Participatory budgeting developments: comparative analysis Belarus and Slovakia

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Abstract: The paper plans to compare the somehow developed Slovak participatory budgeting system with the situation in Belarus. Slovakia is a highly decentralized country, and its local self-government system is in almost full compliance with the principles of the "European Charter of Local Self-Government". Belarus is not the member of the Council of Europe, and the country did not sign the European Charter for Local- Self Government, and the regular monitoring reports on implementation of this law are not available. The Local Autonomy Index study, prepared by one of the proposed team members Dmitry Sokol for the purposes of the large-scale international project on this topic states that there are two power structures on the local level in Belarus:
"Local government": activity of the local executive administrative organs of authority subordinated and accountable directly to the President of Republic of Belarus (article 119 of the Constitution of RB).
"Local self-government": activity of the local Councils of deputies elected by citizens for the term of 4 years (article 118 of the Constitution of RB).
The report also states that elected (self-government) bodies do not have a chance to realize the self-government purposes recognized in the world according to the formulation "self-government".
The process of decentralization of local communities and the participative approach is one of the most challenging recent issues in Belarus. Thanks to decentralized cooperation, the mutual cooperation between Civil Society and Local Governments it was possible to develop projects and activities that support local democracy and economic and social development, creating strong links between communities and citizens, creating dialogue and trust. One of the decentralized cooperation ways is the citizen participation in public administration process on a base of participatory democracy where the citizens and active groups of population are playing active role in decision making at the local and regional levels. Preliminary steps of participatory budgeting are implemented, too. Via these mechanisms people in Belarus have the chance to participate in setting up the local budget and to include in it their projects. Citizens have some right to say how part of the public resources should be spent, they also controlling. Benefits from participatory budgeting are in "pushing" development of fiscal decentralization in Belarus through the expansion of local democracy tools which is the "participatory budgeting". It enhances openness, transparency, and accountability in the local budgetary process. The first steps related to participatory budgeting are connected with the initiative of NGO "Lev Sapieha foundation", who made attempt to create an "embryo" of the decentralized cooperation between citizens' initiative groups and local authorities in budgeting and financing projects which traditionally performed by local authorities.
The comparison, delivered by standard comparative policy analysis tools, should provide lessons how to improve the system in Belarus. The preparation of the paper is supported by the project "Participatory democracy at the local level: What can Belarus learn from the international best practice?", funded by the EU, via the SALT III program.