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Mechanisms for nominating of NGO representatives*

This part will present the different mechanisms for nominating and electing representatives of civic organizations in order to participate in state commissions, working groups and consultative councils in the countries from Central and Eastern Europe. Very often the election is based on the professional qualifications or the established partnership relations i. e. the criteria and methods for the election are informal. However, there are well-organized and well working mechanisms for nominating NGO representatives, moreover - the state structures do not require expert knowledge, but rather representation. Having in mind that there are not many countries where a representative organization of NGOs exists, the creation of a mechanism for nominating is a useful and effective substitute.

Existing mechanisms

1. NGOs elect their representatives for a restricted number of positions

An appropriate example is the National Civil Fund (NCF) in Hungary. Most of the members in the different NCF managing bodies are NGO representatives. They are elected at special meetings of national and regional organizations who nominate their representatives. At the meeting the members of the NCF managing bodies are nominated and selected as the representatives can nominate themselves and other people too. The candidates who receive most of the votes become members. A part of the members is

* *This study is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)**. The contents are the responsibility of the Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government. This study is also made possible with support from the **German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)**, and the contents does not necessarily reflect the views of GMF or the **Balkan Trust for Democracy**.*



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elected on a geographical principle (i. e. they represent a geographic region), and another part represents a particular field of activity.

A similar example is the Council for Development of Civil Society in Croatia – a professional and consultative body with the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs. The members of the council who represent civic organizations should work in preliminary defined fields (one representative is required for each field). Each organization can nominate candidates. All of the candidates who fall within the requirements (such as proper experience, letter of motivation, CV, etc.) are short-listed after the preliminary nominations. After that begins a 15-day period in which organizations vote by filling up and submitting by mail a special form, signed and stamped by the person who represents the organization. The Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs publishes a list including the winners and all the other candidates, as well as the number of votes for each candidate.

In Bulgaria, there are three NGO representatives who are elected in the Monitoring Committee for the National Strategic Reference Framework – one from the social field, one from the environmental and one from the field of education, science and culture. The organizations must be actively working in the respective field for at least three (3) years. After publishing the announcement for the beginning of the election procedure, there is a 20-day period in which NGOs can submit an application form. After that the nominees from each field get together and elect their representative in the Committee. Moreover, they have to propose a coordinating mechanism for sharing information with other NGOs from the respective field and to coordinate proposals with them.

Another Bulgarian example is the mechanism created by Bluelink – an organization, working in the field of ecology. Bluelink coordinates an especially designed mechanism for nominating representatives of environmental organizations in order to participate in different state bodies and consultative groups. First of all there are strict requirements for qualification and experience of NGO candidates (to have at least one year of experience and qualification in the respective field, to submit a letter of motivation). One and the same person cannot be a representative in more than one body and his/her mandate cannot be more than 2 years. Besides this there are strict requirements to inform other NGOs for the meetings held in which the representative has participated. The potential electors (the organizations that have the right to vote in every election) have to submit certain documents in order to be registered before the elections. Each organization can nominate only one person for each position. The period for nominations cannot be less than 12 working days. The elections are held after generalizing the results and publishing all of the nominations. The period for voting cannot be less than 10 working days. Each NGO can vote only for one candidate for each position as the representative of the organization signs a document (it can be sent by mail, fax or scanned and sent by e-mail). The winner is the candidate who receives most of the votes, and those who are on second and third place are reserves.

2. NGOs elect their representatives for unrestricted number of positions

The Civic Council with the Minister of the European Issues in Bulgaria is an example for such a mechanism. There is no limitation for the number of places to be filled in by NGO candidates. There are requirements for the candidates and the most important one is that every member should be nominated by at least 10 organizations.

3. Nominations from civic organizations, elections by the state

In this case the nominations are made by civic organizations and special restrictions related to the fields of activity of the candidates are not typical. It is more likely to have personal requirements for the candidates and not related to their capacity as NGO representatives (i. e. candidates should be experts).

The Council for Public Benefit Activity in Poland consists of 10 representatives of civic organizations and 10 state representatives (5 from the local authorities and 5 from the central authorities). The Minister elects NGO representatives from a list of organizations, provided by the NGOs. The Minister has the right of free choice as long as the elected persons are from the list.

In Estonia, the members of the Board of Trustees of the National Foundation of Civil Society are 10, five of which are from the civil society. They are nominated by civic organizations, but a special body elects the members (there were almost 30 candidates during the elections for the first members and only 5 of them were selected). In this case expertise is sought, not representativeness.

Similar is the example of the local Council of NGOs in Azerbaijan. The President appoints the members. They are 11, three of which are state representatives and the rest (8) are NGO representatives. The eight NGOs represent eight different civic fields. The NGOs from each field have to elect 3 representatives at their own elections. The President elects one of three candidatures from each field.

4. Election by the State without clear rules

There are several examples that could be pointed under these criteria. There are no clear rules on how the NGO representatives are selected and they are not the active party in the selection process.

The first example is the Council for NGOs in Slovakia. It is presented by the vice – premier, who is responsible for the relations with the civic organizations. He appoints also the rest of the members. In 2007 he sent letters to NGOs asking them for nominations. The Council does not have fixed number of members, but there is a requirement for equal number of NGO representatives and state representatives.

The Managing Council of the Foundation for the Development of the Civil Society in Croatia includes 5 representatives of civic organizations. For each following mandate the

current members of the Managing Council send their nominations to the government, which appoints the next members. The Council can organize consultations with different organizations and civic institutions.

5. Procedure organized by NGOs under criteria defined by the contracting authority

Here falls the example of the Center for Information Service, Cooperation and Development of NGOs, Slovenia (CNVOS). Similarly to Bluelink in Bulgaria, the Center has developed a special procedure for selection of NGO representatives in different state bodies. The difference with the Bulgarian example is that in Slovenia the contracting authority chooses the framework of the election – the area of activity in which the candidates should be working, the special requirements for them, including the method for voting. The most frequently used procedure is voting (but there is a possibility for an unanimous majority to be required or some kind of combined procedure to be set up). The first step is nomination of the candidates and preliminary registration of NGOs who want to vote.

Basic characteristics of mechanism for nominating

The basic characteristics of the nomination mechanism can be outlined on the basis of the examples above. The type of mechanism can be defined based on the different combinations of the characteristics.

1. Requirements for the candidates

Such requirements are: the field of activity of the candidate (for example – ecology), the experience (3 years of work in the field of activity) or the necessary expertise, but not representativeness. The candidates might need to present a CV, a letter of motivation or some proof for the agreement of the candidate to be nominated.

2. Requirements for the voters

The voting organizations could be required to work in a special field of activity (for example - the same like the candidate), as well as to have history (i. e. not to be established before the elections). Besides very often there is a preliminary registration of the voters for which specific documents could be needed, for example – a certificate for current legal status.

3. Terms for nominating and voting

On the first place, it could be possible for an organization to nominate itself or to have a limitation to nominate only one candidate. In some cases there could be a requirement that more organizations nominate the candidate (as the requirement for the ten nominators in the Civic Council above).

More often there is a stage before the elections for nomination of the potential candidates. Usually the period for nominations is long enough – 10-15 days. After that, all nominees are announced and the real elections are carried out. The period for the elections is also long enough.

4. Method for voting

The methods for voting are different (unanimous majority might be necessary in Slovenia), but the most popular one are the elections in which the winning candidate is the one who gets most of the votes. The ones that follow are reserves in case the place becomes vacant.

An organization can vote after filling a special form/ bulletin, signed by the person who represents it. The form could be sent by mail (i. e. in original) or by fax or even by e-mail (a scanned copy of the document). Every organization can vote for only one candidate for each position.

5. A possibility for termination of mandate

In some cases it is possible to begin a procedure for termination of the mandate, when the chosen candidate does not fulfill his/her obligations (does not participate in the meetings, does not provide information to other NGOs and so on). Bluelink provides that such a procedure can be carried out at a national conference of environmental organizations. Their representative could be recalled by a majority of 50%+1 from the participants. Another possibility is 20 % of the members to initiate such a procedure (when a national conference is not held). In Slovenia it is stipulated that 1/3 of the voters who had participated in the elections, can terminate the mandate of the candidate.

6. Organizer of the procedure

Usually this is the body in which the relevant structure of civic participation is created. In the cases of Slovenia and Bluelink – it is a non-profit organization.