equality, youth and law in daily life are some of the seminar-topics.

Five issues of the bulletin "Law Academy" have been published, which deal with the namely topics.

Two Round Tables with the participation of the target groups, the local press, representatives of the local administration and teachers and students of the Gomel state university carried the discussion on law and right in Belarus to a wider public and reduced the timidity to talk about these issues in a group like that.

### **Ratusha**

During the project period Ratusha extended the network of Mini-Resource Center in the Grodno Region. By touring around, potential locations and coordinators were identified and a tight cooperation with already existing, experienced Mini-Resource Centers has been established.

The coordinators frequently travel into small villages and settlements in order to find new public initiatives, to encourage them and to offer support.

The Mini-Resource-Centers also deliver information on social events to Ratusha, which are distributed on a special Grodno-Web-Site and sent directly to 2000 subscribers.

During the project 289 NGOs and initiatives made use of Ratusha's services like

- consultations in fund-raising, bookkeeping, legal advice, search for partners
- seminars on issues of organizational development
- the use of technical equipment, in the first place Internet – Ratusha has the best and most speedy access in the region.

Above that, Ratusha keeps up a data base and produced – in cooperation with BARC - a multi media data base – a computer program, which presents information on the Third Sector and the development of the Civil Society in an interactive way.

### **United Way**

United Way conducted 10 two-day seminars for 189 participants in all regions of Belarus: “Non-governmental organizations from A to Z”, which introduced the participants into legal issues of NGO activity, Fundraising, guidelines for proposal writing, use of Internet and others.

United Way prepared the 4<sup>th</sup> issue of an NGO directory, which characterizes in a systematic way the profile and fields of activities of 2000 Belarusian registered and non-registered NGOs.

Above that, United Way also offered individual consultations and support to numerous organizations.

### **VIT and Third Sector**

The Grodno Regional Association of Young Scientists “VIT” and the Information Center for the Support of Public Initiatives “Third Sector” in close cooperation carried out

- Seminars on Public Relations, work with mass media and strategic planning for Youth NGOs
- they organized two Round Tables – one with representatives of NGOs and the local mass media and one with representatives of Youth NGOs and local authorities.
- Both Round Tables immensely improved the readiness for cooperation. The representatives of the local authorities promised to support the preparation of the Youth Forum in Grodno as a first concrete measure. This promise has been kept.
- The partners prepared also a Directory for NGOs, mass media and local authorities, which further facilitates the cooperation among the sectors.
- A bimonthly newsletter is published and distributed to 100 organizations. The subscribers are also provided with a weekly electronic newsletter with information about and for the Third Sector.

So far the projects of our partner organizations.

Before I finish, I would like to mention the aspect of Sustainability of the single projects and the further development of the Third Sector in Belarus. I would like to point out,

- that all involved partners carried out their activities in a very professional way, with high motivation, personal engagement and an admirable patience towards several problems and obstacles
- the target groups have been chosen by our partners under the aspect of multiplicatory effects: NGO activists and teachers, who took part in seminars and conferences already started to pass on their knowledge with the new appropriated methods to small initiatives and colleagues
- the Resource Centers are in frequent contact among each other , passing on information, know-how and ideas in order of a continuous increase of qualification
- contacts to organizations in other countries like Poland, Germany or the Baltic states strengthen the network and give fresh impulses to the inner development

All these human resources exist and will exist in the future, but without continuous financial support, it will nevertheless be difficult to realise projects like the ones, I have just described...

At this point, I would like to thank our partners for the good and fruitful cooperation and I hope very much, that we will have the possibility to continue our partnership in the future!

12.11.02