

Civic education in Belarus: concepts, standards and lack of demand from the society

Civic education in Belarus developed in conditions of growing authoritarianism and the refusal of the government to conduct democratic reforms. It was influenced by difficulties in the formation of civil society and civic consciences, complicated nation-building processes and problems in seeking financial resources to support civic activities.

There is no consensus on the definition of “civic education” in Belarus. One can find in official literature texts about successes in bringing up civic consciousness – however, by that authors mean loyalty to authorities and the imposed from the top, state ideology.¹ At the same time, the non-governmental (NGO) sector promotes civic education in its European meaning. Its representatives sometimes refer to *non-formal* civic education to distance themselves from *formal* state-led civic education. In this article, we will refer to these two main segments of civic education as to *state* (SCE) and *non-state* (NSCE).

Formation of civic education sphere in Belarus

After Belarus became an independent state, the new government created favourable conditions for non-governmental programmes. The declarative principle of NGO registration encouraged the development of the third sector in Belarus, this was also true for educational programmes. Until 1996, civil society organisations (CSOs) dealing with civic education had no problems in relations with the authorities. Moreover, they engaged in partnership with the state. For instance, representatives and even leaders of state institutions (media, schools, institutes) took part in Soros Foundation’s projects.²

¹ The state system of “civic education” created in Belarus is relevant to the nature of the political regime. Political leadership of Belarus is interested in growing dependent, passive individuals who would hope that the state would provide her or him with everything. This type of work by its form and methods reminds us about Soviet “ideological work”. The only difference is that in contemporary Belarus instead of Marxism and Leninism the government uses the so-called “ideology of the Belarusian state”.

² The Belarusian Soros Foundation (BSF) was founded in 1992. Although civic education was not mentioned in its programme activities, it was present in all the Foundation’s activities, especially in

Starting from 1996, the year of the Constitutional coup d'état in Belarus, the conditions for civic education in Belarus began to deteriorate. Government pressure took many different forms: from licensing educational activities to declaring that educational seminars aimed to overthrow the government. These difficulties, combined with the closure of BSF, in February 1997 led to the creation of the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs. In 1998, the Assembly launched the national programme “Civic education” with the participation of 20 NGOs. Those NGOs came up with the idea of creating a network of organisations specialising in different segments of civic education that would complement each other. That led to the creation of the Association of Civic Education (ACE).

In 1999, during the II Congress of the Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs, political scientist Viktor Chernov presented his concept of civic education in Belarus. He suggested introducing a three-stage system that would allow it to bring up not only sovereign citizens but also professionals ready to work in civic education.³

Experts doubted the feasibility of these suggestions, since, at the very least, the Ministry of Education would block participation of “broad circles of the Belarusian population” in the People’s University without a discontinuing of their work. Thus, the concept suggested by Viktor Chernov could be successful only for one, quite narrow target group: activists of political parties and civil society organisations.

One of the biggest projects of civic education in Belarus was the People’s University built on the example of undercover educational programmes (“flying universities”) that

the programme “Transformation of humanistic education”. That program allowed publishing of a new generation of textbooks on social sciences and humanities and brought to light many talented scientists and educators who were able to work in the new conditions of transitional society. By supporting the development of civil society and reform of the education system, BSF played an important role in the formation of the new type of civic consciousness. The Foundation invested around 13 million dollars in support of education, independent media, development of civil society and access to the Internet. However, in 1997, it received a huge fine and stopped its activities inside Belarus.

³ The first stage would consist of short-term training or study circles that would encourage the search for knowledge, create conditions for discussions, etc. On the second stage, the main educational institution would be a People’s University and (or) a School of Civic Education. In those institutions, students would gain systematic knowledge on all ranges of relevant sciences: political sciences, economy, and law. The practice of thematic schools was initiated by the Belarusian Soros Foundation and continued by the Lev Sapieha Foundation and the Open Society Foundation (for instance, school of political sciences for journalists, Schools of political education for young politicians, Schools of civic education for professors of social sciences and humanities). (See: Chernov V. *Nekotorye aspekty strategiyi razvitiya grazhdanskogo obrazovaniya v deyatelnosti tretyego sektora v Belarusi*. // *Selected aspects of the strategy of the development of civic education in activities of the third sector in Belarus* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine, 2005. No 1 (4). Pp. 7–14). Finally, the third, advanced level would be dedicated to intensive professional education and secondary training of multipliers of civic education (lecturers, trainers, schoolteachers, university professors and journalists). In addition to subject knowledge, those courses would provide special knowledge on methods of teaching.

were widespread in Eastern Europe before the fall of Berlin Wall. Unlike the Polish “Flying University” that attracted pro-democracy students, the People’s University of Belarus aimed at changing mass consciousness. It had a formalised curriculum with obligatory and facultative courses. The curriculum consisted of extensive courses mostly in social sciences (120 and more academic hours) that lasted from 3 months to one year and included philosophy, political sciences, economy, history and culture of Belarus, human rights, theory of trade unions etc. After finishing a course, students passed tests and received symbolic diplomas.

At that time, the People’s University was the biggest educational project in the third sector. There was no comparable initiative with as many courses, the number of academic hours and as diverse and big a group of students or as highly qualified professors. After graduation, the best graduates had an opportunity to continue studies in Poland.

Over time, conditions for the People’s University got increasingly difficult since no owners wanted to take the risk of allowing it to rent their premises. Since 2005 and until the end of its activities, the People’s University gathered students from Belarus for visiting sessions in Lithuania.

Although experts positively evaluate the activities of the People’s University and its contribution to civic education, this initiative was not able to fulfil all of its goals. It had a limited audience consisting of political and CSO activists. Its evident weakness was dependence on such factors as state policy in the non-formal education of adults, the level of development of civil society structures as well as on the sustainability of financial support to educational programmes.

The Association of Civic Education (ACE) was set-up in 2000. It united 15 organisations working in the sphere of non-formal education and education of adults. Association educated specialists, prepared methodological texts and supplementary material, promoted ideas of civic education in the society and among potential clients, partners and donors.

ACE network implemented joint civic education projects with partners from Sweden (Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan) and Germany (Institut für Internationale Zusammenarbeit des Deutschen Volkshochschul-Verbandes). It promoted civic education via weeks of non-formal education, the festival of non-formal education, presentations, workshops and exhibitions. Since 2004, ACE is publishing *Adukatar* (Educator) a non-formal education magazine, as well as manuals, brochures and books. The Annual NGO publishing contest allows an increase in the quality of publishing in the sector of non-formal education and attracts many talented authors. Educational services are being promoted with the help of the newest marketing technologies.⁴

⁴ Ryabova, N. *Issledovanie osvedomlennosti i predpochtenii potrebitelei uslug neformal'nogo obrazovaniya // Research of awareness and preferences in services of non-formal education. // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 3 (9).*

Since 2005, Resource Programme of Study Circles became one of the priorities for ACE. Study circles are one of the forms of adult education.⁵

ACE was not always successful in attracting, to its activities, representatives of state institutions, political parties and civil society. Moreover, there was no unity among Association's member in understanding strategic issues. By mid-2000s, the Belarusian NGOs came up with several approaches to defining objectives and goals of civic education. Members of ACE mostly supported the vision of citizens who

*are able to make a wise and rational choice and to think critically; understand the meaning of laws; have a moderate attitude to their political adversaries; are able to critically assess information presented by the mass media; show their interest in civic, political and economic spheres of life.*⁶

According to this approach, civic education should enrich citizens with “everyday democratic practices” that will help them in

*interaction, public speaking, solving conflicts, planning their lives and activities, managing family budgets, choosing quality goods, defending their views and respecting the views of others, standing up for their rights etc.*⁷

Nationally oriented pro-democracy CSOs have a different approach to civic education. Their main objective is building an independent state on the basis of national culture:

*We have to take as a basis our historical heritage, its time-proven values and traditions that are relevant to the Belarusian national character.*⁸

5 In 2001–2007, more than 300 study circles were conducted all over Belarus, with the participation of more than 2500 people. One of the advantages of study circles compared to traditional formats of work of the third sector is that they do not require registration, and their organisation does not require huge financial resources.

The process of setting up study circles in Belarus revealed several problems. Belarusian society lost the tradition of joint study, discussion and solving problems. Potential participants perceive a circle as a group for children's education, as a psychotherapeutic group or sometimes as a religious sect. According to experts, one of the main problems of study circles is their unwillingness to touch upon “political” topics and a preference of topics related to professional education and personal development. According to Resource Programme of Study Circles coordinators Aliona Velichko and Inna Hubarevich, study circles were often a goal in themselves and were not perceived as a tool for changing social life. See: Velichko A., Hubarevich I. *One Circle, Two Circles...* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2007. No 1 (11).

⁶ Zhurakovskii, V. *O zadachakh grazhdanskogo obrazovaniya v Belarusi* // *On objectives of civic education in Belarus* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 1 (7). P. 5.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Kuzminich I. *Natsyyanalnaya sviadomasc i hramadzianskaya adukatsyya*. // *National identity and civic education* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2007. No 2 (12). P. 16.

The main goal of civic education in this approach is national identity, which is understood as

*the complex of historical facts, feelings, attitudes, values, types of activities united by the national language, culture and history, that are recognized by the people as national and create spiritual ties between their bearers, thus uniting and solidarising with them.*⁹

Uniting around national values creates the basis for support for democratic changes in society. In modern Belarus, recognition of one's national (Belarusian) identity, as a rule, equates to the active civic position. The key point of the "revivalist" programme is the issue of the Belarusian language. The meaning of the Belarusian language for civic education is so significant that it got a special title "More than just a language." One of the Belarusian activists, Vitaut Rudnik, promotes the development of civic education in the Belarusian language, since language can serve as a powerful integrational platform.¹⁰ Switching to the Belarusian language is perceived as an act of civil courage that can change the political situation in Belarus:

*Learning new values is, in a way, a revolution in the consciousness of a person. Switching to the Belarusian language is a double Revolution. Switching to the Belarusian language means acceptance of, adopted by the Belarusian-speaking environment, values, ideals and methods of action. Switching to the Belarusian language is not just learning new values but a daily manifestation of those values in one's environment (society, family, colleagues). This is a quality change in a person and her/his behaviour. Switching to the Belarusian language means that a person chooses a difficult path with a specific civic position as her or his way of life.*¹¹

Proficiency in the Belarusian language, as well as "cultural self-identification", should be viewed as key civic competencies of Belarusians. They allow Belarusians to get out of the Russian language information space, which in current conditions does not offer either freedom or democracy. From Russian-language sources, people receive, distorted by spin doctors, information and images of the world.¹²

⁹ Ibid, p. 17.

¹⁰ Rudnik V. *Bolsh chym prosta "mova"*. Руднік, В. *Больш, чым проста «мова»* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2007. No 2 (12). P. 21–22.

¹¹ Kuzminich I. *Natsyyanalnaya sviadomasc i hramadzianskaya adukatsyya*. // *National identity and civic education* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2007. No 2 (12). P. 20.

¹² Matskevich T. *Hramadzianskiya kompetentsyi: shto treba belarusu, kab stats hramadzianinam*. // *Civic competencies: what a Belarusian needs to become a citizen* // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2012. No 1 (22). P. 19.

“Revivalists” accuse their ideological opponents of creating programmes that are based on

*borrowing and accepting as ones own, someone else’s language and traditions and building new cultural traditions on the basis of borrowed language and values.*¹³

Opponents accuse critics of authoritarianism, disrespect to human rights, witch hunting, etc.¹⁴

Discussions on conceptual basis of civic education in Belarus

The failure of democratic forces in the presidential election in March 2006 demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the system of civic education that existed at that moment. The most critical in their assessment of the 15 years of development of civic education in Belarus were AHT-CSI representatives:

The misunderstanding of the sense and procedure of activities led to the inability of the opposition and third sector to adequately assess the situation and set relevant goals. It led to the inability to consolidate and cooperate, negotiate or sign agreements. On the one hand, all actors declare principles of democracy, freedom of expression and responsibility. On the other, in their actions one can see egalitarianism, subordination, anarchy, egocentrism, lack of acceptance of dissent, inability to listen to and hear opponents, have business communication, etc. Personal opinions and feelings become more important

¹³ Ibid, p. 17.

¹⁴ Since 2006, an influential member of ACE and the CSO sector as a whole is the “Agency of Humanistic Technologies – Center for Social Innovations” (AHT – CSI), which are led by Uladzimir Matskevich. This organisation adamantly criticises the described above approach: “The declared principles of democracy and national rebirth are mere words — the reality is all about comfortable jobs, ambition and narrow interests. The inability to see any home-grown sources of development in Belarus, and the constant use of foreign rather than Belarusian conceptual models, is becoming ingrained though it runs counter to the principles of Belarusification and democratisation. It is unacceptable that educators in civic education should live in Belarus and yet not see or think Belarus.” (See: Matskevich S. *Istoriya i aktualiyi grazhdanskogo obrazovaniya v Belarusi. Pragmatika, paradigmatika, sintagmatika. // History and actual trends in civic education in Belarus. Pragmaticism, paradigmaticism and sintagmaticism. // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 1 (7). P. 12).*

This group quite quickly showed their aspiration for the leading role in the Association quoting the effectiveness of their own approach to the reform of Belarusian education (for school and professional education), to concept of the renovation of education in humanities and functional literacy.

Suggested by Matskevich’s group, ideas on civic education were not met with enthusiasm. Participants of the group explained that by the unwillingness of “traditional” educators to refrain from using outdated schemes of thinking and activities.

*than logical well-grounded views, or joining forces in the action that defines the destiny of the whole country... In this regard, the third sector, and opposition in their way of thinking and behaviour, are not different from the authorities who continue to apply the Soviet approach to ruling the country.*¹⁵

The third sector was unable to confront the powerful system of state ideology set up in 2003.¹⁶

Since the state blocked almost all NGO initiatives in the sphere of civic education, the number of participants of civic education projects from such target groups as school teachers, university professors, school and college students has decreased. Another reason for the failure of civic education was the lack of a well-thought out strategy of interaction with the Western partners:

*Lack of clarity in goals and structures of Belarusian CSOs in the beginning of the 1990s led to the situation where Western partners started to offer not only financial resources but values and goals that should be promoted by Belarusian partners. The Belarusian side did not offer any changes in the goals of the projects; instead, it suggested human resources to implement the objectives and goals set by the Western side. In this way, Belarus became a platform for the entrenchment of democracy but it lacked internal Belarusian actors; this contradicts the very principle of partnership. During the last 15 years, the cultural norms of democratic society have not formed in the third sector. The trend of being totally inferior to the Western partners has strengthened: organisations were created before they even thought about their goals; they followed democratic norms that were developed for conditions of European, American but not Belarusian territories.*¹⁷

In February 2006, the round table “What Should Civic Education in Belarus Look Like Now?” took place in Minsk. The main problem articulated there was a lack of demand for civic education in the Belarusian society. The majority of the population did not need real knowledge about democracy and its related skills and practices since they could not apply them in real life. They needed much more knowledge and skills that would allow them to

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 8.

¹⁶ Strengthening of the control on civic education was reflected in many legal and institutional acts of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus. Over time, the government came up with a process of validation of projects run by NGOs in the sphere of civic education. That process has many stages: expertises by the Ministry of Education and National Institute of Education; registration of programmes and projects in the Humanitarian Aid Department or Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Belarus; receiving permissions for activities in state institutions or entities from ideological departments of all levels; validation of programmes of educational seminars, conferences, schools etc.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 10.

adapt to the authoritarian rule. In addition to that, Belarusian NGOs had limited access to broad target groups or to promoting their educational services via the media.¹⁸

Another problem is related to the absence of actors of the democratic civic education. In European countries these actors would be the government, political parties, trade unions, civic movements, church and others. In Belarus, they either do not exist or show no interest in the topic. Relations with the government are a special case in Belarus. The government not only refrains from assisting NGOs in their activities; it also introduced its own “ideological” education to pursue its own goals. Naturally, CSOs that treat civic education as teaching democracy are not well perceived in that system. The most interested in the development of civic education in Belarus are those who had to be mere executors of “procurement”. These actors cannot replace the main client, at the very least, because they are not able to create conditions for application of received civic knowledge and experience.¹⁹

Participants of the discussion on strategy and tactics identified one more problem: the difference between “urgent” and “long-term” approaches to civic education (as defined by U. Vialichka). The “long-term” approach set as priorities, deep changes in the mentality and culture of the Belarusian society, directing it to new democratic values, and learning new behaviour models on the level of daily communication. That would require quite a lot of time, therefore influence on politics and politically motivated acts were treated as secondary:

Supporters of that approach are ready to continue working in unfavourable conditions; they are sure that the society should first prepare itself well for transition to democracy in order to avoid one more disillusionment and socio-economic crisis.²⁰

Supporters of the other, “urgent” approach were confident that in conditions of the total ideological pressure of the government on the Belarusian society it would be naïve to expect that isolated efforts of organisation promoting civic education could influence public life. According to them, the only valid goal of civic education was encouraging civic and political activeness that would bring Belarus back to the path of democratic development. This approach explains the notions of a citizen and civic consciousness taking into account the specifics of the society, in which democracy is yet to be created:

In the absence of democracy a citizen is a person who can build democracy, build a democratic type and system of interpersonal relations, identify and foresee threats to

¹⁸ Vialichka U. *Na suchasnykh rostaniakh belaruskay hramadzianskay adukatsyi // On the contemporary crossroads of Belarusian civic education // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 1 (7). P. 16.*

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 14.

*democracy, find ways of confronting those threats. Citizen's qualities can manifest only specific situations requiring action and in historical moments – election, public forums, courts, human rights defence, communication, etc.*²¹

However, unlike in market conditions, Matskevich's group claimed, the demand for civic education does not form "from below". It has to be formed by elites based on national cultural values. Any technology of education includes goals, subject and object of education, methods of teaching, content, step-by-step organisation of the process, and results. At that time, non-state civic education organisations did not have any of that. The main subject (actor) of civic education, the educator, did not perform her/his function because of an inability to

deeply and in a reflective manner define goals of civic education based on the analysis of the Belarusian situation.

Following the fashion of implementing modern methods of teaching, the educator follows his student, to follow his wishes and provide him with the most comfortable conditions for the learning process:

*What gives a teacher a right to become an educator in civic education? Only personal, civic position, actively though thorough and resultative action in the current political situation in Belarus. The right to be an educator should be at all the times tested and confirmed. Only a democrat can teach democracy, only a literate and experienced teacher can teach civic literacy. Only those people who were part of learning activities, who experienced them and who know what should be the next step can prepare people to such a next step and organise teaching activity.*²²

In 2006, *Adukatar* published the article "Standards and standardisation in non-formal education: approaches and definitions" by Uladzimir Matskevich, Sviatlana Matskevich and Tatsiana Vadalazhskaya. Although that text was defined as an introduction to the topic, it was quite a difficult read. During the thematic round table, it became clear that the majority of educators treated standards based on their own experience and on traditions, i.e. in the way those standards were introduced into school education in the 1990s. Such standardisation focuses on the preservation of existing norms of educational activities. In schools it resulted in typological forms of school curriculum and curricula of separate courses; in the sphere of civic education it reduced to the implementation of a simple rule:

²¹ See: Matskevich S. *Istoriya i aktualiyi grazhdanskogo obrazovaniya v Belarusi. Pragmatika, paradigmatica, sintagmatica. // History and actual trends in civic education in Belarus. Pragmatism, paradigmaticism and sintagmaticism. // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 1 (7). P. 11.*

²² *Ibid*, p. 12.

“The best practice used today is a standard in itself.”²³ The approach, suggested in the article, was based on another paradigm:

Demand for the educational system comes from external systems of activities: trends in socium, development of culture, humanitarisation.

It meant that standardisation had to “stimulate and regulate the development of the system of education” rather than preserve the existing stereotype.²⁴

In March 2007, AHT-CSI organised a role game titled “Civic education in Belarus: a continuation or beginning.” The results of the game were controversial. Already in the process of the game, some participants expressed their disagreement with techniques and methods used. In their views, they contradicted the pro-democracy spirit of civic education and could not be acceptable by intellectuals.

The results of the game provided the grounds for the development of the Concept of Civic Education along with a set of learning aids. It was discussed throughout 2008 but eventually not approved as the basis for the operation of ACE (several years later, the association was registered as the Association of Lifelong Learning and Enlightenment – it shifted its focus from civic education).²⁵

²³ Poshevalova T. Пошевалова, Т. *Kriterii kachestva i standarty v grazhdanskom obrazovanii / Kruglyi stol v ramkakh Festivalya neformal'nogo obrazovaniya. Zametki moderatora // Criteria of quality and standards in civic education / Round table held at the Festival of non-formal education / Notes of the moderator // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 3 (9). P. 23.*

²⁴ Two reviews of “Standards and standardisation in non-formal education: approaches and definitions” were published in *Adukatar*. In one of them, authors expressed their surprise at the lack of a “clear and fixed definition of civic education that would be used throughout the whole text.” (See: Kirilyuk L., Naumova S. *Retsenzii na rabotu “Standarty i standartizatsiya w neformalnom obrazovanii: podkhody i opredeleniya”* (Matskevich V.V., Matskevich S.A., Vodolazhskaya T.V.) // *Adukatar non-formal education magazine. 2006. No 4 (10). P. 30*). According to reviewers, while paying heightened attention to the methodology of education, authors of the article did not say anything new about the real state of affairs in civic education in Belarus, its trends, the subject of standardisation or steps that were undertaken in that sphere. While presenting to the reader the whole spectrum of objects of standardisation, authors “ignored standards of the content” and did not attempt to “characterise its value basis, principles or ideals.” (Ibid, p. 34).

²⁵ In the same spirit, the conference titled “De-Sovietization and Mass Consciousness Shield in contemporary Belarus” was organized in August 2007 in Silute, Lithuania. The proceedings of the conference were compiled and published under the title “On de-Sovietization. Belarus: the beginning of the 21st century (Silute, Lithuania, 20–24 August 2007 // Minsk, 2008. A new compilation of articles on this topic was published shortly after in “De-Sovietisation in the context of Belarusian society transformation” / Edited by V. Matskevich. Vilnius, 2012). A similar conference titled “Belarusisation: can one complete the process of institutionalized independent nation-building?” was held on 22 November 2013 in Minsk. The proceedings of the conference were also published.

After the 2010 presidential elections, a need emerged to adapt civic education actors to the new social and political realities. With that objective in mind, the Association of Lifelong Learning and Enlightenment organised in November 2011 the conference titled “Belarusian civic education and relevant civic competencies.” It focused on the context of civic education in the country:

*the contemporary authoritarian regimes do not produce civic education. Rather, they produce the upbringing of the population in line with the obedient and paternalistic behaviour patterns, which can be counteracted only by united efforts of all pro-democracy oriented civic society and media actors.*²⁶

The Association of Lifelong Learning and Enlightenment in partnership with EuroBelarus launched the Citizenship.BY campaign, which was designed to try to influence the formation of demand for civic competencies in society. The second phase of the campaign began in 2013 and was devoted to the promotion of active citizenship in masses. The first event of this phase was the roundtable meeting titled “Citizenship and relevant art”, which took place in May 2013.²⁷

In June 2013 there was a contest “Contemporary Belarusian Citizenship”, while in March 2014 there was a photo contest “I Am a Citizen!”²⁸

A collection of educational and methodological materials “12 Steps to Citizenship for Educators” is one of the most significant outputs of this project. It includes a set of learning materials and art products aimed at helping teachers, trainers and civic activists in organising educational events. The collection contains e-versions of publications about citizenship and civic education, as well as an annex with graphics, music and video.²⁹

The Flying University’s programmes, the Thinking Loudly media project, Citizenship.BY campaign and others became the most significant initiatives of AHT-CSI in recent years.

²⁶ Final statement of the seminar-conference “Belarusian civic education and relevant civic competencies” held on 4–5 November 2011 in Minsk.

²⁷ Based on the results of the event, the following conclusion was made: “one has to act in the context of contemporary post-modern society, in which assessment of the processes is ambiguous; authority is not obvious; demands are shaped spontaneously; resources are diversified; the boundaries of subjectness are blurred.” Kalitenia L., Antashkevich S. *Our country and Citizenship.BY // Adukatar (Educator) non-formal education magazine*, 2015. No 1 (24).

²⁸ Citizenship.BY campaign has its own PR programme. Its press releases are published in the independent Belarusian media. It is present in online media and in the most popular social media, such as Facebook or V Kontakte, where its accounts are regularly updated.

²⁹ Ibid.

3. Conclusions

In 2013, the Office for European Expertise and Communication (OEEC) in partnership with the Office for a Democratic Belarus, prepared the Overview of the Civic Education Sector in Belarus. It aimed to assess the effectiveness of the work by CSOs in this field, establish development trends and present possible ways for improving their operation. The overview was drafted using the desk research of documents (regulatory acts, curricula, and publications in the domain of civic education) as well as qualitative methods, which included in-depth individual interviews and focus groups with CSO practitioners.

One of the findings of this overview was that

*the Belarusian civic education by the third sector is stagnating.*³⁰

There is no actor in the civic education in Belarus “who could mobilise CSOs’ efforts and resources for the sake of civic education.” The overview pointed at the unfavorable political framework created by the state and the lack of coordination among the sectoral actors was found to be the determining factors hindering the progress in civic education in Belarus.

The cases where CSOs are included as co-implementers into the state programmes are rare, with very few of them trying to build cooperation with the state-run education system.

The existing programmes often focus on the needs of target groups, without taking into account a more general prospect of changing the political culture in society. Belarusian CSOs working in the field of civic education focus on cultivating the competencies of civic participation. At the same time, their programmes lack proper focus on civic knowledge, the knowledge of the mechanisms and universal democratic principles. Another weakness of the civic education programmes implemented by Belarusian CSOs is that they are conditioned by their assumption that

in the authoritarian Belarusian state a full-fledged civic education is not possible, and a lot of knowledge and skills of democratic behavior are not applicable.

The differences in the approaches of CSOs to civic education suggest a “lack of communication and cooperation within the sector.”

The civic education sector needs to improve the outreach of its educational programmes. Experts assess that the overall outreach by civic education programmes does not exceed 100 000 participants in 5 years, which makes about 1.2% of the population aged 14 and older. At the same time, the ideological and upbringing work of the state – mass media

³⁰ http://www.actngo.info/sites/default/files/files/overview_2013_05_kor.pdf.

not included – covers about 3.6 million people or 45% of the population aged 14 and older. Internet usage by civic education programmes is very low.

The short-term nature of these programmes (1–2 years) is yet another factor affecting their effectiveness; programs lasting for 3–5 years and more have better results.

The number of civic education CSOs and experts has decreased in recent years, leading to the loss of best practices. There are regions in Belarus, where not a single CSO provides services in civic education.

Based on the results of the study, the overview proposed several recommendations. For example, it recommends organizing the process of communication between the main providers of civic education services; taking into account the interests of various target groups without losing common values when developing the programmes; sharing the most effective programmes with the potential of the mass audience outreach between a wide range of CSOs. The cultivation of civic participation competences

should be complemented with a basic knowledge of the legal mechanisms and structure of Belarus; principles, documents, ideas, and confrontations meaningful for the constitutional democracy of Belarus; of the political mechanisms for representing public opinion and bringing about political change...

Education programmes should be combined with civic campaigns including innovation-based forms such as animated cartoons and videos for children and other age groups using the Internet and social media, having in mind the high Internet penetration (from 26% in 2007 up to 54% in 2013). Monitoring the outcomes and impacts of civic education programmes should become a standard for NGOs. New civic education programmes should be designed and supported, subject to thorough cost benefit analysis and evaluation of previously achieved results. The overview also recommends ensuring broad outreach of civic education by means of involving a wide range of providers into the field – NGOs, trade unions, faith-based organizations, initiatives, businesses – everybody who can purposefully integrate civic education into their educational programmes and activities.

It would be naïve to believe that the CSOs alone can cope with the tasks facing civic education in Belarus. However, their coordinated and well thought-out activities could become an important contribution in shaping demand for civic competencies in Belarusian society, thus bringing a change for the better closer.