

CENTER OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

International Relations Strategy



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Introduction

An international relations strategy plays an important role in the development of civil society institutions. Taking into account that foreign organizations are a major source for independent think tanks' funding, it's clear that it's very important to develop foreign partnerships. Given this, the creation of an International Relations Department and strategy can prove extremely valuable to the sustainability and effectiveness of an organization.

The Center for Economic and Social Development, established in 2005 in order to promote research in economic and social policy, has paid special attention to developing international relations. Since its foundation, the center has collaborated with leading international organizations, including: the European Commission, the German Marshall Fund, the International Development Agency, the International Bank, the International Bank of Asia, the Eurasia Foundation, the Think Tank Fund, PASOS, LGI, PTF, and many others. CESD has also strengthened its international partnerships by joining major international think tank networks.

Current International Relations Activities

After receiving an institutional grant from the Think Tank Fund, a separate Department of International Relations was formed within CESD. This department was created in order to supervise relations with foreign institutions and the development of strategies, policies and objectives. Considering the results achieved, it can be said that the activity has been very productive. Here are a few of the department's recent activities:

- CESD became the first local civil society institution in Azerbaijan to provide internship opportunities for foreign experts. In the Summer of 2010, interns from Switzerland and Italy joined CESD staff for a three month program.
- The department translates news stories about CESD in Azeri, English, and Russian and publishes it on the organization's website. The department plays an important role in highlighting the center's activities in the local and foreign press.
- In order to keep diplomatic staff updated about the activities of the center, the department frequently conducts meetings with embassies in the country. The department collects information about embassies in a specially compiled database that is constantly updated.

The formation of foreign partnerships and their participation in ongoing projects is a very important part of the center's strategy. One of the key issues is to constantly maintain ties with foreign partners through official correspondences and the coordination of joint projects. The Department of International Relations continually involves new foreign partners with the center's activities. The department gathers information about foreign partners that support the mission of the center, monitor their activities and maintain contact with them. It is important for the center to take part in local, regional and international projects. The department also participates in various international conferences.

Future International Relations Strategy

The CESD Department of International Relations plans to robustly expand its foreign cooperations. The department plans to achieve this goal through work in five distinct directions:

European integration

CESD views European integration as a strong way for improving Azerbaijan's economic and social policy development. To support this development, CESD will increase its relationships with institutes in Europe. More specifically, as Azerbaijan is an Eastern Partnership country, CESD will increase contacts with think tanks in other Eastern Partnership members. Joint support for interregional projects has the ability of sharing knowledge between participating organizations and expanding the outreach of the projects. For example, CESD is currently participating in a PASOS Visa Liberalization program for Eastern Partnership countries. Through this project, CESD has attended training seminars and built contacts with similar work-oriented Civil Society Organizations.

In addition, Vugar Bayramov, Chairman of CESD, has recently been elected as the national representative of Azerbaijan for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum steering committee. Participation in this committee will increase the outreach of CESD projects and open the doors of dialogue with civil society leaders from all of the Eastern Partnership countries and their EU counterparts. It will also provide increased access to EU officials, enhancing the impact of CESD work towards European integration.

Expanding connections in Asia

CESD believes in expanding its work and collaboration with CSOs in Central and Eastern Asia. A CESD representative recently gave a presentation at the PASOS Annual Assembly about ideas for expanding PASOS in Central Asia in the future. Chairman Vugar Bayramov will submit his candidacy for the PASOS Board of Directors next year and if successful, will use this role to help make these ideas a reality.

CESD will also support the upcoming United Nations Democracy Fund funded project implemented by PASOS, titled «Opening the Doors of Policy-Making in the South

Caucasus and Central Asia.» CESD is applying to send two representatives for a two-day *Policy Training for Civil Society Actors* in May 2011 in Istanbul. Central Asian representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan will be in attendance for this skills development training program. In addition to increasing skills in advocacy, research, and policy analysis, it will also also CESD to broaden its network of think tanks. These new connections could sow the seed for future joint projects.

CESD is also always open to future connections with Eastern Asia. Many of these countries have had enormous success with high growth rates and rapid industrialization. Their success in opening up their markets could be analysed further by CESD for determining the best path for Azerbaijan's economic policy. CESD recently hosted representatives from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), one of the premiere think tanks in Asia. These department directors from CASS expressed interest in sharing information and perhaps holding a joint conference in the future.

Increasing ties with the United States

CESD has already had success working with US Government institutions, such as USAID. CESD hopes to expand this relationship by continually providing USAID with relevant social and economic analysis and reports. In addition, CESD is currently hosting a United States Peace Corps Volunteer as a project manager. CESD has benefitted from this relationship by his support on research projects and assistance in editing papers. This enhances the respectability of CESD's work by increasing the readability of published reports. Additionally, CESD is interested in expanding its contacts with American think tanks and universities. Multiple experts at CESD have completed their higher education at American universities. CESD can use these contacts to begin collaboration by sharing information and supporting research.

Build on local embassy relations

CESD has the opportunity of improving foreign relations by enhancing relations with embassies in Baku. CESD has found that local embassies can become a bridge to think tanks in other countries. For example, the Romanian embassy in Baku recently recommended CESD to a think tank in Romania for participation in a conference in Romania. Improving local ties with embassies can open the door for networking in their respected countries. CESD will continue to hold meetings with local diplomats and provide staff with updates about the activities of the center.

Improve regional development

As post-Soviet republics, the three South Caucasus countries of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia face many of the same social and economic challenges. Collaboration of ideas could enhance and hasten their development process. In addition to networking with other CSO representatives at PASOS events and trainings, CESD is interested in working together on regional projects.

For example, CESD has recently submitted an application to GTZ to be a project partner with the Association of Young Economists in Georgia (AYEG) on the following project: *Cross-Border Study of Trade Opportunities Between Georgia and Azerbaijan*. These projects not only increase the economic literature on such important topics, but also encourage progressive reforms to improve the current situation. This collaboration also strengthens the relationship between CESD and other regional partners.

Conclusion

Clearly, CESD views foreign relations as an extremely vital part of CESD's work. Naturally, CESD hopes to expand its efforts, which therefore calls for a stronger and more extensive international relations strategy. The plans and ideas expressed in this strategy lay the groundwork for a successful expansion of CESD's work.