
Report on thematic visit to Georgia

Scope of thematic visit: Meeting with Europe Foundation (EF) to discuss possibilities for collaboration, and attending AGNA annual general meeting

CISU staff: Jacob Thorsen

Date of the thematic visit: May 31-June 1, 2018

1. Background

CISU has since April 2016 administered a Neighbourhood Fund as part of Danida's Neighbourhood Programme, which expires later this year. The fund has supported civil society projects and activities which are rooted in partnerships between Danish CSOs and CSOs from eligible countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood region as defined by Danida's Neighbourhood Programme. Besides CISU engagement in the neighbourhood countries, Danida has recently launched a new programme to Ukraine and Georgia, which includes a number of civil society elements, and has all in all contributed to a considerable resource base in Denmark interested working in Eastern Europe.

CISU has since the launch of Neighbourhood Fund as part of Danida's Neighbourhood Programme had a keen interest to learn and engage more closely with civil society in these countries, and CISU thematic visits to both Ukraine and Georgia in 2016 and 2017 have provided fruitful firsthand insights about the situation of civil society in the two countries. A major learning from the recent visit to Georgia last year is how CSOs in the country have a relative free space for manoeuvring with a state and legislation that does not create unnecessary obstacles. CSOs, however, only enjoy limited confidence and trust (a rough estimate is 30-35 percent of the population), which in part has threads back to the totalitarian past and a Soviet era with collective compulsory memberships, as well as a culture with a high degree of corruption and (therefore) greater trust in family, friends and the church; a very distinct vertical hierarchical society structure with just few horizontal social layers. The CSOs usually have only few members, and are predominantly elite driven with a self-supplying board that often do not address local specific issues both rather national or global abstract agendas, which makes it difficult to recruit members and support to assure representativeness from their constituencies. The vast majority of CSOs are found primarily in Tbilisi and have only limited scope in the rest of Georgia. In other words, there are very limited civilian actors who listen and can respond to the needs of vulnerable groups outside Tbilisi; CSOs where people can meet and engage on local concrete common issues and agendas.

On recent visit to Georgia meetings with EF took place. EF administers basket funding for their approx. 140 members CSOs, which they can apply for. Namely basket funding can help promoting greater civil society engagement and ownership of development interventions and objectives. CISU wishes with this thematic visit to explore with likeminded institutions in Georgia, Europe

Foundation in particular, if there is scope for mutual learning, and whether CISU experiences and knowhow on this subject can be of any support and contribution in current Georgia challenges working and engaging with civil society.

AGNA annual general meeting was this year held in Tbilisi May 31-June 1, which was attended.

2. Objective

The objective of this thematic visit is to explore possible scope for CISU collaboration with EF. Moreover the objective was to attend the AGNA annual general meeting held in Tbilisi this year.

3. Observations

3.1 Meeting with EF

On May 22 a meeting was held with Nino Khurtsidze, vice president of EF, where we took the thread from last year's meeting and discussed possible areas of collaboration between CISU and EF. We both agreed we ideally could start with something 'simple' and from there see how things evolve. Possible areas of collaboration identified:

- Co-funding scheme with combined CISU-EF funding for project interventions in Georgia was discussed. It could have a particular thematic focus area – e.g. youth.
- EF has social innovation as one of their focus areas; how to promote social innovation skills. EF would like to exchange experiences with CISU on this topic.
- Another area we discussed was how to communicate project impact and change stories to members and public. EF would likewise like to exchange experiences with CISU on this topic.
- Other areas where EF would like to learn from CISU/Danish experiences is on public finance management (how to identify a good relevant partner), working on labour rights and working with cooperatives.

3.2 AGNA AGM

Participants from 28 different countries participated in the AGM. The two-day AGM was divided in the first day focusing on internal administrative matters and governance structure of AGNA, while day two was more outward looking giving scope for member network engagement.

Initially, a review of activities for the past year was outlined. Highlights of activities from the past year include a working group that has worked with legitimacy, transparency and accountability (LTA). As national associations it is key for AGNA to walk the talk on accountability issues. The LTA group met three times (Dominican Republic, Fiji, and Georgia) within the last year. They are developing a toolbox on good LTA practices to be shared with the AGNA network and beyond.

AGNA members well received the invitation to contribute and promote the toolbox once launched as well as to join in for 2018 Global Accountability Week (12-16 November 2018).

Youth working group on youth peer exchange on meaningful youth participation was held with AGNA youth leaders and members of CIVICUS in Johannesburg May 2018.

Up-to-date financials are pending and will be sent out after the AGM. Staff exchanges are in the process of being determined. Highlights from the plan for the next year include piloting national dialogues on resource mobilisation, organising working group meetings, organising peer exchanges, organising staff exchanges, and supporting the LTA working group's action plan, among others.

On AGNA governance there was quite a lengthy discussion day one on the need for a revision of existing policies and documents to be fit for today's purpose. Changes include that steering committee members will serve three year term and the election process for the steering committee. The new ToR was unanimously approved by present voting members. Steering committee members are elected for a three-year term and a re-election is only possible after a three-year break following this term. AGNA members discussed whether the steering committee seat is linked to the organisation or the individual. Moreover, there was a discussion around AGNA membership criteria; i.e. who are/should be members (e.g. regional networks, grassroots?), who is/should be voting members etc. The steering committee will look into this for clarification going forward. The coordinator will be followed up with members to clarify their participation and criteria. Former and current steering committee members clarified that the steering committee provides strategic guidance and oversight of AGNA work, whereas the CIVICUS secretariat jointly work with AGNA members to make decisions and implement activities. CIVICUS' programmatic work and membership is much broader than AGNA so that some of these activities might not be targeted specifically at AGNA members. The CIVICUS Board encompasses currently three AGNA representatives who have direct influence on CIVICUS' overall decision-making, however while they're able to advocate in AGNA's interest, they're not mandated or expected to do so.

Day two was on network engagement. A group exercise had the objective to identify root problems around engagement in national associations and networks. Most of these focus on membership engagement and a lack of communication/responsiveness. A new working group on network engagement was formed. In a marketplace skills sharing exercise participants created a mapping of their strengths and needs with regard to technical and thematic areas, pointing to many opportunities for sharing skills and best practices across networks.

In the afternoon day two, CIVICUS civil society resourcing specialist attended AGM giving her point of view on current global civil society trends. Her observations include very few financial resources reaching the "frontline", government restrictions in many countries, and static policy and advocacy spending. CIVICUS invests in leveraging its networks, knowledge and visibility to push for more and better resources for citizen action. One example is to support CIVICUS members to enhance capacity on domestic resource mobilisation (including online fundraising), especially from southern CBOs and marginalised groups. AGNA's role is crucial to advocate at national networks' level and AGNA members are invited to be trained on domestic resource mobilisation.

The topic triggered sharing of country examples and inputs from participants. The civil society resourcing specialist is accessible to members on concrete actions.

Reflections on AGNA AGM:

- Day one was solely focussing on governance and election processes. Preferably, more of the issues could have been decided and sorted out beforehand on email and Skype, which then could have provided more time for group discussions and networking.
- Discussions were at times very fluffy, and at times I had my doubts whether we as participants met our strategic objectives participating in the AGM (especially the discussion on AGNA governance had at times 'personal political' undertones). The AGM didn't clearly prove the extent AGNA is relevant.
- It was odd the AGM took place in Georgia without the participation of any Georgian CSOs.

Annex: TOR

Terms of Reference Georgia Thematic Visit May 2018

1. Background

1.1 CISU – Civil Society in Development

CISU – Civil Society in Development is an independent association of 280+ small and medium-sized Danish Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). All members are actively engaged in development work with civil society partners in developing countries.

CISU has the following two focus areas:

1. Administer the Civil Society Fund on behalf of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
2. Support and capacity building of member organisations through training, services, advice and debates.

Moreover, CISU advocates on behalf of their members in relation to the general framework of civil society in Denmark, especially on issues related to external development assistance, and promote member organisations mutual interests and defend the space for civil society around the world.

CISU has since April 2016 administered a Neighbourhood Fund as part of Danida's Neighbourhood Programme, which expires later this year. The fund has supported civil society projects and activities which are rooted in partnerships between Danish CSOs and CSOs from eligible countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood region as defined by Danida's Neighbourhood Programme. Besides CISU engagement in the neighbourhood countries, Danida has recently launched a new programme to Ukraine and Georgia, which includes a number of civil society elements, and has all in all contributed to a considerable resource base in Denmark interested working in Eastern Europe.

CISU has since the launch of Neighbourhood Fund as part of Danida's Neighbourhood Programme had a keen interest to learn and engage more closely with civil society in these countries, and CISU thematic visits to both Ukraine and Georgia in 2016 and 2017 have provided fruitful firsthand insights about the situation of civil society in the two countries. A major learning from the recent visit to Georgia last year is how CSOs in the country have a relative free space for manoeuvring with a state and legislation that does not create unnecessary obstacles. CSOs, however, only enjoy limited confidence and trust (a rough estimate is 30-35 percent of the population), which in part has threads back to the totalitarian past and a Soviet era with collective compulsory memberships, as well as a culture with a high degree of corruption and (therefore) greater trust in family, friends and the church; a very distinct vertical hierarchical society structure with just few horizontal social layers. The CSOs usually have only few members, and are predominantly elite driven with a self-supplying board that often do not address local specific issues both rather national or global abstract agendas, which makes it difficult to recruit members and support to assure representativeness from their constituencies. The vast majority of CSOs are found primarily in Tbilisi and have only limited scope in the rest of Georgia. In other words, there are very limited civilian actors who listen and can respond to the needs of vulnerable groups outside Tbilisi; CSOs where people can meet and engage on local concrete common issues and agendas.

On recent visit to Georgia we met with [Europe Foundation](#), which administer basket funding for their approx. 140 members CSOs, which they can apply for. Namely basket funding can help promoting greater civil society engagement and ownership of development interventions and objectives. CISU wishes with this thematic visit to explore with likeminded institutions in Georgia, Europe Foundation in particular, if there is scope for mutual learning, and whether CISU experiences and knowhow on this subject can be of any support and contribution in current Georgia challenges working and engaging with civil society.

The thematic visit will be conducted by Jacob Thorsen, advisor at CISU.

2. Objective

The objective of this thematic visit is to explore scope for CISU collaboration in Georgia on basket funding to CSOs. Europe Foundation (EF) has, in this regard, been identified as an important institution working in this area since 2008, and meetings will primarily be with EF to explore possibilities of CISU-EF collaboration.

Topics for meetings will primarily be on the following areas:

- Exchange of CISU and EF experiences on civil society engagement and ownership of development projects
- Legitimacy, accountability and transparency internally and in projects and partnerships – also seen in light of current Georgia CSO level of trust, legitimacy and representativeness
- Possible thematic areas for collaboration between CISU and EF; grant management and administration, separation of powers in grant management and grant giving, services to member CSOs on supervision, trainings, networking and counselling, etc.
- Attend AGNA annual general meeting

3. Outcome

The visit will result in a report of no more than three pages with the presentation of conclusions and recommendations. The report will be available no later than four weeks after the monitoring visit.