

ICPS newsletter®

What's missing in political platforms?

In analyzing the platforms of different parties, researchers can look not only at what is included in each platform, but also at what is missing. Public hearings in six Ukrainian cities to debate the effectiveness of party platforms saw this very issue brought up, as representatives of different parties and interest groups spoke about the need to take voters' opinion into account in developing party platforms, to avoid producing hollow platforms, and to report back to voters about how the different planks are being implemented

Over 9–19 September 2004, public debates on “The Priorities of Social Development as Reflected in Party Policies” took place in Donetsk, Kolomyia, Mykolayiv, Poltava, Striy, and Vinnytsia. These hearings brought together people from various political parties and social groups in the local communities. Attended by some 300 individuals, the audience included leftist, centrist and rightist forces, SMEs, educational and medical professionals, activists from youth organizations, local officials, and journalists.

These participants share the belief that an effective party platform must reflect the needs of its constituency. It should include not only a list of party priorities, but also specific ways to implement party policies. So far, most parties have not treated their platform as an effective tool for gaining voter support. But the attitudes of political parties to the quality of their platforms is gradually changing as the 2006 Verkhovna Rada elections, which will be done on a proportional basis, come closer.

Results of these six hearings have not been summarized yet, but it is already possible to speak about key voter expectations both in general and among interest groups such as business, young people and professionals in medicine and education.

What's really worrying voters?

In discussing the issues of government and local development that should be reflected in party platforms, interest groups in different cities pointed out that the key priority was to form a responsible government and to take public opinion into account.

At the same time, SME representatives underscored the need to resolve key

business issues: simplifying the registration process, lowering the tax burden, combating corruption, making political pressure on businesses unacceptable, and protecting domestic industries.

Teachers and doctors complained about the lack of funding for educational and medical facilities, which they see as the main reason behind the growth of bribery and brain-drain in their fields. They said that party platforms also needed to focus on how to make education and healthcare systems meet today's needs.

Representatives of youth organizations reported that young people are most concerned about borrowing money for a higher education and housing, finding a job after graduation, and eliminating substance abuse, both drugs and alcohol, among them. They also pointed to the need to involve young people in local government.

How should political parties change?

Participants in the hearings urged political parties to pay attention to public opinion and reflect it in their platforms. In their opinion, critical changes in party platforms include moving from empty slogans to the identification of concrete measures to reach specific goals, spelling out the resources necessary for this purpose and the timelines for carrying the measures out. In addition, a key element is regular progress reports from each party on how it is fulfilling its plan of action.

Among the obstacles in the way of changing party approaches, participants included the low institutional capacity of regional party organizations, the lack of funds and qualified personnel, the apathy of party members, and the lack of

cooperation between the government and community organizations.

Party platforms are getting better...

These debates are a part of ICPS's “Public Participation in Public Dialog on Party Platforms” project, which is aimed at raising the effectiveness of policy-making through public involvement in analyzing, monitoring and evaluating party platforms. The main means are public debate and raising institutional capacity at community organizations.

Under this project, launched in December 2003, ICPS has developed methods for analyzing the quality of party platforms. This was then applied to the platforms of the most influential political parties in six cities by the project's regional partners. These methods helped reveal discrepancies between the contents of a party's platform and voter expectations, and other shortcomings, such as unclear identification of social priorities and of the specific ways that the party intended to attain them.

In 2006, the Verkhovna Rada will be elected on a proportional basis. This means that high-quality party platforms will become one of the main tools for gaining voter support. The experience of this project shows that parties that have recognized the growing role of platforms have united their efforts in looking for ways to improve their programs, independent of ideological differences.

Public hearings on “Priorities of Social Development as Reflected in Party Platforms” were held under the “Public Participation in Public Dialog on Party Platforms” project, financed by the Ukraine Citizen Activity Network (UCAN) of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC). Over 30 September—10 October 2004, the second round of public hearings on “Monitoring and Evaluating Party Policies” will take place in Donetsk, Kolomyia, Mykolayiv, Poltava, Striy, and Vinnytsia. For further information, contact Petro Udovenko by telephone at (380-44) 229-0692, or via e-mail at garant_kviali@icps.kiev.ua.

The ICPS way to organize public debate

How to prepare for a public hearing? Who should be invited? How to make the debate most productive? How to engage the press? How to determine whether the debate had an impact? ICPS's experience in conducting public hearings has been summarized in a methods handbook that can be viewed and downloaded in our on-line library

Public debate and negotiation are one of the most important tools in democratic policy-making. They provide an opportunity to reveal different opinions, to develop alternative solutions to a problem and to organize productive dialog among stakeholders on issues that need to be considered while preparing to adopt one or another political options.

To partly compensate the lack of methodological literature on this particular issue in Ukraine, ICPS has been providing one approach to preparing and conducting public hearings on party policy issues to its regional partners in the "Public Participation in Public Dialog on Political Platforms" project. Although these methods were developed for the narrowly-focused goals of the project, they can easily be adapted for use beyond the project. Applying these methods will raise the capacities of organizations to initiate public dialog and help them prepare, conduct and summarize the results of public debates.

The ICPS approach can be particularly useful to active participants in public dialog:

- community organizations, civic movements and non-government think-tanks;
- political parties, political blocs, and members of community political associations;
- officials from executive and local government bodies;
- special interest groups and the general public.

The public debate cycle is divided into three stages, including the preparatory stage and follow-up activities.

The section of the ICPS handbook describing the preparatory stage focuses on:

- setting criteria for identifying stakeholders, studying and predicting their expectations;
- identifying the goal and tasks of a debate;

- providing organizational, logistical and financial support;
- planning preparatory activities and holding the public hearing, determining rules of order and the program;
- informing participants and experts in advance;
- informing the media.

The hearing stage includes:

- preparing the premises;
- meeting, setting up, catering, and arranging materials and equipment;
- cooperating with journalists;
- holding the public debate, the role of the chair;
- organizing activities in the open session and in working groups;
- summing up and closing the hearing.

The wrap-up stage consists of:

- summarizing the results of the debate and preparing a report;
- working with interest groups beyond the debate;
- monitoring the impact of the debate.

Methods for preparing and conducting public debates (in Ukrainian) can be downloaded from ICPS's on-line library at <http://www.icps.kiev.ua/library/show.html?17>. The methods proposed are a part of a policy analysis handbook that ICPS plans to publish in November 2004. This will be also available on-line. To receive information about new publications on the ICPS web-site, you can add your e-mail to the ICPS announcements mailing list on the ICPS home page at <http://www.icps.com.ua/>.

The "Methods for Preparing and Conducting Public Debates on the Problems with Party Policy" were developed within the "Public Participation in Public Dialog on Political Platforms" project, financed by the Ukraine Citizen Action Network (UCAN) of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC).

Finance Ministry presents Ukraine to global investors

Global investors are turning more and more frequently to Ukraine, whose economy is showing the most rapid growth rate in Europe.

On 24 September 2004, Euromoney, the leading European investment magazine, jointly with Ukraine's Ministry of Finance held a conference ambitiously entitled "Ukraine: Europe's Eastern Engine" in London. At this venue, some 350 business leaders interested in Ukraine had an opportunity to discuss investment barriers and prospects directly with First Deputy Premier Mykola Azarov, acting NBU Governor Arseniy Yatseniuk, key ministers, top officials from Kyiv City Council, and foreign investors with experience working in Ukraine.

The conference consisted of four open sessions dedicated to Ukraine's macroeconomic situation, its investment climate, and the financial and energy sectors. Four separate presentations covered Kyiv as a new European business center, the Ukrainian securities market, the government bond market, and the country's transport infrastructure.

ICPS Deputy Director and senior economist Andriy Blinov chaired the session on Ukraine's investment climate, which featured EBRD Ukraine Director Kamen Zahariev, Western NIS Enterprise Fund President Natalie Jaresko, BAT Ukraine General Manager John Richardson, Baker & McKenzie-CIS Partner Serhiy Chorny, and others.

Among key investment obstacles, corruption, a flawed judicial system and underdeveloped infrastructure were the top ones named. Although Ukraine's investment climate continues to be seen as unfavorable, participants pointed out that it was clearly also possible to invest successfully here.

For further information, contact Andriy Blinov by telephone at (380-44) 236-1292, or via e-mail at ablinov@icps.kiev.ua.

For further information on methods for preparing and conducting public hearings, contact Petro Udovenko by telephone at (380-44) 216-9883, or via e-mail at garant_kvali@icps.kiev.ua. For more on how to develop the capacity of community organizations to conduct public debate, contact Volodymyr Hnat by telephone at (380-44) 236-4116, or via e-mail at vhnat@icps.kiev.ua.

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To be included in the distribution list, contact the ICPS publications department at marketing@icps.kiev.ua or call (380-44) 236-5464.

icps newsletter editor Yevhen Shulha (shulha@icps.kiev.ua). Phone: (380-44) 236-4477.

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