

## POLICY BRIEF

### POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS OF COOPERATION

#### BETWEEN

**COUNCIL FOR COOPERATION OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT BODIES UNDER THE  
COUNCIL OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE BELARUSIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

#### AND

**CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

### BACKGROUND

In June 2008, the Council for Cooperation of Local Self-Government Bodies under the Council of the Republic of the Belarusian National Assembly (hereinafter referred to as Council) approached the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (hereinafter referred to as Congress) with the request to be granted observer status with the Congress (see **Annex 1**). On December 3, 2008, the Standing Committee of the Congress considered the request and made a positive decision.

Opinions of representatives of Council of Europe (CoE) member states were taken into account in the process of preparing this decision. In particular, they had expressed some critical remarks and suggestions. Their **main criticism was related to the fact that the Council did not have the status of a legal entity, as well as to the principles of its formation** (in terms of both establishment procedures and composition of membership) **and to its activities and functions**. The representatives expressed hope and expectation that the Belarusian side would take certain steps to increase cooperation with the CoE in general and with the Congress in particular. **The Congress's Secretary General Ulrich Bohner expressed readiness to discuss with official Belarusian representatives the possibility of organizing a joint conference in Minsk focusing on issues of local self-government, noting that such an event could also involve participants from the European Commission and the OSCE along with representatives of the CoE.**

The Congress's decision to grant observer status to the Council as well as the general mood of the representatives of Congress member states indicate the readiness for cooperation with Belarus.

Therefore, it is deemed important to develop and put forward some **directions of cooperation which would be in line with national interests of Belarus, reflect the country's priorities and at the same time would serve as evidence for seriousness of intentions to develop cooperation**. The proposed directions also need to conform to the expectations of the Congress (see above) as well as to the principles and norms that are the basis for cooperation with member states. Moreover, they need to be commensurate with its capabilities.

### VISION OF COOPERATION

In our opinion, the development of cooperation between the Council and the Congress needs to achieve the following:

- Demonstrate the seriousness and sincerity of Belarus' intention to join the CoE;
- Increase the level, effectiveness and intensity of contacts between Belarus and the CoE;
- Establish relations that could strengthen trust, understanding and mutual respect;

- Expand contacts with international organizations and CoE member states, including through the implementation of joint programs and projects in the field of local self-government;
- Establish an efficient system for the transfer of knowledge and experience accumulated by the CoE, its member states and other international organizations in order to improve the qualification of Belarusian specialists in the field of local self-government;
- Provide assistance to the process of Belarus' accession to the CoE.

Cooperation is an effective way of solving problems if objectives and goals of those involved in it are close or the same, if they are formulated clearly, unambiguously and their meaning is shared by all sides involved, and if the way the cooperation is realized is acceptable, optimal and transparent.

Based on this vision of cooperation, the following directions and forms of cooperation are outlined in greater detail below.

## **1. REVIEW OF BELARUSIAN LEGISLATION ON LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT TO CHECK ITS COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES AND NORMS OF THE EUROPEAN CHARTER OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT**

### **1.1. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION**

On several occasions recently Belarus has expressed its willingness and readiness to develop cooperation with different European organizations, including the CoE. As of now, Belarus is the only European country which is not a member of the CoE. However, one should remember that the process of accession to this authoritative international organization is linked with the fulfillment of certain obligations by an applicant country, in particular, signing and ratification of a number of international documents adopted by the CoE.

The **European Charter of Local Self-Government** (see **Annex 2**), adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on October 15, 1985, is one of such documents. It is signed by 44 out of 47 CoE member states and ratified by 43 of them.

The European Charter of Local Self-Government is an international legal act which is an output of several initiatives and years of work in the CoE. It is one of the main sources of municipal law in European countries which follow the way of developing local self-government in modern Europe.

A theoretical and practical commentary on the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus (edited by Grigory Vasilevich) points out in its section covering Article 117 of the Constitution that **"following the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which is the most detailed description of notions and principles of local self-government, is one of the conditions for the accession to the Council of Europe."**\*

When preparing for the accession to the CoE, Belarus will have to address the issue of signing and ratifying the European Charter of Local Self-Government. According to Article 12, Paragraph 1, of the Charter, **each country which accedes to the document undertakes to consider itself bound by at least twenty of thirty paragraphs of Part I of the Charter**. Thus, Belarus will have to decide which twenty paragraphs it is going to commit itself to. **Without a review of Belarusian legislation on local self-government in the light of the European Charter, it would be impossible to make a conscious, balanced and acceptable (in line with national interests) choice of commitments.**

**At present, there is no official analysis or review of Belarusian legislation with respect to its compliance with the principles and norms of the European Charter.**

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\* Apart from acceding to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, candidate countries have to fulfill other conditions, such as the signing and ratification of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, abolition of death penalty and adoption of some other documents which are not relevant for this memo.

At first glance, it seems that it would be logical to set up an expert group of Belarusian specialists to prepare an analysis of national legislation in the light of the principles and norms of the Charter. But firstly, the preparation of such an analysis by Belarusian experts will not solve the problem, that is, it will reflect the opinion of only one side, that of Belarus. Secondly, this approach, if chosen, can lead to the emergence of tension instead of cooperation. The basis for such fears comes from frequent claims by some official documents in Belarus that **national legislation in the field of local self-government is already based on the principles of the European Charter**. In particular, it can be found on Page 7 of the Concept of Draft Code on State Government and Local Self-Government (Ministry of Justice, 2008).

At the same time, an analysis of opinions and articles by a number of Belarusian and foreign experts in this field shows that **these claims are not entirely true**. According to them, the Belarusian system of local self-government and the European Charter of Local Self-Government are based on two different theories. The system of local self-government currently functioning in Belarus is based on the **state theory of self-government**, while the principles and norms of the European Charter are formulated in the spirit of the **theory of dualism**. This means that **certain differences are inevitable**. Some of them are of systemic nature and directly linked to certain provisions of the Belarusian Constitution, while others are linked to norms established by individual Belarusian laws. Still, some provisions of the relevant Belarusian legislation are indeed in line with the principles and norms of the European Charter. The experts believe that **some of these differences can be removed from national legislation without much effort, time and pain (especially, what concerns the recognition of the right of local self-government bodies to set up associations and unions)**.

The fact that the assessments of the Belarusian legislation can differ so much can be explained by different and subjective understandings of the nature of local self-government and balance between the state and the person, as well as the balance between the local and central governments.

Since Belarus is an official candidate for the accession to the CoE (its application dates back to March 12, 1993), it has to follow **Paragraph 3 Article 2 of the Statutory Resolution CM/RES (2007)6** relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, adopted on May 2, 2007: "The Congress shall prepare on a regular basis country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member States and **in States which have applied to join the Council of Europe**, and shall ensure, in particular, that the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government are implemented.

To this end, the Institutional Committee of the Congress has a **Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government** (document CG/INST (7)33 rev2), which deals with country-by-country monitoring of the implementation of the Charter in national legislation of CoE member states and candidate countries.

Therefore, since we are talking about the analysis of Belarusian legislation in the light of the European Charter and not vice versa, we believe it will be **a correct and constructive approach if this analysis is conducted by experts of the Congress**.

## **1.2. PROPOSALS FOR COOPERATION**

**As part of the planned cooperation, this problem can be addressed by sending an official request to the Congress to conduct a review of Belarusian legislation in the light of the principles and norms of the European Charter and prepare a report on the basis of the review.**

While preparing this request, it is advisable to hold consultations with the Belarusian Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) to identify all the necessary procedures for organizing the sending of such a request, including the designation of a government body which will send it.

### **1.3. EXPECTED RESULTS**

**1. The proposal to the Congress to prepare a report analyzing the situation in Belarusian legislation is not a declaration but a real step on the way to the CoE and confirmation for the seriousness of Belarus' intention to join the CoE.**

2. The preparation of the report is a very serious, demanding and difficult job. The fulfillment of this job within the framework of cooperation with the Congress will be a **substantial contribution** to Belarus' efforts to join the CoE as well as **to the development of contacts and establishment of trustful and mutually beneficial relations on a qualitatively new and high level.**

**3. The Congress's report will be, in essence, an official opinion of the CoE about the condition of local self-government in Belarus in the light of the European Charter.**

The preparation of such a document corresponds with the interests of Belarus, because its conclusions will become a basis for further strategic and tactic decision-making by the President, Parliament and Government of Belarus for the purpose of developing local self-government in the country.

It is also important to note that a candidate country is not required to have its legislation in full compliance with the European Charter at the moment of signing and ratification of the Charter. **The signing and ratification of the European Charter means the need for gradual adaptation of national legislation to the principles and norms of the European Charter.**

One has to take into account the fact that the Congress does regular country-by-country monitoring intended to assess the progress of CoE member states in the implementation of European Charter provisions in their national legislation.

In addition, the **European Charter has to be translated into the official state languages of Belarus (Belarusian and Russian) before it can be signed.** The preparation of official translations (into Belarusian and Russian) of the European Charter is an important, serious and difficult task. Due to different interpretations of some terms used in the Charter, there is a danger that the process of translation can render some parts of the Charter's text in an incorrect way or distort the meaning of some principles and norms. This has to be taken into account when preparing a translation for Belarus; it should be done from the original English or French version of the text of the Charter.

## **2. ESTABLISHMENT OF BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES**

### **2.1. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION**

Associations (unions) of local and regional authorities (hereinafter referred to as Associations) play an important part in the development and strengthening of local self-government. As was mentioned above, one of the points in the European Charter is **the right to form associations** as provided for in Article 10:

(1) "Local authorities shall be entitled, in exercising their powers, to cooperate and, within the framework of the law, to form consortia with other local authorities in order to carry out tasks of common interest."

(2) "The entitlement of local authorities to belong to an association for the protection and promotion of their common interests and to belong to an international association of local authorities shall be recognised in each State."

(3) "Local authorities shall be entitled, under such conditions as may be provided for by the law, to cooperate with their counterparts in other States."

**Note:** For a more detailed description of this article see **Annex 3** and its explanatory report to the European Charter of Local Self-Government. In particular, it says the following with respect to Article 10:

*"Paragraph 1 covers co-operation between local authorities on a functional basis with a view in particular to seeking greater efficiency through joint projects or carrying out tasks which are beyond the capacity of a single authority. Such co-operation may take the form of the creation of consortia or federations of authorities, although a legal framework for the creation of such bodies may be laid down by legislation.*

*Paragraph 2 is concerned with associations whose objectives are much more general than the functional considerations of paragraph 1 and which normally seek to represent all local authorities of a particular kind or kinds on a regional or national basis. The right to belong to associations of this type does not however imply central government recognition of any individual association as a valid interlocutor.*

*In a Council of Europe instrument of this type, it is normal that the right to belong to associations at the national level be accompanied by a parallel right to belong to international associations, a number of which are active in the promotion of European unity along lines which accord with the aims laid down in the statute of the Council of Europe.*

*However, Article 10.2 leaves to individual member states the choice of means, legislative or otherwise, whereby the principle is given effect.*

*Paragraph 3: Direct co-operation with individual local authorities of other countries should also be permitted, although the manner of such co-operation must respect such legal rules as may exist in each country and take place within the framework of the powers of the authorities in question.*

*The provisions of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (21 May 1980, ETS No. 106) are particularly relevant in this respect, although some forms of co-operation need not be restricted to frontier areas."*

**At present, Belarus does not have a National Association of Local and Regional Authorities. In our opinion, there are several reasons for this.**

**Firstly**, there is a lack of information about the role, objectives and activities of such associations as well as about the principles guiding the establishment of such associations, sources of funding, forms and methods of work, etc. and as a result, there is a lack of initiative from local self-government bodies to aspire for the creation of an Association.

**Secondly**, there is a lack of legal basis in Belarusian legislation for the establishment of an Association (see **Annex 4**).

**Thirdly**, there is a fear (on the part of central government) of building "counter-balance" to state government bodies on the local level; there is excessive centralization of government and a lack of legal guarantees for state non-intervention in internal affairs of local self-government bodies without good reasons.

**Fourthly**, there is a lack of funding. Local councils – although they are legal entities *de jure* – do not have the necessary attributes of legal entities, such as property of their own and bank accounts, which means that they do not have funds of their own which they could contribute to the running of an Association.

**National associations of local and regional authorities exist in all CoE member states. They are often the main platform for a dialogue between different levels of state government and local self-government.**

An analysis of statutory regulations for such associations in Czech Republic, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Poland and Russia (see **Annex 5**) allows us to make the following conclusions:

1. Czech Republic, Finland, Lithuania and Latvia have one national association each, while Ukraine, Russia and Poland have several of them.
2. Associations are voluntary non-state unions with the rights of legal entities and established in accordance with national legislation.
3. Associations usually have the following goals:
  - 1) Implementation of European Charter provisions in respective countries;
  - 2) Negotiations with Parliament and Government on issues related to the interests of local self-government;
  - 3) Drafting legislative proposals to improve national legislation in the field of local self-government;
  - 4) Protection of rights and common interests on behalf of local self-governments;
  - 5) Contributing to the creation of conditions for the training of personnel for local self-government bodies;
  - 6) Assistance to the realization of citizens' rights at the local level;
  - 7) Developing common policies of local self-governments and looking for solutions to common problems;
  - 8) Development of cooperation with international organizations and associations in other countries;
  - 9) Participation in international programs and projects;
  - 10) Studying the experience and dissemination of best practices at the local level;
  - 11) Research.
4. A General Assembly is usually the supreme governing body of Associations. It elects representative and executive bodies of the respective Association as well as an audit committee.
5. Financial and property resources of Associations are formed by contributions from members, state grants, donations and other legally acquired resources.

**6. Associations, as provided by law, take part in the selection of representatives from the respective country for the Congress.**

The Council of the Republic of the Belarusian National Assembly set up a **Council for Cooperation of Local Self-Government Bodies** by its decision made on April 2, 2007. This Council is a collective deliberative body under the Council of the Republic.

**The Council does not represent local councils in their relations with state bodies and does not have the status of a legal entity. The principles of its formation (in terms of both membership and establishment procedures) differ from the principles and norms of the European Charter and require certain improvements in its functions and goals.**

Nevertheless, **the establishment of the Council is a correct and positive decision.** In our opinion, **this is the first step toward the establishment of a Belarusian Association of Local and Regional Authorities.** If certain conditions hold, the Council can become the basis for such an association established in accordance with the principles and norms of the European Charter already in the short term.

**The cooperation between the Council and the Congress in the work aimed at establishing a Belarusian Association of Local and Regional Authorities is a priority direction, in our opinion.**

## **2.2. PROPOSALS FOR COOPERATION**

The following forms can be suggested for cooperation with respect to the situation described above:

- **Collection and analysis of information** about the experience of CoE member states in the establishment and operation of Associations;
- **Improvement of Belarusian legislation** in the light of Article 10 Paragraph 1 of the European Charter concerning the right of local authorities to form Associations;
- **Organization of conferences, workshops and other events**, including regional ones, to disseminate information about the role, objectives, goals and activities of Associations.

In the context of cooperation with the Congress, it is suggested **to approach the Congress with the request to provide consultative, methodological and information support aimed at the establishment of a Belarusian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, including the organization of a conference focusing on legal regulation of issues related to the establishment and operation of national associations in CoE member states.**

Suggested timeframe: July or October 2009

Expected number of participants: 150 people

Duration: 2 days

**Note:** The Congress has the experience of providing such assistance in CoE member states, including in CIS countries.

## **2.3. EXPECTED RESULTS**

1. On the basis of the acquired knowledge and information, the Council could draft proposals and amendments to Article 14 of Belarus' Law "On Local Government and Self-Government in the Republic of Belarus" and the Council of the Republic could submit them for consideration to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus. In case they are adopted, **Belarusian legislation could be brought in line with one of the mandatory norms of the European Charter (Article 10 Paragraph 1).**

2. The conferences, workshops and other events could lay the foundation for the preparation of the establishment of a national Association. **It would be possible to proceed with the establishment of the association after local elections in December 2010.**

## **3. TRAINING IN THE FIELD OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT**

### **3.1. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION**

Another promising and very topical direction for Belarus in cooperation with the Congress would be the **provision of training in the field of local self-government.**

Due to many reasons, Belarusian experts do not have sufficient information about the content, principles and norms of the European Charter and other international documents in the field of local self-government. Similarly, they lack knowledge about legislation of other countries in the field.

Courses to upgrade qualification of specialists working in local self-government as well as other training events organized from time to time in Minsk and in regional centers are almost always intended solely to discuss or explain new legal acts issued by the country's president or other national authorities. Draft legislation in the field of local self-government is sometimes discussed but most often attention is focused on current, day-to-day local issues in the light of national legislation.

One way or another, the fact is that nearly **all training events are locked in national legislation**. As a result, the knowledge of specialists at the local level is mostly one-sided and limited to national legislation, although rare exceptions do occur. Consequently, **Belarusian specialists do not have a common conceptual framework and common definitions with their European counterparts. They lack consistent and up-to-date information about reforms that took place or are still going on in Central and Eastern Europe, including CIS countries, about their results, successes and failures.**

For the same reason, there is **a lack of scientific publications by Belarusian legal researchers** in the field of local self-government. Methodological basis and quality of teaching in Belarusian universities with programs in the field of public administration leave much to be desired. Moreover, university courses on local self-government are getting smaller in number.

Public administration is not a prestigious field of study, because many graduates have difficulties finding jobs. **The number of post-graduate students writing their theses on local self-government is very small, because the topic is considered as having poor prospects for the future in Belarus.**

This situation can create serious problems already in the near future. It can get particularly acute at the time of modernizing the existing system of local self-government to bring it to the basic requirements of the European Charter. **Therefore, the relevance of training and updating of qualification in the field of local self-government on the basis of modern knowledge is high indeed and requires adequate attention and necessary adjustments.**

**The Congress could provide practical assistance in this respect through European Network of Training Organizations for Local and Regional Authorities (ENTO).**

ENTO is a European Network of Training Organizations for Local and Regional Authorities from almost all of the 46 Council of Europe member states. ENTO is a "child" of the Council of Europe although it "grew up" into an independent organization in January 1995 when it was registered in France. It is a non-profit making NGO. It is financed from membership fees, sponsorship from some of the member organizations. The Council of Europe also provides financial support to it. Member organizations also support ENTO through the provision of staff, equipment and resources. The ENTO's office is in Strasbourg.

ENTO organizes seminars on topical issues for the management of local and regional authorities, focusing particularly on the implications for training and development services. Each seminar is hosted by an ENTO member and is held in a different European country.

ENTO publishes a newsletter with details of the network's activities, updates on the Council of Europe's and the European Union's work, information about members and their activities, articles of general interest, opportunities for members to publicize their activities and products and to request help or information from other members.

**ENTO provides expert assistance and training for countries in Central and Eastern Europe** which lack management experience and technical skills. It fosters cooperation among training centers for local and regional authorities and helps national organizations to establish partnership links abroad.

Developing cooperation with **the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA)** is also of considerable interest.

It is an international non-governmental organization, based in Strasbourg. Established in 1999 as an initiative of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, ALDA focuses on, and has extensive experience of, the promotion of active citizenship and participative democracy in all areas of local governance, and human rights at all levels of government.

ALDA has a particularly close relationship with the European Commission, being a member of its Strategic Group on active citizenship, and has maintained strong links with the Council of Europe. The Association has also established good relations with the UN and OSCE, as well as civil society organizations and local and regional authorities. ALDA has extensive experience of project management and of providing expertise and support to civil society actors, in particular

through its coordination of 11 Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) situated in Western Balkans and Southern Caucasus.

ALDA uses its expertise gained from working with the LDAs to promote tolerance, human rights, and participative democracy in other European and not European countries. With its wide, diverse network, ALDA has developed numerous projects to foster peace through the exchange of best practice and capacity building.

**ALDA's main partners and members include local and regional authorities**, civil society organizations, and universities, giving it a wide network of contacts. Through its headquarters in Strasbourg and offices in Venice and Brussels, ALDA ensures its visibility and influence. Furthermore, its international status gives international impact to the projects in which it is involved.

### 3.2. PROPOSALS FOR COOPERATION

It is recommended that the Council together with other stakeholders, including local councils and NGOs, do the following:

- **Prepare proposals for cooperation** with ENTO and ALDO and send them to these organizations;
- **Agree on working meetings** with ENTO and ALDA representatives (March 2009 in Strasbourg) to establish stable contacts and discuss already prepared projects and prospects for future cooperation.

### 3.3. EXPECTED RESULTS

It can be said with certainty that stable contacts with these organizations, which are also potential project partners, have always been and will be good capital and key to success.

As for project proposals, **one should not expect quick results. It usually takes one year from an idea as described on paper to the beginning of its practical realization.** And this can be considered already a good result.

**The implementation of joint projects will allow Belarusian specialists to get familiar with international documents adopted by the Congress as well as study the organization and operation of local self-government bodies in other countries.**

## 4. COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND COUNCIL OF EUROPE MEMBER STATES

Apart from above-mentioned organizations (ENTO, ALDA) working under the aegis of the Council of Europe, there are many other opportunities for cooperation in the field of local self-government.

**4.1.** They are first of all related to **assistance programs of the European Union**. In the period between 2007 and 2013 most assistance for Belarus is granted through the **European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI, see Annex 6)**<sup>†</sup>. The ENPI comprises the following programs:

- **National** – for each participating country;

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\* More information about programs of the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument can be obtained from Tacis Coordinating Unit or Delegation of the European Commission to Belarus in Minsk.

- **Regional (East)** – together with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine;
- **Cross-Border Cooperation** – Baltic Sea Region; Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus; Poland, Belarus, Ukraine;
- **Interregional** – TEMPUS, Erasmus Mundus, TAIEX;
- **Thematic** – Investing in People, Migration and Asylum, Environment and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources including Energy, **Non-state Actors and Local Authorities: Partnership for Development**, and Food Security.

Each of these programs has opportunities for cooperation in the field of local self-government for government and self-government bodies as well as NGOs.

In particular, National Program envisages support for projects in the field of **Democratic Development and Good Governance**. "**Large projects**" with a value of more than EUR 1 million are mostly implemented within such programs. Negotiations on projects within National Program are conducted with each participating country on an individual basis.

Bilateral negotiations (Belarus – European Commission) are now underway to discuss project for the National Program 2010 and in our opinion the **Council of the Republic could initiate a project in the field of Democratic Development and Good Governance**.

There is also an opportunity for the Council of the Republic, local government and self-government bodies and NGOs to take part in the Thematic Program dealing with **Non-State Actors and Local Authorities: Partnership for Development**. The Council of the Republic could come forward with the initiative of direct participation in this thematic program or could provide informational and education support for local council in order to encourage their participation in such projects.

**EU assistance programs have a number of drawbacks:** firstly, they involve **numerous bureaucratic procedures** at the phase of project preparation, and secondly, the procedure of **project registration by Belarusian authorities is complicated**. Presumably, the Council of the Republic cannot really influence the volume of bureaucratic procedures from the EU side, but at the same time, it can exert some pressure on relevant authorities in Belarus in order to simplify and shorten registration procedures for EU-funded projects.

**To date, no project application in the field of local self-government has been submitted by Belarusian applicants, because such projects are not considered a priority by Belarusian authorities.**

**The Council of the Republic and its Council for Cooperation of Local Self-Government Bodies could play an important role** in the development of international cooperation, encourage it and bring it to a new qualitative and quantitative level.

**4.2.** Many CoE member states have **special funds to support international cooperation** (Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Poland and others). National associations of local and regional authorities in these countries can **provide funding from these special funds for the implementation of projects in the field of local self-government**.

However, since the Council of the Republic cannot be a direct participant in such projects because of its status, and there is no association of local and regional authorities in Belarus, a number of other partners can be directly involved in such projects from the Belarusian side: **research institutes, government agencies** (depending on issues covered in the project, such as legislation, local finance, housing and communal services, physical planning, etc.), **NGOs** (which are always welcomed by EU partners) and **a partnership of governmental and non-governmental organizations**.

The Council of the Republic (or Ministry of Foreign Affairs) could initiate meetings with representatives of CoE member states' embassies in Belarus and discuss issues related to possible cooperation in the field of local self-government.

**4.3.** **Non-governmental organizations** can provide substantial support, especially at a local level, in developing cooperation. Many of them have **good and stable relations with their partners in EU countries**. These links are extensive and diverse covering different areas of

activity (social, cultural, environmental issues, communal services, youth affairs, education, etc.) and different forms of activity (conferences, seminars, study tours, publishing, citizen participation in local decision-making, etc.).

**In addition, NGOs have certain intellectual, organizational and technical resources as well as experience in preparing and managing projects.**

As of now, capabilities of NGOs in developing international cooperation are used insufficiently, which is the case in Belarus for different reasons: suspicious attitude of state government organizations, under-appreciation of their actual capacity, low level of understanding and respect between government and non-governmental sector, lack of tolerance, and so on. However, we are sure that **many of them would respond positively to the proposal of local authorities for constructive cooperation.**

Funding of projects in this field is a priority for many international organizations and foundations. Joint work in this respect could also encourage the dialogue between local authorities and citizens.

At the same time, **excessive centralization of local government and self-government impedes the development of horizontal links at the local level**, because local authorities are afraid of showing initiative in establishing cooperation with non-governmental organizations as they are waiting for instructions from the higher authorities.

**By demonstrating support for this kind of cooperation, the Council of the Republic would encourage more active contacts and more constructive dialogue between local authorities and NGOs as an important component of real and effective local self-government in Belarus.**

We believe that the proposed directions of cooperation for intensifying and expanding international cooperation in the field of local self-government would **increase the level of knowledge and qualification of Belarusian specialists and help them in their work aimed at improving and strengthening local self-government in Belarus.**

**To conclude, we would like to apologize for a rather lengthy document: taking into account the importance of international cooperation in the field of local self-government and being aware of a special role and significance of local self-government for every citizen, by preparing this document we tried to make our contribution to its development and strengthening as large as possible.**

**Chairman of Board  
Educational Non-Governmental Association  
Lev Sapiieha Foundation**

02 February 2009

*Miroslav V. Kobasa*