

From Editors

The publication is a collection of texts dedicated to the development of civil society during the last 15 years that in a critical-minded way sum up the efforts of Belarusian non-governmental organisations. It deals with various dimensions of civil activity, including cultural activity, gender issues, political solidarity, local self-government, civil education, relationships among religious groups, youth subcultures, environmentalist movement, and the process of (de)consolidation and (de)politicisation of civic sector. The publication also sheds light on different understandings of civil society in Belarusian mass-media and the practice of substitution of civil society for state-run non-governmental organizations. Daily life of civic sector is described, as well as the peculiarities of the provision of social services by NGOs.

We hope that the publication will be used as an argument in discussions about the significance of civil society for the post-Communist transformation.

The publication opens with an analytical article by a sociologist and publication's co-editor Aliaksei Lastouski "Solidarity test: reaction of Belarusian civil society to events in Ukraine in 2013–2014".

A researcher from the Institute for Political Studies "Political Sphere" Vadzim Smok presents his article "How Cultural NGOs Struggle for the Right to Be Belarusian".

A researcher from the same institute Vadzim Bylina writes about "Football fans as an example of a community beyond the government's control in the conditions of the authoritarian regime".

A sociologist Ihar Rasolka reflects on "Politicisation of civil society in an apolitical society: paternalism, deconsolidation and action strategies of social agents".

The publication also features a study by a renowned political scientist Vitali Silitski (1972–2011) "Civic sector in Belarus: its daily life and organisational processes".

The publication contains another big study by Natallia Vasilevich titled "Church and state in Belarus in the period of consolidated authoritarianism".

A researcher from Manchester University Iryna Clark writes about "Mediation of the term 'civil society' in the Belarusian press (1991–2010)".

A political scientist from European Humanities University Tatsiana Chulitskaya presents her study "Social organisations in Belarus: between the state and society".

Tatsiana Shchurko writes about "Gender sector and civil society in post-Soviet Belarus".

A civic activist Anastasiya Matchanka shares her observations in the article: “Substitution of Civil Society in Belarus: Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisations”.

An analyst from the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies Alena Artsiomenka makes her contribution to exploration of the central topic of the issue with her article “(De)-consolidation of civic society in Belarus: decreased potential for solidarity action, de-politicisation, disagreements about values”.

An expert from Lev Sapieha Foundation for Democratic Reforms, Mikhas Pliska in his article “Local self-government: fifth wheel in the wagon of central power” criticises the absence of reforms at the local administration level.

Viachaslau Babrovich critically assesses the effort directed at civil education of citizens in his article “Civic education in Belarus: concepts, standards and lack of demand from the society”.

And finally, Uladzimir Rouda classifies data from international organizations on civil activity in the country in his article “Assessment of the state of civil society in Belarus in Freedom House and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) reports in 1999–2013”.

The publication closes with a “List of reading on Belarusian civil society research (2000–2014)” prepared by Aliaksei Lastouski.