

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2017

Working Session 2: Fundamental freedoms, including freedom of peaceful assembly and association and National human rights institutions and the role of civil society in the protection of human rights, Tuesday, Sept 12th, 2017

National Statement of Poland

Good practices in the area of the support for the development of civil society in Poland: National Institute of Freedom – Center for the Development of Civil Society

Thank you Mr. Moderator, All Distinguished Guests,

My name is Agnieszka Rymsza and I represent the Department of Civil Society at the Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

Civil Society encompasses many numerous organizations, also those protecting human rights. Civil society is manifestation of freedom of association – one of the most crucial democratic rights.

Poland allies with the statement delivered by the EU. However, in my national capacity I would like to share with you good practices in the area of the support for the development of civil society in Poland. I would like to present the concept of the **National Institute of Freedom – Center for the Development of Civil Society**, which is a part of the current Polish government's commitment towards strengthening civil society organizations and activities.

The current version of the draft Act on the National Institute of Freedom – is a result of the broad dialogue with the civil society actors in Poland. The consultation process lasted 6 weeks and everybody could participate in 23 information/consultation conferences held during the consultation process across the whole country.

The main idea behind the planned creation of the National Institute of Freedom is the creation of government institution that would be fully devoted to the implementation of government (and not ministerial) programs strengthening development of civil society in Poland.

The National Institute will NOT take over any competences of local governments or other ministries, except for one Fund for Civic Initiatives program that will be transferred from Ministry of Family, Work and Social Policy to the Chancellery of the Prime Minister to the Institute.

The idea and organizational structure of the National Institute of Freedom benefits from the good practices of other (also OSCE) countries, which was also acknowledged in the recent opinion on the Draft Act issued by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Apart from the Fund for Civic Initiatives the Institute is planning to run other programs that aim to strengthen civil society and civil society actors in Poland such as: Institutional Grants Fund, Civic Education grants, programs supporting advocacy and watchdog activities of Polish

organizations, programs supporting civic participation of Polish citizens as well as Polish Solidarity Corps – program of supporting long-term volunteering. The special attention will be given to providing support to organizations that so far have little chances of receiving government support – to balance chances and facilitate diversification of the civil society sector in Poland. The theme of the programs are the response to problems of Polish nonprofit sector and civil society voiced for many years by civil society actors and revealed in various research and discussions.

Programs to be run by the National Institute will be developed by the Committee for Public Benefit at the Chancellery of the Prime Minister (Committee constituted by the secretaries of state from all the ministries) in cooperation with special expert groups of civil society representatives and experts and then will also be open to public consultation and opinions of already existing Council of Public Benefit – consulting body consisting of the representatives of central and local governments and nonprofit organizations.

The Institute is to function in a transparent manner and will be open to social control through the Council of the Institute that will assist the Committee in supervising the Institute. The Council will also approve the principles of grant competitions. The Council will have 11 members, out of which 5 will be representatives of nonprofit organizations.

The Draft Act on National Institute of Freedom – Center for the Development of Civil Society will not take away from nonprofit organizations in Poland any rights or privileges guaranteed so far by Polish Constitution or other existing legislation, nor it will impose on them any additional control or obligation. Its goal, again, is to create one institution that will implement government horizontal policies and support programs for nonprofit organizations and be the first step in developing the broad system of supporting the development of civil society in Poland.

The Draft Act on the **National Institute of Freedom – Center for the Development of Civil Society** is now being processed in the Polish Parliament and **is expected to be passed within a month.**

I have copies of the full text of my presentation with the contact details if you would like to learn more about the Institute and our policies towards strengthening civil society or you would like to cooperate with our department.

They will be available outside the conference hall.

Thank you for your attention

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