

## Ukraine Working Group – June 20, 2014:

The call opened with an update from Stefka Slavova regarding her recent trip to Ukraine and updates on the SAG to explain the major points moving forward and the tasks that they are currently working to address. A main discussion point was the so-called “triangle vision” of the stakeholders around Ukraine and SAG. Three key groups stood out: international donors, civil society organizations, and the government of Ukraine. Recent meetings in Ukraine have persuaded the idea that the SAG will continue forward as a feeder group for the National Reform Council (NRC), which will be the official body of reform for Ukraine. The SAG will culminate in the retreat in late July. The retreat acts as essentially a job market where the best candidates will emerge through discussions and eventually join the NRC, which will establish medium to long-term goals for reform in Ukraine. Stefka also noted that the government strongly supports these groups—especially the prime minister.

The most pressing issue facing the SAG and its sub-groups is a lack of specific goals. What are these groups working toward exactly? A discussion of issues, goals, and ways forward took place, which will be broken down by area of focus:

- Legal/Judicial SAG:
  - This SAG seems to be the most clear-cut at this point. They currently propose transitory provisions on the constitution (although perhaps changes to the constitution will be more tricky than originally assumed) that deal with an independent judiciary. There is also work to be done on appointment of judges. Wictor Osiatynski will be moving forward with reaching out to allies and experts. The goal is to have the majority of the groundwork laid by the end of the summer.
- Education and Public Health SAGs:
  - Both of these SAGs seem to be the least clear-cut at this point. What will come out of these groups is largely influenced by the quality of experts that emerge, the feasibility of larger reforms, and whether or not the reforms will be supported by the government and/or the public.
  - Later, the discussion veered back toward the Education SAG. The major themes of education reform were brought up by several working group members. The list of the reform themes included the following: testing, higher education reform, review of university autonomy, the feasibility of reform of the ministry of education, giving voice to stakeholders, decentralization of autonomy, training and mobilizing policy experts, accreditation and optimization.
- E-governance SAG:

- Mall Hellam discussed the advice that Estonian experts were providing to Ukrainians on the lessons learned from their experience. Registries were focused on as a particular point of focus.
  - Inna then discussed the establishment of the State Agency for E-governance in Ukraine on June 4<sup>th</sup>. The agency is working on implementations based on the Estonian model and with influences as well from Moldova. The agency will help to unify the approach to e-governance and ideally result in feasible goals. It was noted that the SAG has a lot of room here to advise and assist the agency.
  - Mall then brought up the concepts of e-health initiatives in Estonia and perhaps the time is now right for the discussion of e-health initiative to begin in Ukraine. Beginning this process now will result in less painful transitions later. Jonathan Cohen agreed to convey these points to counterparts in Kiev next week on his trip and then update the working group on the situation.
- Cross-cutting SAG issues:
- The point was then made that there are several large issues that SAGs can work on cooperatively. The issue of anti-corruption was considered a particularly good example as corruption is rampant in many of the branches of government in Ukraine. It was noted that there should be links between the SAGs and that they shouldn't work independently of each other.
  - Other cross-cutting issues mentioned were the bloated administrative offices and inefficiency in many ministries and offices.
  - Jonathan Cohen mentioned the issue of trade's impact on the skyrocketing prices of essential medicines in Europe as another issue that crosses between Economic and Public Health SAGs.

Next, Stefka moved the discussion forward to the SAG retreat. Current estimates look to be about 80 experts already confirmed. We are currently in communication with the government to send out an official invitation letter by next week. There is still a need for moderators for the event (specifically one fluent in English and Russian) and we are open to suggestions.

Inna confirmed that IRF is willing able to assist with logistics and a meeting will be set-up soon to further discuss these details.

Stefka highlighted the existence of lists that categorize potential experts/activists/volunteers into groups loosely based on their qualifications and levels of experience.

It was noted that business should perhaps be included someone in discussions or in the retreat itself. Reforms can often benefit—and rarely exists—without the support of the business community.

Then, discussions were led by Inna on the current status of Ukraine and the realities of work on the ground. A key change is the proposed dissolution of the Ukrainian parliament in the coming weeks followed by early parliamentary elections. Early reports of a possible draft of constitutions amendments indicate that the president's powers might be more expansive than originally thought. A response to these unexpected changes is difficult to prepare at this point due to the fact that early reports may not be entirely accurate. The situation will be closely monitored.

Next, Inna discussed the details of a proposed updated emergency response plan which highlighted several areas that are to be expanded or explored. Firstly, human rights abuses continue to be monitored and documented. The amount of abuses and the resulting data are overwhelming and monitors require training and assistance. The networks require further strengthening—especially in eastern and southern Ukraine. Other areas of concern are those NGOs and lawyers displaced from Crimea and now also from eastern Ukraine. Providing support for those still in Crimea is a particular concern, especially so considering the new Russian control and legal system. Other IDPs require food, medicine, and general assistance/coordination. Civil society groups have drafted proposals for legislation to ease the problems here for IDPs, but nothing seems close to becoming law at this time. Mainly, IRF is focused on both coordinating relief and improving the likelihood of legislation being passed. The UN, US, and EU are offering assistance, but are not yet able to do so. A further emergency response point concerns access to information and media outreach. Few quality proposals have been received (only from Odessa) and thus the need is more difficult to meet. Extreme security risks for journalists have also complicated the situation.

As a final point, Iskra Kirova discussed an upcoming International Donors meeting on July 8-9 in Brussels. The discussion then veered into the potential comprehensive risk insurance mentioned by George Soros to encourage investment in the region. A proposed fund would be set-up in the amount of five billion USD to act as insurance for political and commercial risk. It was concluded that further discussions should take place before the International Donors meetings on July 8-9 so that a more concrete proposal could be brought to the table.

The next meeting of the Ukraine Working Group is proposed for either just before or just after the July 8-9 International Donors meetings.