

Civic sector in Belarus: its daily life and organisational processes

General Comments

The author of this article was asked to analyse the data received from the research on Belarusian non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The goal of the research was to find ways of raising the effectiveness of the civic sector as a pre-condition for the democratisation of Belarus. Initiators of that research, conducted a thorough analytical work that resulted in a national poll of more than 400 Belarusian NGOs combined with several dozen in-depth interviews with the leaders of the non-governmental sector. The factual material collected during the research gives grounds for solid conclusions. However, it should be admitted that the author, as an analyst, was not involved in designing this research and does not always share that vision and hypothesis. Therefore, one should pay attention to two substantial limitations that were placed on this study by its initiators and that limit the spectrum of answers that can be produced by the author of this article.

First of all, to understand how to increase the effectiveness of civil society as a democratisation factor, one has to have a serious theoretical basis. This basis would allow to develop, a vision of the way in which civil society influences democratisation as such. This should not be confused with the less controversial issue of the role of civil society in the consolidation of already existing democracy. There is no consensus on that issue between theorists (political scientists, analysts, sociologists, philosophers etc.) and “practitioners” (politicians, civic activists, NGO managers etc.). For instance, several “processual” theories of democracy, state that democratic transit is the issue of “elite games”¹, according to which civil society is a result rather than the cause of political changes. Belarusian analyst Yury Drakahrust formulated that approach very well at the conference “To the New Vision of Belarus” that took place in September 2007:

No technological or ideological suggestions of those intellectuals, even if they are put into practice in the best possible way, wouldn't change the weight of opposition, or the situation in

¹ See the classic example of the “elitist” theory of democratisation: Guillermo O'Donnel, Philippe S. Schmitter, and Lawrence Whitehead. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.

society as such, in the short term... For now, it is enough for the opposition to demonstrate their activeness somehow, to stay afloat and create a visual image for an alternative. This is both a necessary minimum and a maximum. The quality of opposition does not impact on the probability of regime change. The quality of the opposition influences only the form that this change will take (the lower the quality is, the greater is the probability of violent transition). Moreover, the quality of the opposition will decide on what will happen after the transition (even if the current opposition will not be playing a big role in this process).²

In other words, this view suggests that one cannot hope for the increase of the effectiveness of civil society in conditions of strict authoritarianism. One can only decide to support its existence till the moment when the regime collapses. Its existence is already an achievement.

Another viewpoint suggests that civil society itself is the main factor, the main “organiser and motivator” of change. This approach has become especially popular after “velvet” and “colour” revolutions, where civil movements presumably played the defining role.³ Freedom House’s study “How Freedom Is Won: From Civic Resistance to Durable Democracy” demonstrated that indeed, the majority of democratic transformations was “non-cooperative”, i.e. provoked by powerful civil movements that challenge the authoritarian governments, and are not caused by “elite” games and pacts.⁴ However, the phenomenon of a “civil movement” is quite loose, since in such a movement a lot of actors (NGOs, political parties, private businesses, churches) are interrelated (and sometimes confused). Civil society as an engine of changes is not an avant-garde of the NGO sector as such; it is rather a representative of the whole nation. Such condition is met only when civil society and its aspirations are legitimised by other, often hierarchical, structures. In Poland, the Solidarity movement received support from the, symbolic, capital and moral authority of the, authoritative Catholic Church. Without such support coming from a wider spectrum of institutions, without appealing to wider and more diverse set of values and symbols, civil society is reduced to the subculture of a political minority, which is the case for Belarus. Such a subculture can be a very powerful factor of change if extrinsic to its factors, (such as external pressure or internal erosion of the regime) open the window of opportunity for change. However, it is unlikely that civil society will be able to open such a window on its own, the way Polish Solidarity did.

One should also note that many researchers tend to exaggerate the role of the NGO sector in the democratisation process. Such research is often prepared by civic activists and (or) donors and serves as a tool of self-promotion. Relatively “neutral” observers show

² This quote is based on the manuscript that was sent to the author.

³ See: Pavol Demeš, Joerg Forbrig, Robin Shepherd. *Reclaiming Democracy: Civil Society and Electoral Change in Central and Eastern Europe*. Bratislava: German Marshall Fund, 2007.

⁴ http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/29.pdf.

more complex relationships between the dynamics of the democratic transformation and its role in civil society. In the framework of this approach civil society has self-sufficient value for the democratic future, but at the same time, there are some demands to its strategy, tactics, organisational capacity etc.

At the time of the rule of the authoritarian regime, civic sector and its common rank participants are under the “cover of obscurity”. They are forced to listen to lengthy reflections on why their country could be “not ready” for democracy. They feel the pressure from the state’s repressive machine and at the same time meet disappointment and conformism, even from the side of socially active people. The process of exit from authoritarianism, its length and dynamics, context and prerequisites, are covered with the same level of obscurity, as well. Therefore any answer to the question on what should be done to assist the regime change and democratisation in the best way, will be quite ungrounded and unsubstantiated. The author of this article thinks that in the short term, the main concern for civic activists in Belarus will be survival and “keeping the flame on”. Preserving the principles of civic consciousness in this community gives hope that when the window of opportunity opens, it will be used in the most relevant way.

Thus, the author is trying to answer how Belarusian civil society could influence the democratic changes *in the context of the idea of the inherent value of civil society as “fire keeper”, bearer of a special spirit, experience, values and capital that, in favourable conditions, will become the catalyst for change.* The rationale for choosing such an approach is the following:

Democratic change in the short-term perspective is not possible.

Independent civic activeness in modern Belarus is a clearly subcultural phenomenon in a society that has a solid contract with the state.

Processes of erosion of the old authoritarian system started in Belarus, give grounds for expectations for some changes in politics and the economy. However, in conditions of social apathy and tough political control, the potential for these changes are quite limited; it will stop at introducing some changes to the Belarusian society and at some degree of disorganisation of the governmental apparatus.

In the long-term perspective, the processes of erosion can open the window of opportunity described above. However, the same processes in the short-term perspective can cause a counter-reaction in the form of attempts to “fix” the cranky system with the help of repressions and political persecutions.

In these conditions, civil society’s main priorities are *survival and expansion of the “freedom zone” in a non-free society, increase of its influence in the frameworks of the hierarchized “mainstream”, as well as well-thought preparation of changes, creation of intellectual alternatives and generation of new visions.* Unfortunately, this range of questions is not reviewed in the given study.

Some more methodological comments should be made before the analysis of the data can be provided. In the thematic literature there is a clear divide between “civil society 1” (or “herbivorous” NGO sector that focuses on self-organisation of citizens in order to address their issues and provide them with services) and “civil society 2” (“carnivorous” NGO sector focused on political and moral confrontation with the authoritarian government).⁵ It is quite easy to distinguish the border between them. Should one expect that feline societies will provoke a democratic revolution? Although it may sound paradoxical, a positive answer to this question has the right to exist. Depending on the answer to this question, one can suggest totally opposite recommendations. If civil society works exclusively for the long term perspective then everything that develops certain habits of civic activeness and makes citizens less indifferent and more responsible works for the sake of the democratic future. However, if one expects civil society to be more “carnivorous”, not just active, then it has to make steps that “herbivorous” NGOs should avoid. “Herbivorous” civil society supports the “modernisation-oriented” and “evolutional” transition to democracy. This route envisages a graduate increase in the quality of life and increase of the social capital, necessary for the functioning of the democracy. However, such civic activity risks transforming into an annexe of the national state system of social security. On the other hand, if “carnivorous” NGOs cannot cause political change, they, as practice shows, quickly lose the momentum and become disoriented.

These theoretical deliberations cause methodological comments. The author has been asked to describe the effectiveness of the whole civic sector where organisational missions, strategies, etc. are built on the level of a single organisation. To analyse the effectiveness of a sector through the prism of an organisation is the same as to analyse the effectiveness of the market via the business strategies of companies. The latter may behave rationally, but the market itself can still be imperfect. At the very least, it is impossible to analyse a sector in isolation from institutions and the rules of the game. However, there is a hypothesis intrinsic to this methodological individualism: the problems of civil society in Belarus are first of all organisational. This vision, in part, is the answer to the criticism of the civic sector from numerous observers including donors, who increasingly blame this sector for being too sub-culture oriented, lacking clear organisational strategies, being too politicised and being unable to define its mission and concentrating only on selected target groups; being too much focused on “regime change” instead of “change in consciousness” of citizens.

An organisation can successfully implement its projects. However, will these projects bring with them a change in reality that will be relevant to the organisation’s values? This is not an issue of management. Getting ahead of ourselves, we should state that this is the main conclusion coming out from the polling of the Belarusian NGOs, which, despite

⁵ Foley, Michael W. Edwards, Bob. *The Paradox of Civil Society Journal of Democracy* // Volume 7. Number 3. July 1996. Pp. 38–52.

their orientation, institutionalisation or financial sources, apply approximately the same criteria to measure the effectiveness of their work: they place the achievement of the goals set by their organisation higher than serving the needs of their target audiences.

On the other hand, it is hard to believe that the democratisation in Belarus will start from several NGOs that will successfully implement their strategies; the main factor for democratisation is the new quality of civil society and the society as a whole. Therefore, in this analysis, the author will try to separate the organisational effectiveness of a given organisation, from the performance of the whole sector. By analysing the self-assessment of organisations, their self-evaluation, we will try to analyse whether this self-assessment is related to the organisation's focus on democratic change and on activities that foster that change.

Finally, one should mention one more limitation, even if this limitation makes the work of the author of this study easier. The initiators and developers of the research quite specifically focused on the NGO sector as one of the dimensions of civil society. This narrows the object of the analysis, but at the same time makes it difficult to lead any serious conversation on civil society, since structured NGOs form only a part of it.⁶ The focus on organisational capacity does not always take into account that organisations are made up of people. These people's personal growth, personal development, their victories and disappointments take place not just in parallel with their daily private life but also as a part of this life. If one ignores people's daily life as a factor, that person will have to study civil society separately from citizens as such. The rich fact-based material inclines us towards that route of analysis. Finally, one cannot imagine organisational effectiveness without the strong internal motivation of people to engage in civic activities, especially if these people fight for democracy against the authoritarian rule.

Analysis of the In-Depth Interviews

The analysis of the in-depth interviews is of interest since these interviews allowed us to study in detail the context and some peculiarity of civic activeness in Belarus that are not always accurately reflected by statistics. Moreover, these interviews provide "decrypting" of some dilemmas that arise in the work and daily life of activists and suggest some hypothesis that can later be tested on a larger set of data. In this analysis, the author has focused on the following topics:

- Motivation to engage in civic activity.
- Combining civic activity with daily life.
- Self-assessment of own activities.

⁶ See: Thomas Carothers. *Think Again: Civil Society* // Foreign Policy Magazine. Winter 1999–2000. <http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/civsoc.htm>.

Where do NGO activists come from?

The survey, as well as the interviews with the leaders of civil society, demonstrate that a significant part of civil society organisations in Belarus, emerged in two distinct time periods: 1989–91 (the climax of the *perestroika*) and in 1996–97 (during the events that ended up in reversion to the authoritarian system). In both cases, the emergence of the NGOs was the response of the active part of society to the processes that were taking place in Belarus.

People coming to the civic sector had quite a defined motivation. The first wave of activists in the 1980s was “awoken” by the *perestroika* and wanted to use new opportunities offered to them by the new political openness, such as “getting to know the outside world”. It was also a form of protest against the Soviet reality. At that time, many “amusement organisers” or “community workers” from the Soviet system tried to unleash their potential and increase social capital via new forms of activities. Self-realisation was secondary as a motivational factor for those people, since at that time (in both time periods) the participation in NGOs opened new horizons, opportunities and perspectives and looked more attractive than keeping shaky and non-durable relationships with the state.

The analysis of trajectories of “inflows” in active public work allows us to make two important conclusions. Firstly, civil society initially genetically formed in Belarus as a distinct subculture of passionate and ambitious people in the patriarchal and subjective political culture. The subcultural nature of civil society and opposition in particular often are regarded by this community as a disadvantage (“they are too far from common people”). However, applying such an approach is the same as accusing healthy body cells of not being able to conquer the cancer tumour. Healthy cells lose because there are not enough of them, not because they are not trying to become immune! Secondly, the analysis of the genesis of the Belarusian third sector coming from in-depth interviews with its leaders runs against the widespread stereotype that NGOs have transformed into a “way of surviving” and just another source of income for the political opposition. Quite to the contrary, as the interviews have demonstrated, the undergoing process of politicisation of the Belarusian third sector was often due to the “sucking up” into the political activities of initially “herbivorous” civic initiatives. Only later did the civic activity that was initially regarded as a “calling” turn into a professional activity for many.

If engaging in civic activity was a matter of choice, staying in that sector became a necessity or, sometimes, even a forced step. This status quo is often called “path dependency”: at some critical juncture a person or a group make a choice, the consequences of which “lock” them onto a certain stage. For instance, at the age of 18 a person can make a career choice, which will be impossible to change at the age of 30, after investing time and resources. What is important, at this “critical juncture” in the personal lives of the activists coincides with the “critical juncture” in the country’s development as a whole.

Based on the answers to these questions, one can make the following conclusions related to the overlapping of NGO activities with the wider context of everyday life.

Activities in the civic sector gradually became synonymous with the confrontation with the official society. Some degree of “time sharing”, i.e. combining work in the state and civic sectors, was possible, approximately, up to the beginning of the 2000s. However, choosing activities in the third sector often meant that there would be no return into “official society”. Contacts with that society remain only at the level of interaction with passport issuing authorities or shop assistants. Therefore, in activists’ perception, NGOs gradually transformed from being just a workplace to a means of existence.

The same factors lead to certain human resource problems in the third sectors; those problems were quoted by many polled. The core of the problem is not in the unwillingness of civic activists to learn or get new skills or to change their attitude to work. Based on the “path dependency” hypothesis, the NGO sector attracts mostly idealists. Pragmatic managers have either entered into contractual relations with the state or emigrated. An NGO in Belarus cannot approach a hiring agency asking it to provide candidates with the selected set of competencies. Therefore, finding a good NGO manager is a complicated task. Many NGOs are forced to work with those who stayed in the sector and who are not good managers by definition since their idealism is not compatible with rational thinking.

The response to the deficit of competencies is, as paradoxical as it may sound, the hyper-professionalism of Belarusian NGOs. In theory, independent civic activity can take different forms. A person is not obliged to devote all her or his time to that activity; several hours per week can be enough. She or he is not obliged to deal with legal or financial issues since not every organisation will be huge: one can be civically active by training a street football team. However, in Belarus, the independent civic activities are nearly always performed in the format of a formalised NGO. Since the form defines the content, keeping this form in good shape requires quite a varied set of skills under quite serious political pressure.

Hyper-professionalism might be a necessary condition for the survival of the civic sector in modern Belarus. However, this factor narrows down (or is the result of the narrowing down) the field of independent civic activity to “professional NGOs” and “locks in” those who would have left the third sector under different circumstances.

The majority of those polled regard themselves as accomplished leaders, although some respondents were quite self-critical. At the same time, leaders heavily criticise the condition of the third sector as such. The general point of view is that there are not more than 10 per cent of effective organisations in Belarus. The criteria for this effectiveness are predictably blurred.

What makes the civil society effective?

Leaders of the civic sector's organisations almost unanimously agree with the statement that, even under current political conditions, the issue of the effectiveness of Belarusian NGOs is relevant. However, the criteria for this effectiveness are often quite blurred. There are two main interpretations of effectiveness. According to the first one, an organisation is effective when it has reached all its goals. According to the second one, to be effective, an organisation needs to fulfil its mission. Moreover, here is the paradox. In the current political environment, the NGO leaders are not satisfied with their personal achievements, even if they are satisfied with the results of the activities of their organisation. They are not trying to fool themselves when they see the strengthening of repressions directed at them. In general, it is not quite clear whether a "limited" mission of an organisation can be reached at all in conditions which lack political freedom. Both leaders of NGOs and "theorists" of democracy do not have a clear understanding of whether "quite limited in time and scope" projects and campaigns, lead to the envisaged goal (and if yes, then how?). One cannot say that we see light at the end of the tunnel, not even a weak flashlight. There's no point on the horizon that could be seen by all activists: both partisan and non-partisan, organised and non-organised, offline and online, Minsk-based and rural, Belarus-based and exiled. There's no sign of even the smallest and least realistic hope.

The analysis of the in-depth interviews allows us to set the following hypotheses:

Increasing the effectiveness of a separate organisation cannot be a dominant motivator of civic activity in the conditions of political pressure. Even self-preservation as a more powerful motivator will lead to a certain degree to self-limitation in tools and means. Moreover, self-preservation leads to actions that go against organisational capacity building and against spreading the activities of an organisation to wider target groups. For instance, some respondents said that their organisations did not want to engage in "self PR".

If NGOs make self-preservation the main priority, this not only limits their capacity, but also destroys their social capital. Under constant pressure and constraints the main feature of self-organised society disappears: mutual trust.

Civic activity in its "herbivorous" format obviously brings bigger satisfaction and higher self-esteem. However, this type of activity is focused mostly on non-conflict formats and goals for its activities.

Traditional assessments of the organisational effectiveness do not take into account all aspects of work of the civic sector. Maybe the quantity of those who are affected by activities of an NGO are not as important as the impact that those activities have on the psychology and aspirations of a given person.

Results of the Audience Poll

To answer questions raised by the initiators of the survey, we needed to determine regularities in organisational practices and self-assessment among different types of Belarusian NGOs (first of all, based on their self-assessment of their own effectiveness). We tried to learn about the peculiarities of the “herbivorous” and “carnivorous” NGO sector, by analysing their replies to the following questions: 1) whether they are registered, 2) whether they think it is important for their organisation to strive for democracy in Belarus.

Moreover, practices and moods in the NGO sector were analysed depending on whether organisations were grant recipients or whether they received funding from the state’s budget. If we are to extend the nature-related metaphor to this analysis, we can say that these two groups of organisations can be classified as “birds” (grant recipients) and “snakes” (governmental NGOs, or GoNGOs).

In the second part of the analysis, the author observes the same trends (practices, moods) depending on the assessment of the effectiveness of the organisation as such and the NGO sector as a whole. Also to that, to refine the data, we defined two types of organisations that appear to be the most interesting for this study. Both types of organisations consider their activities effective. The difference is that the first ones consider democratic change an important goal to reach, while the second ones do not think so.

Slightly more than a half of NGO representatives work in the sector “full time” or close to full time. This percentage is slightly higher among “democrats” but not significantly. The main factor for professionalisation is access to the sustainable source of external funding, whether for “birds” or for “snakes”. One can also observe that professionalisation positively influences the self-esteem of an organisation and its evaluation of the effectiveness of the whole sector (the latter is especially true for pro-democracy organisations). However, this could be, in part, explained by the emergence of some corporate spirit with low criticism of its “own breed”.

Table 1. *Is civic activity your main activity?*

	Regis- tered	Non-Regis- tered	Demo- crats	“Apoliti- cal”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not sup- ported by the state	Total
Yes or rather yes	53	44,8	55,7	38,6	67	36,5	64,3	48,5	51,0

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes or rather yes	54,7	44,1	56,6	44	58,8	43,6	51,0

The same trend can be observed in the analysis of dedicated human resources. “Snakes” and registered organisations usually have full-time staffers; the absence of full-time staffers negatively impacts the assessment of the effectiveness of an NGO’s work and sector as a whole.

Table 2. Organisation’s full-time staff

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
No	41	61	45	50	45	46	20	51	46
Yes	58	38	54	50	54	54	78	48	54

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
No	41	63	40	53	40	47	46
Yes	57	36	60	47	59	53	54

A slightly different trend can be observed in the analysis of the dedication of activists to their work. On one hand, only in the group of “snakes” the percentage of members who actively participate in the activities of the organisation was significantly higher than average. However, the share of “free-loaders” is minimal in the non-registered organisations, as well. The absenteeism is more wide-spread among registered organisations and among “birds”. Interestingly, the number of active members of an organisation has almost no influence on the self-esteem of an organisation itself or the sector as a whole.

Table 3. The share of active members of an organisation

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes 25%	33	15	28	32	33	28	16	32	29
Yes 50%	31	41	34	32	37	33	27	35	34
Yes 75%	12	15	12	13	10	13	13	12	12
Yes 100%	24	30	27	22	20	27	44	22	25

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes 25%	29	29	32	28	28	33	29
Yes 50%	32	39	29	37	32	30	34
Yes 75%	13	12	15	10	12	13	12
Yes 100%	26	20	24	26	28	24	25

Taking into account the process of liquidation of NGOs that took place in Belarus in 2004–09, one can consider as encouraging the fact that only 20 per cent of NGOs claim that the number of their members has decreased. This is not controversial: those who managed to survive, did so only because they were able to keep their active members. Quite predictably, the non-registered organisations have the biggest human resources problems; this is because now pressure is on the level of applying the articles of the Criminal Code against activists. Otherwise, such factors as the political focus of an organisation, its relations with authorities or with grant-giving organisations influence the loyalty of members to their NGOs only minimally. At the same time, the link between loyalty and the assessment of the effectiveness of work is more than evident.

Table 4. Recently, the number of members of your organisation has:

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Increased	36	26	32	34	30	33	36	32	32
Decreased	20	29	22	20	25	22	11	24	22
Stayed on the same level	41	46	42	44	43	42	50	41	42

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Increased	37	15	38	27	37	38	32
Decreased	18	31	21	25	17	17	22
Stayed on the same level	43	40	39	44	43	44	42

2. Motivation for civic activities

The following motivating factors are intrinsic to pro-democracy organisations, grant recipients and non-registered organisations: a) “individual” such as self-realisation and b) “global” such as a wish to change the situation in Belarus “in general”. The indifference to the second group of factors is quite obvious among those who do not regard their civic

activity as a means to foster democratic changes. At the same time, democrats and apolitical civic activists are almost equally motivated by a willingness to solve a particular problem or help other people. Interestingly, those who were motivated by “individual” or “global” factors, first of all, got disappointed with civic activity the most. Probably, those people were initially more politicised and therefore fostering political change for them was the criterion for the realisation of their potential. However, there can be another explanation for this phenomenon, which is partially supported by in-depth interviews. Those who entered the civic sector for self-realisation are people with extremely high ambitions and expectations. They usually achieve a lot in their lives and therefore they are dissatisfied when they compare their achievements with what could have been achieved under other circumstances. One should notice that dissatisfaction is often the best stimulus for any activity.

Table 5. Motives that led to the creation of the organisation

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Self-realisation	22	33	28	13	28	23	20	25	24
Willingness to help members of the NGO	39	31	37	35	37	37	37	37	37
Wish to influence changes in Belarus	32	51	49	12	45	34	20	40	37
Wish to solve a particular problem	44	51	47	41	59	42	41	47	46
Wish to help other people	55	47	52	52	58	51	54	52	53

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Self-realisation	23	35	18	32	26	13	24
Willingness to help members of the NGO	37	38	40	33	37	38	37
Wish to influence changes in Belarus	34	47	30	48	45	10	37
Wish to solve a particular problem	43	48	47	45	47	40	46
Wish to help other people	53	41	58	45	52	57	53

What is the main problem for organisational activity? The majority of respondents mentioned the problem of access to financial resources (in its different aspect, such as receiving financial support, possibility to rent premises, etc.). This problem is the least

crucial for “democrats”, and not by chance. The question was mostly aimed at learning how important is this problem for them in comparison to other problems. At the same time, those most lacking of financial support are organisations that are... supported by the state. It is quite interesting that the majority of NGOs do not regard internal organisational problems as the most important, although this problem is slightly more important for organisations that receive grants. One should also note that the deterioration of relations with the government negatively influences the assessment of the effectiveness of organisational activities, although pro-democracy organisations that managed to become effective have more conflicts with authorities than an average NGO.

Table 6. The biggest problem in an organisation's activity is:

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Related to finances	44	29	37	47	29	44	52	38	40
Related to the government	26	47	39	14	42	28	20	34	31
Internal organisational problems	6	6	7	6	9	6	1	8	7
Other	22	16	17	32	20	21	26	20	21

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Related to finances	43	32	48	32	39	50	40
Related to the government	30	36	25	38	36	16	31
Internal organisational problems	6	12	5	10	6	5	7
Other	21	19	21	19	19	28	21

The overwhelming majority of respondents are confident that their organisations will not disappear and will continue their work. Around one fourth of them thinks that they will be able to expand their activities. In this aspect, “interclass” differences are minimal, although one interesting observation is that there are more of both pessimists and optimists among members of non-registered NGOs, while the share of those who expect to expand their activities is the same for non-registered NGOs and NGOs that are supported by the state. Low self-esteem correlates with the pessimism regarding the expansion of an organisation's activities. What is interesting, is the aspiration to expand the activities is not a criterion for higher self-assessment in civic activities. If this self-esteem is relevant to reality, then effective NGOs are winning due to quality, not quantity.

Table 7. In three years, your organisation will...

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Stop its activity	6	15	7	4	5	9	2	10	8
Reduce its activity	5	7	6	5	5	5	6	5	5
Leave the activity on the same level	39	34	38	36	39	38	43	37	38
Expand its activity	24	29	26	26	24	26	29	25	25

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Stop its activity	7	14	9	9	7	9	8
Reduce its activity	4	13	8	6	3	5	5
Leave the activity on the same level	40	33	39	38	39	39	38
Expand its activity	28	19	26	23	28	28	25

We can mention as a positive point the fact that the overwhelming majority of members of the civic sector are confident that they will continue their civic activities. The absence of “interclass” difference here leads us to the conclusion that the civic sector has managed to become not only a place for different types of activities, but also a lifestyle (or a “cross” that activists have to carry throughout all of their lives).

Table 8. Do you plan to continue participating in the civic sector?

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes or rather yes	92	95	94	92	98	91	92	94	90

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes or rather yes	92	88	91	89	92	92	90

Practices of civic activities – how?

Belarusian NGOs are divided into two major categories of activities. The first one involves mostly politicised and non-registered organisations. This category includes protection of national cultural heritage, history and local history, education, self-organisation of the local population and human rights defence. The second one is for those who prefer not being involved in politics and/or are enjoying the protection by the state. This category is dominated by various types of recreational activities such as sports, tourism, amateur performance, social programmes and charity. This seems to be the border between “herbivorous” and “carnivorous” paradigms although there are some types of activities that are favoured by everyone if they have the means for that. For example, social projects are most often realised by those who gets money from grants or the state. Of course, one can say that non-politicised organisations choose types of activities that have more chances to reach the maximum number of beneficiaries. However, on the other hand, one cannot say that democrats do not want to be engaged in such activities since there was no question of what democrats want to do. Generally speaking, pro-democracy organisations are trying to reach their audiences via intellectual challenge (i.e. by developing forms of activities that encourage people to think critically, educate themselves and take decisions), while non-politicised organisations, on the contrary, allow people to get a proper rest from thinking. It is not rocket science to guess which organisations will be more popular. However, it is quite difficult to define, which of the strategies will be more helpful in the democratisation of Belarus.

“Democratic” forms of civic activities most often go hand in hand with low self-assessment of effectiveness. Only those “democrats” who closely work with people in human rights or educational spheres can feel some satisfaction from their work. As for non-politicised NGO activists, it seems that their route to a positive mood is quite clear: sports, tourism, charity, amateur groups and social projects. Of course, it does not mean that culture, for instance, is not socially significant. The whole layer of the national culture is preserved only with the help of dedicated activists. The fact that they are dissatisfied with their activities illustrates their powerlessness in the face of repressive actions of the state, including the destructive policy in the sphere of national culture. The low effectiveness of their actions does not mean there’s no need for them; in such spheres one could apply a huge effort to achieve minimal results. However, “democrats” should consider seriously whether the sphere of entertainment, leisure time and daily life is sufficiently covered by their activities. Maybe, even the most dedicated fighters for freedom could think about finding broader, more effective (and sometimes simpler) ways to reach people who could understand and support them?

Table 9. Spheres of activities of your organisation

	Regis-tered	Non-Regis-tered	Demo-crats	“Apolit-ical”	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not sup-ported by the state	Tot-al
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
National culture	24	38	30	18	31	26	26	28	27
Self-organisation of citizens	7	13	11	4	8	9	0	10	9
Local self-govern-ment	3	6	5	0	2	4	1	4	4
Military and patriot-ic activities	5	3	4	6	2	6	9	4	5
Artistic activities	6	8	6	11	5	7	11	6	7
Membership based club	10	15	9	18	10	12	9	12	11
Professional associ-ation	12	3	10	10	6	11	7	10	10
Labour rights	5	5	6	2	2	6	6	5	5
Sports, tourism	9	8	5	20	6	9	16	7	9
Religion	1	5	2	3	2	2	1	2	2
History, local history	9	19	13	8	14	10	4	12	11
Human rights	11	23	18	6	17	13	9	14	13
Social protection/ services	29	10	26	19	30	23	33	23	25
Consumer rights	2	0	2	1	0	2	3	1	6
Protection of envi-ronment	5	9	7	4	10	4	7	5	2
Education	25	30	31	19	42	22	21	28	27
Charity	21	4	13	26	20	16	17	17	17
Assisting other NGOs	5	8	7	3	14	4	0	7	6

	Consider their or-ganisation effective	Do not con-sider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democ-racy and considers itself effec-tive	Indifferent to democ-racy; con-siders itself effective	On aver-age
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
National culture	26	36	25	29	28	18	27
Self-organisation of citizens	8	10	8	10	10	5	9
Local self-govern-ment	4	1	4	4	6	0	4
Military and patri-otic activities	6	1	6	4	6	6	5
Artistic activities	7	3	7	5	6	13	7
Membership based club	11	15	9	14	9	17	11
Professional asso-ciation	10	7	8	12	10	13	10
Labour rights	5	4	6	4	6	1	5
Sports, tourism	10	3	7	10	6	23	9
Religion	2	1	3	1	2	3	2

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
History, local history	9	21	9	13	11	3	11
Human rights	13	11	12	16	18	5	13
Social protection/ services	25	18	28	22	25	21	25
Consumer rights	1	1	2	2	2	1	6
Protection of the environment	5	10	5	8	7	1	2
Education	27	28	26	30	31	20	27
Charity	19	8	20	10	16	28	17
Assisting other NGOs	6	8	5	8	7	3	6

As for the type of activities of Belarusian NGOs, the diversity of these NGOs directly depends on the funding received, whether it is internal or external funding. However, here one can again define characteristics for the “democrats” spheres of activities. Politicised NGOs focus mostly on civic campaigns and seminars while pro-governmental organisations are mostly represented in such spheres as social projects, charity and organisation of leisure time (festivals, contests). One more interesting peculiarity is the misbalance of non-registered organisations in the research and analysis sphere. If we are to find a link between the assessment of its own effectiveness and types of activities, one can observe that the more focused on charity the activity is, the higher its self-assessment of effectiveness is.

Table 10. Types of NGO activities

	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Conducting training, seminars	64	75	70	61	81	63	59	68	67
International exchange and study visits	34	33	37	25	54	28	21	36	34
Consultations and expert support	35	35	40	26	55	29	24	37	35
Research and analysis	34	45	45	20	52	33	26	39	37
Organising festivals, fairs, etc.	37	32	34	40	35	36	47	34	36

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Publishing info materials	40	51	47	33	64	36	30	45	42
Collecting donations, organising humanitarian and charity actions	42	20	34	44	40	36	53	34	37
Actions and campaigns promoting civic interests	25	31	32	12	45	21	17	28	26

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Conducting training, seminars	68	64	59	72	70	59	67
International exchange and internships	35	24	33	35	39	25	34
Consultations and expert support	36	32	33	37	42	24	35
Research and analysis	36	42	33	44	45	16	37
Organising festivals, fairs, etc.	40	18	38	31	39	39	36
Publishing info materials	42	40	39	47	47	26	42
Collecting donations, organising humanitarian and charity actions	41	19	44	26	36	50	37
Actions and campaigns promoting civic interests	27	24	27	26	33	12	26
Development of partnership and/or networking	27	31	23	35	32	14	28

In the analysis of target groups, one can observe that non-politicised or pro-governmental NGOs are also the ones that have the most “charity”-type audiences: children, retired people, and handicapped people. They also have the biggest chance to get satisfaction from their activities. Among those who are least satisfied with their effectiveness, the majority work for rather politicised target groups: youth, media, other NGOs.

Speaking of target groups of Belarusian NGOs, which of them can become real agents of change? Other research (such as that of audience survey company NOVAK’s and Belarusian

Institute of Strategic Studies research) show that currently the “intergroup” differences in worldview and political preferences are disappearing. Pro-democratic orientation and the fight for democracy are now related to values, while the bearers of the values of freedom and morality can be found in any social group. The focus of NGOs on young people is totally understandable, not only because this group has the biggest concentration of socially active people who are the basis of the civic sector, but also because the youth are considered to be the main “actor” of possible political change in Belarus. However, it seems that this latter statement does not totally correspond to reality anymore.

Table 11. NGO's target groups

	Regis-tered	Non-Regis-tered	Demo-crats	“Apoliti-cal”	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not sup-ported by the state
Children	38	23	31	42	35	34	44	33
Youth	57	69	63	54	66	58	50	62
Trade unions	24	23	26	19	27	23	23	24
Media	14	18	17	11	16	14	6	16
Consumers	5	5	5	5	6	4	3	5
Other NGOs	14	24	21	5	29	12	4	18
Women	25	19	26	19	24	23	17	25
Local popu-lation	36	43	39	35	38	38	46	36
State institu-tions employ-ees	13	5	13	6	10	11	13	11
Members of organisation	36	33	40	26	44	32	21	38
People with limited abil-ities	23	9	18	24	24	19	24	19
National minorities	9	4	8	7	10	7	13	7
Retired people	21	9	19	16	21	17	17	18

	Consider their organisation effective	Do not con-sider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effec-tive	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democ-racy and considers itself effec-tive	Indifferent to democ-racy; con-siders itself effective	On av-erage
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Children	38	23	31	42	35	34	35
Youth	57	69	63	54	66	58	60
Trade unions	24	23	26	19	27	23	23
Media	14	18	17	11	16	14	15
Consumers	5	5	5	5	6	4	5
Other NGOs	14	24	21	5	29	12	16
Women	25	19	26	19	24	23	23
Local population	36	43	39	35	38	38	37
State institutions employees	13	5	13	6	10	11	10

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Members of organisation	36	33	40	26	44	32	35
People with limited abilities	23	9	18	24	24	19	19
National minorities	9	4	8	7	10	7	8
Retired people	21	9	19	16	21	17	18

4. Practices of civic activities – with whom?

Non-governmental organisations in Belarus are mostly “mingling” with themselves and with international partners; to a lesser extent – with media, even less – with state organs and minimally – with political parties. Non-registration of such organisations cardinally decreases their social capital, making them “locked” in the political subculture of the opposition. Quite predictably, non-politicised or pro-governmental organisations have more chances to communicate with the state institutions, local authorities and media. What strikes most, is the high percentage of pro-democratic NGOs that never communicate with political structures. This might be caused by the fact that, for many, the civic sector is a means to “exit” party policy or avoid it. The general and the most evident trend is the almost total absence of regular connections between NGOs and businesses, which is true both for “democratic” and “apolitical”, or pro-governmental NGOs. The correlation between the frequency of contacts and self-assessment of civil society is quite strong. “Democratic” organisations that consider themselves effective are mostly focused on contacts with other civil society actors while “apolitical” organisations prefer contact with state institutions and media.

Table 12. Interactions with other actors

Frequency of interaction with other NGOs									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Regularly	40	40	46	26	62	34	44	28	40
No	11	9	9	18	4	13	10	11	11
Frequency of interaction with foreign and international organisations									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Regularly	32	23	33	24	47	25	27	30	30
No	33	40	25	39	8	36	29	30	35

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Frequency of interaction with local authorities									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Regularly	33	8	23	32	22	28	44	24	27
No	47	43	26	23	52	45	50	46	24
Frequency of interaction with commercial organisations									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Regularly	9	3	9	3	9	8	11	7	8
No	43	61	49	48	49	48	26	52	48
Frequency of interaction with state media									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Regularly	24	6	18	26	23	19	26	19	20
No	23	60	38	19	30	32	7	36	32
Frequency of interaction with non-state media									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Regularly	19	27	26	11	31	18	13	22	20
No	34	27	25	48	22	36	29	33	41
Frequency of interaction with central authorities									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Regularly	23	5	18	22	19	19	30	17	19
No	33	69	44	39	38	42	7	48	42
Frequency of interaction with political parties									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Regularly	9	23	17	1	20	10	7	13	12
No	67	40	51	83	53	62	60	60	60
Frequency of interaction with іншымі НДА									
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average		
Regularly	44	28	43	39	50	29	40		
No	10	20	9	14	7	18	11		

Frequency of interaction with foreign and international organisations							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Regularly	33	8	35	23	37	29	30
No	28	19	29	28	23	37	35
Frequency of interaction with local authorities							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Regularly	32	8	33	20	28	36	27
No	22	37	20	29	46	43	24
Frequency of interaction with commercial organisations							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Regularly	9	3	8	7	10	3	8
No	44	68	47	49	44	44	48
Frequency of interaction with state media							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Regularly	23	4	21	18	20	30	20
No	29	29	26	38	39	52	32
Frequency of interaction with non-state media							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Regularly	29	17	21	23	29	12	21
No	33	32	35	29	41	30	40
Frequency of interaction with central authorities							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Regularly	21	14	21	14	20	23	19
No	39	57	38	48	42	37	42

Frequency of interaction with political parties							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Regularly	12	8	10	14	18	1	12
No	63	54	62	55	23	85	60

5. Criteria and means of achieving effectiveness

The ideal formula for maximising “beneficiaries” is to have access to financial resources and be registered by the state. This is not possible for every organisation, especially if their activities are related to politics. On the other hand, the absence of registration substantially decreases the capability of an organisation to provide any services.

The survey has demonstrated a strong correlation between the level of “pro-democracy” orientation of Belarusian NGOs and their willingness to improve organisational practices and get new work skills. Obviously, such willingness does not necessarily transform into the improvement of practices. However, if one compares “democrats” and “grant recipients” to “apolitical”, or pro-governmental NGOs, it is obvious that the first groups are more ambitious in the sphere of organisational capacity. For instance, “democrats” usually have a mission statement, a strategic plan and short-term plans. Also, pro-democracy NGOs pay more attention to capacity building, learning and research. Of course, some of that can be explained by the requirement of donors to have all the above documents and strategies in place. It is not a coincidence that the “best” organisational practices usually take place among organisations that receive grants. Another explanation of this phenomenon is that grant recipients have been provided with a good theoretical and practical introduction into capacity building from donors as a bonus, and this helps them in planning project activities, running the projects and developing their organisations. If this is true, then it is possible to say that mostly external actors have traditionally taken responsibility for developing the NGO sector in Belarus. What is essential, is that all capacity building activities (development of strategic plans and mission, trainings and research on target groups etc.) positively influence the self-assessment of effectiveness. At the same time, organisations that consider themselves non-effective, admit to a lack of training and a lack of high-quality analysis of the civic sector. At the same time, and this is yet another repetition of the same regularity, effective organisations that have no democratic aspirations pay much less attention to internal organisational issues than pro-democracy NGOs. Probably, in the case of pro-governmental NGOs, they do not have to worry about their organisational capacity or professionalism because it is being taken care of by their real creators.

The second general trend demonstrated by the study, is inertia in the organisational development. This trend is strong, first of all, among non-registered organisations, not the

“democratic” NGO sector as such. The survey has confirmed that “democrats” and “grant recipients” spend relatively more time researching their impact on their target groups and the society as a whole. The problem of the independent NGO sector, it seems, is not in the fact that its leaders and activists are focused exclusively on regime change and do not want to work on society’s daily issues. Quite the contrary, we observe in the pro-democracy NGO sector the willingness to become a “normal” civil society, as much as the Belarusian political situation allows.

Table 13. *Capacity building in the Belarusian civic sector.*

How many people used the services of your organisation?									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Up to 50	6	5	6	5	4	20	9	5	6
Up to 100	16	15	17	18	19	16	23	15	16
Up to 1000	31	17	29	27	33	26	27	28	28
More	13	4	10	13	15	10	10	10	11
We do not provide services	16	26	18	22	16	20	16	19	19
We have a written mission statement									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes	62	48	57	65	64	56	54	59	58
We have a strategic plan									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes	62	45	59	54	66	56	57	58	58
No	35	49	37	43	33	40	39	38	38
We have short-term planning procedures									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes	85	69	81	83	89	79	66	84	81
No	12	27	16	16	11	17	26	14	15
We organise training sessions to improve our organisational skills									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	“Apolitical”	Receive grants	Don’t receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Never	26	26	26	27	23	27	34	25	27
Rarely	41	33	40	40	48	37	31	41	40
All the time	29	36	31	30	28	32	31	31	31

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We initiated processes of capacity building									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes	46	47	52	33	64	41	42	47	46
No	51	46	44	64	35	54	55	49	50
Our organisation needs changes									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes	32	38	41	17	35	33	26	35	34
No	58	57	51	72	58	57	62	57	58
We need training in capacity building									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes	41	50	49	27	49	41	24	46	42
No	51	44	42	65	46	50	54	48	49
We collect information about our target groups									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes	49	43	52	37	66	43	43	49	48
No	47	50	43	60	33	52	51	47	48
We collect information about the impact of our activities in solving issues of target groups									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes	38	31	41	26	58	30	32	37	37
No	55	62	52	69	39	61	55	56	57
We organised civic campaigns to promote interests of target groups									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes	32	40	40	20	43	32	26	36	34
No	63	55	55	76	53	63	69	60	60
There's a lack of analysis of the third sector									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Total Not supported by the state	Total
Yes	45	43	48	32	42	45	29	48	45
No	47	44	42	61	50	46	56	45	47
We researched our organisation's or other NGOs' activities									
	Registered	Non-Registered	Democrats	"Apolitical"	Receive grants	Don't receive grants	Supported by the state	Not supported by the state	Total
Yes	31	30	31	33	39	27	23	32	31
No	68	64	65	67	60	69	73	66	57
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average		
Up to 50	5	8	5	6	6	4	6		

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Up to 100	16	16	20	13	16	18	16
Up to 1000	31	13	26	30	31	30	28
More	12	7	10	10	12	14	11
We do not provide services	16	30	18	20	16	18	19
We have a written mission statement							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes	61	51	61	56	58	67	58
We have a strategic plan							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes	64	33	65	30	66	55	58
No	33	63	32	46	31	43	38
We have short-term planning procedures							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes	85	71	82	80	84	89	81
No	13	26	15	18	13	10	15
We organise training sessions to improve our organisational skills							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Never	23	35	29	24	23	27	27
Rarely	43	28	42	39	43	42	40
All the time	30	33	27	34	31	27	31
We initiated the processes of capacity building							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes	50	36	44	52	55	34	46
No	48	60	53	44	41	64	50
Our organisation needs changes							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes	30	47	29	42	37	15	34
No	63	43	63	49	56	77	58

We need training in capacity building							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes	40	51	42	45	47	24	42
No	51	43	50	49	46	66	49
We collect information about our target groups							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes	52	29	52	44	59	37	48
No	43	66	44	52	38	60	48
We collect information about the impact of our activities in solving issues of target groups							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes	40	22	38	36	44	28	37
No	60	69	62	60	53	76	60
We organised civic campaigns to promote the interests of target groups							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes	37	27	34	34	44	20	34
No	60	69	62	60	53	76	60
There's a lack of analysis of the third sector							
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes	44	48	46	46	48	30	45
No	49	42	48	41	44	65	47
	Consider their organisation effective	Do not consider their organisation effective	Consider the civic sector effective	Do not consider the civic sector effective	Pro-democracy and considers itself effective	Indifferent to democracy; considers itself effective	On average
Yes	32	26	33	29	32	36	31
No	66	72	66	67	64	64	67

Conclusions and recommendations

Veterans of the NGO sector know civil society better than the author of this text. Therefore, instead of imposing some algorithm of actions, I will limit myself to several general remarks and statements. Philosophical and theoretical question about which forms of civic activities are the most conducive for the democratisation of a society remains unanswered. The most correct answer, perhaps, is that this goal is achieved best through the variety of species, in the same way as biodiversity assists in achieving environmental

balance. The main problem of the Belarusian civic sector is that civil society is still a subculture. However, this sub-culturality is caused by the *very fact of the emergence of civil society in Belarus*. Being indifferent in Belarus means to live an “alien life”. Thus, the very fact of the existence of civil society in Belarus is a huge benefit for the future of this country. One cannot even imagine what this huge potential gained by the years of civic activities, combined with life experience and knowledge, can bring. Therefore it is vitally important to preserve this experience inside Belarus. And therefore forms of support for civil society should encourage people to stay and work in their homeland.

If we come back to our starting point, the statement that the amount of politically active people, or dissidents, or “others” directly influences the democratic future of a country, we can see that our survey allows us to elaborate further on what will enable Belarusian civic sector to become an effective democratisation factor in the future. It makes no sense to challenge some standard NGO procedures such as capacity building and sustainable development. This is needed; but this is not enough. We observe that many pro-democracy NGOs that successfully apply capacity building practices do not consider the sector, as such, effective. This brings us to the conclusion that either the NGO capacity building has become too formalised, or critics demand the unachievable from NGOs. If democracy is based on people, the main focus of attention for civil society organisations should be people, not organisations. Then NGOs should, each in their own sphere, look for answers to the questions: what motivates people to engage into civic activities? What makes them become involved and responsible? What forms of activities attract new people to the civic sector? In which way and why do people stay in that sector? The issue of motivation in civic activity is worth a separate study. Such a formulation of the question is cardinally different from those tasks that numerous pro-democracy, and first of all, “grant-oriented” NGOs, whose activity is focused on the widening the circle of the “beneficiaries” of their services. One should not question this standard request to organisations, which is sound and reasonable on its own. But we should be aware that the democratic future of Belarus requires not only popularisation of NGOs in the society (via beneficiaries) but the increase in “benefit-givers” i.e. all socially and civically active Belarusians.

How can one attract, to the civic sector, new people if old members are rapidly leaving it? In the current situation, two distinct forms of civic activities indicate the effectiveness of an NGO. The first one is focused on democratic change, and the second one is aimed at getting maximum satisfaction from the results of their own activities. In order to feel useful to society and effective, the non-politicised pro-governmental organisations do not have to worry about things that are core to the survival and development of the pro-democracy civil society. The turn away from politics makes life much easier and creates a more positive and attractive social attitude to the organisation. However, it does not mean that when the NGO sector engages in more popular and attractive activities (social projects, charity actions, festivals etc.) it will make Belarusian society more “civil”, not

benefit-oriented (when the services of the NGOs will be treated in the same way as the services of social protection services).

This brings us to a broader point: does the activity of non-politicised NGOs foster democratisation? We don't mean support for the established democracy, where the activities of a bird watching society are as important as the work of other NGOs. Obviously, in some way (and this has been proved by the research) non-politicised NGOs can be a way out for those who are hiding from real social problems and challenges. On the other side, many "non-politicised" organisations, whether consciously or not, focus on a different strategy for the change in mentality of Belarusian citizens: via gradual, non-violent influence on their lifestyle. This can bring unpredictable effects: improving the "lifestyle" in the short-term perspective makes NGOs allies of the state, supporting the regime's stability. The population views such NGOs as part of the state system. At the same time, representatives of "carnivorous" NGOs should not forget that tea clubs, feline societies and other like organisations can play a role in civic education if someone purposefully works with them. Moreover, it would be even better if such spheres of activities get to be the focus of attention of pro-democratic activists.

Probably, the only way for the reconciliation of the "herbivorous" and "carnivorous" paradigms is to support engagement of pro-democracy activists into non-politicised forms of activities. The evident disadvantage of the independent civic sector is its weak connection to daily life. Civic life generally starts from a positive motivation to get out of the house and communicate with others. Maybe, this is done more easily via leisure activities, sports, entertainment and other kinds of activities that don't require huge effort? At the same time, NGOs should not be afraid of being selfish up to an extent. Yes, it is good to dedicate yourself to a greater goal, but no one will blame those who start their civic activities from sports clubs or singing clubs, as the national liberation movements actually did in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Vitali Silitski (1972–2011) was one of the leading Belarusian political scientists who, for many years, chaired the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies. He prepared this article for the study "Belarusian NGO Sector: Potential for Changes" that took place in 2005–2009, at the request of several Belarusian non-governmental organisations.