

Event report: “Forum for Freedom”

Kyiv, Ukraine 2018-06-07 – 2018-06-10

The Forum was organized by ELF, the Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC) and Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF). This report is written by the event organizers at SILC.

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1. Summary

A three day conference gathered sixty participants from fourteen countries in a moderately isolated conference hotel in the outskirts of Kyiv. Participants were mostly from liberal political parties, while some represented civil society organizations. The Forum’s ambition was to strengthen the capacity of liberal organizations in terms of structure, communication, policy-making and policy-implementation. However, networking and relationship-building within the liberal family were also key aspects of the event. The event was constructed on the premise that liberals in tough situations can learn a lot from each other, even if the specific issues at hand may vary between countries. A special focus was given the political context of Ukraine with an afternoon dedicated to Ukrainian anti-corruption work and with a longer presentation of the Ukrainian liberal party *Syla Lyudey* (Power of People).

Our assessment is that the event was a success, we observed participants connect with each other and share experiences. Participants were actively involved during the entire event, contributing and asking questions as well as maintaining a presence on social media. Evaluation forms were handed out at the end and the general satisfaction with the event was very positive (4.66/5, n=41).

2. Event objective and layout

The aim of the Forum was to strengthen liberal political parties in the European Neighborhood. This to be done through an enhanced knowledge on specific topics, organizational insights and new relationships.

Most participants represented liberal parties that are current partners to SILC or in other ways friends within the liberal sphere. Since the participating organizations work within a wide range of contexts and in their countries face different types of challenges, the event was designed so that all participants would find sessions that appealed to them. All sessions had in common that they aimed to strengthen the parties in policy making, political communication, internal organization, equal participation and political implementation. In our experience, liberal politicians have more in common than what differentiates them, and the shared objectives create a good base for discussion.

Most speakers also doubled as participants, as they, too, enjoyed the three day event and could make use of new insights in their work. Speakers include former and current party leaders, researchers, policy experts, and experts of specific questions of relevance for the event, such as coalition building or fundraising.

The program was designed to create dedicated points of discussion while also providing new tools and insights. All sessions in one way or the other related to the objectives mentioned above and there was



also space dedicated for presentations of some of the represented parties, including a lengthy introduction to the local party *Syla Lyudey*, who also had most participants present. In the end, the sessions created a mix of local examples, expert input and interactive discussions.

The location was intentionally slightly isolated. This of course was beneficial for the budget but mostly it was about the atmosphere desired for the event. With pretty much nothing intriguing in the neighborhood and Kyiv city approximately 45 minutes away with a taxi – most participants remained at the hotel and conference grounds. This allowed for endless opportunities for informal chats and meetings between participants.

3. Highlights

The three day conference was packed with interesting sessions, but the following ones seem to have left the greatest impressions based on the evaluations and our observations.

The welcome speech by SILC chairman Lennart Nordfors was an appreciated start that set the tone of the weekend. In an ideological speech Lennart underlined the need for cooperation and reflection as liberalism is threatened all over Europe and the world.

An interactive and moving workshop on gender equality reforms by human rights lawyer Hanna Gerdes created an inspiring atmosphere where everyone was keen to join in on the discussion.

On Saturday morning the most time efficient and elaborate slot in the program took place, with four parallel sessions covering coalitions, how to bounce back after election failure, election campaign planning and policy making. This was an important part of the event since it allowed sessions in smaller groups where the participants could choose to attend sessions of their liking.

The Saturday offered a full afternoon on the topic of corruption and anti-corruption. FNF hosted an educative panel discussion with various experts on the topic before all of us left for an anti-corruption tour in downtown Kyiv.

4. Results and reflections

In essence the event is assessed as a success. Organizers' observations and evaluation forms handed out at the end tell us that participants have built new relationships and knowledge that can be utilized in their organizations.

We can expect that participating parties will have new ideas for developing political communication and policy making processes that can be implemented by their own parties. We can expect that non-Ukrainian participants have a greater understanding of the national and regional context. We can expect that all participants experience a stronger connection to the liberal family in the European Neighborhood.

The gender balance at the event in terms of attendees successfully turned out at an exact 50-50 rate. However, the speaker presence in the program was slightly off target with 59% men and 41% women 'on stage'. It is mentionable that SILC was very strict with invited organizations, with strictly gender balanced delegations allowed.



The location of the event seemed to have fulfilled its purpose. However, hosting the event in Ukraine did create some issues with visas. Participants from Venezuela and Egypt were denied entry entirely, and half of the Tunisian delegation were denied visas. Many participants from countries who applied for visas testify to rude and uncooperative treatment at Ukrainian embassies.

In conclusion, the event inspired participants and provided new tools for further internal party development. The participants were provided the possibility to compare fresh experiences from election campaign planning in Tunisia and Sweden, take part in an ALDE-party fundraising training and dissect political strategies, essential for parties in stages ranging from government coalition building – to times of crisis and fight for survival. However, it cannot be stressed enough that these learning outputs were achieved in a unique atmosphere where participants were interacting, sharing and building relationships in a natural way. As an example the event ended with smiling participants receiving colorful football shirts with which a group photo and a relaxed football game took place before people said their goodbyes. This importance of results such as this is hard to assess, but should from our perspective as event organizers, not be underestimated.

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