



January 5, 2015

Newsletter

Project Opening Conference Partnership for Budget Transparency: Civil Society Oversight of Public Spending in Georgia

On December 19, 2014, Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) hosted stakeholders and future beneficiaries at the inaugural event of its new, EU-funded project entitled *Partnership for Budget Transparency: Civil Society Oversight of Public Spending in Georgia*. The project, which was launched on November 1, 2014, is co-funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and aims at contributing to improved budget transparency and accountability in Georgia. The President of EPF, Ms. Ketevan Vashakidze, and the Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to Georgia, Mr. Boris Iarochevitch welcomed the guests and noted the importance of the undertaking given the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, as well as Georgia's commitments under the Open Government Partnership (OGP). Both highlighted the timeliness of the project, both in terms of building the capacity of local civil society organizations (CSOs) in monitoring public expenditure and improving government transparency and accountability for public spending. Mr Iarochevitch additionally elaborated on the overall importance of having a strong oversight of budgetary processes (i.e. fiscal credibility, low borrowing cost, minimized risk of corruption) and pledged the EU's readiness to support increased civic oversight of budget processes.

The details about the project, including the planned training and grant opportunities, were presented by Mr. Viktor Baramia, Senior Program Manager. The audience was interested to learn that in addition to a series of trainings on public policy-making and public expenditure monitoring (PEM) oversight mechanisms, EPF will also publish a Georgian-language booklet *Monitoring Budget Spending for Beginners* (supported by Policy and Management Consulting Group (PMCG) and undertake an assessment of the existing PEM oversight mechanisms, in order to develop evidence-based recommendations for their improvement. CSO representatives present at the event were interested to hear that up to 4 grants will be awarded (around EUR 15,000 each) for Georgian CSOs to implement public expenditure monitoring activities either on the national or municipal levels. CSOs will also be supported in creating a common platform for informed discussions about budget transparency issues, so that the recommendations are then communicated to the government of Georgia through the Budget Monitoring Coordination Council to be set up as a result of the project.

After the presentation, **Mr. Arne Flaemk from GIZ** asked if EPF plans to expand the project by also focusing on budget preparation phase, so as to ensure that the views of citizens are reflected from the beginning. In response, EPF's Ketevan Vashakidze noted that the Foundation has long been working on CSO capacity-building which, among other things, promotes greater



participation of various groups in the budgeting process and enables them to bring their interests in budget preparation. While this particular project focuses on budget execution, EPF appreciates the need for improved CSO participation in budget planning and plans to raise additional funds to expand the work of the Platform in this area as well. **The PMCG's Deputy General Director, Zaza Broladze**, noted that if EPF will expand its efforts into the area of budget preparation, PMCG will design a training module and manual accordingly.

Mr. Levan Avalishvili from the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) asked to clarify whether the project would focus on budget monitoring only at the national level or will also look into monitoring self-government activities at the regional level. He also inquired what types of grants will be awarded under the project, namely, whether EPF would be funding sustainable long-term projects or will consider co-funding as one of the options. Lastly, Mr. Avalishvili wanted to know if the media will be able to benefit from the project's capacity building efforts.

EPF representatives explained that at this point, while journalists will not be benefiting from trainings delivered within the project, the media is looked at as one of the stakeholders and partners, including in sub-grant projects to be awarded to local CSOs for monitoring public expenditure. In addition, it is hoped that the media, as well as business associations, will get involved in the work of the civil society platform, as such collaboration would benefit the media to learn about the pressing PEM issues and to report on them to the public. In response to IDFI's question about the project coverage, it was noted that while most activities will focus on national-level monitoring and advocacy, the project may also target the municipal level, mostly through grants that will be awarded to local CSOs. EPF representatives also noted that while the possibility of co-funding existing projects may not be ruled out, more specific information about the grants to be awarded under the project will be announced in spring 2015. At the same time, local CSOs were reminded about grant opportunities under EPF's Engage and Monitor for Change and Open Door Grantmaking Programs.

The Q & A session was concluded by **Ms. Nino Gamsakhurdia, representing the Sector Economy and Economic Policy Committee of the Parliament of Georgia**. Ms. Gamsakhurdia welcomed the launch of the Partnership for Budget Transparency project and noted the readiness of the Parliamentary Committee to cooperate with EPF and its partners to achieve positive results.