

LONG REPORT

ELF Regional Expert Networks 2018

The Regional Expert Networks is a project implemented by the European Liberal Forum with cooperation of the International Educational Center, Haya van Someren Stichting/ VVD International, IDI/ D66 International, Centre Party International Foundation, Novum Institute, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom and the Boris Divković Foundation.

Regional Expert Networks in numbers:

-3 training events/ expert group kick-offs

-7 partner organizations

-17 beneficiary organizations

-53 experts in three fields: Policy Development, Data, Storytelling; 10 trainers and moderators (4 VVD, 3 D66, 1 ALDE, 2 local trainers), 3 main organizers

Regional Expert Networks events:

-**Regional Expert Networks – Policy Development and Manifesto Writing**, Hotel Astra Garni, Sarajevo/ April 6-8, 2018

-**Regional Expert Networks – Campaigning in a Data-driven World**, Hotel International, Zagreb/ June 15-17, 2018

-**Regional Expert Networks – Storytelling in Political Communications**, Hotel Park, Ljubljana/ September 7-9 2018

PROJECT GOAL:

Main goal of the project is to develop a best practices sharing platform among liberal organizations in CE and SEE regions. The project will also create a blueprint of target organizations' structures and activities. The latter will enable ELF members involved in the project to more effectively promote structural changes within the beneficiary organizations.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

- establish the Expert Groups,

- facilitating an exchange of best practices and experiences between organizations involved in the project,

- to continue to develop and strengthen the framework for regional trainings given by ELF and other partner organizations,
- make use of results of previous ELF projects and projects of partner organizations,
- obtain internal information about structures and activities of the target organizations in the overall and concerted effort of partner organizations aimed at promoting beneficial structural changes

TARGET AUDIENCE:

REN targets relevant experts from liberal organizations in CE and SEE from three fields of political work:

1. **Policy Development**
2. **Data Analysis**
3. **Storytelling**

Programs connected 20 policy development experts, 17 data experts and 16 political communication experts from the beneficiary organizations.

TRAININGS' SUMMARIES:

1. SARAJEVO, policy event

First event of the Regional Expert Networks was moderated by **Maša Kociper**, vice-president of the Social Liberal Alliance (Slovenia) who participated and graduated from the Regional Academy for Liberalism ToT programme in 2017. She was joined by policy development experts **Nanda Kelly** from VVD and **Robert Farla** representing D66.

On Friday, the event began with a round of introductions and energizer games. Afterwards, the trainers led the participants in an exercise in which they discussed their goals and expectations for the weekend.

On Saturday, the programme covered 3 sessions: *Organization of manifesto writing process (Nanda Kelly)*, *Defining and communicating the political party's priorities (Robert Farla)*, *Pitching your party programme to your members exercise (Maša Kociper)*

The first session required the participants to present the policy cycle in their party after which Nanda explained the theory behind the cycle and how manifesto writing is organized in the party. Following this, there was a practical exercise in which participants needed to formulate a task for the drafting team of their party. In defining and communicating the political party's priorities session, Robert presented the case study of D66 and how its political restart involved clearly defining and positioning the party in terms of policy priorities (radically progressive, focus on education, staunchly pro-EU).

In the conclusion of the day, participants had a writing exercise in which they developed and presented a program, including its structure, topical priorities and detailed paragraph on one primary topic.

On Sunday, participants were involved in the final session on communication of policy proposals and concluded on the session of evaluation and feedback.

2. ZAGREB, data event

The second event of the Regional Expert Networks was moderated by **Saša Vasić**, project manager of the Boris Divković Foundation (BiH) who participated and graduated from the ELF Regional Academy for Liberalism ToT programme in 2017. Trainers and experts who implemented the programme were: **Max Sundermann**, ALDE Party data analyst, **Rob Geldhoff** and **Marlijn Heijnen**, VVD data experts and **Jelmer Schreuder**, D66 data expert.

On Friday, the event began with a round of introductions in which each participant presented how their organization handles data and in what way it informs their campaign planning. Afterwards, the trainers led the participants in an exercise in which they discussed their goals and expectations for the weekend.

The programme of Saturday and Sunday was divided into 3 sessions: **Data analysis Theory, Workshop 1 and Workshop 2.**

The first session began by a presentation of Max Sundermann who introduced the participants to how the ALDE Party works with data, citing examples of cooperative efforts with the member parties that enabled them to better target their political campaigns. Afterwards, Rob Geldhoff presented the concept of mapping and using mapping to analyse geographic patterns in voter support while connecting this data to publically available demographic, economic and social statistics. This was an introduction to the next session led by Marlijn Heijnen who talked about statistics and how to do a simple analysis using Excel or other programs.

On Saturday afternoon, the participants did a practical exercise on the QGIS program where they mapped voter support based on data for Zagreb elections in 2017 and connected this data to socioeconomic statistics.

Finally, on Sunday, Jelmer Schreuder presented how using data works in practice by giving an example of Utrecht campaign. Participants were then asked to do an exercise in which they analysed election data and provided insights on voter behaviour.

3. LJUBLJANA, storytelling event

Trainers and experts who implemented the programme were: **Benjamin van Es**, former campaign organizer and **Danielle Brouwer**, D66 Parliamentary Group Communication Officer.

On Friday, the event began with a round of introductions in which each participant presented their organization's story and how it's communicated to the public.

After a brief presentation of "theory", the programme of Saturday and Sunday consisted of a simulation training in which participants took on the role of communication officers of fictitious political parties from the county of Qumar.

Participants were divided into groups and asked to research their party's story based on available information. Following this exercise, groups were confronted with polling research affecting their stories and asked to modify their story accordingly. At the end of the day and as a final exercise, groups were given newspaper clippings containing scandals and events affecting their party to which they needed to provide a response.

On Sunday, participants once again were divided into groups and asked to do a recap of their stories based on lessons learned during the weekend. On the final session, participants applied these lessons learned to their "real" organization's stories.

OUTCOMES:

The ELF REN project successfully established a regional platform for exchange of good practices among participating organizations. The platform is currently centred on 3 Expert Groups – Policy, Data and Communications but proved to be an attractive training concept that could be expanded to include experts from other fields of work.

By connecting relevant experts from the region as well as their counterparts from the VVD and D66 as well as the ALDE Party, REN project facilitated the development of working relationships between experts of different organizations, creating the foundations of a network of knowledge and experience. Such a network should enable organizations to share ideas, experiences and insights from fields of political work that are very particular and almost incomparable to other types of work and usually only commercially available from marketing and research agencies.

REN training events also invited organizations to share how their internal processes work, in particular, to describe how they develop policies and do data analysis. Gathering this internal and confidential information is the first step towards getting a clear picture of the state of play in liberal organizations in CE and SEE regions. Repeated meetings should produce even more firsthand information and data that shall enable the partner organizations to create a blueprint of how their beneficiaries operate and identify their key needs. This is a key ingredient in promoting structural change and further professionalization of liberal organizations in the region.

REN also took advantage of the pool of local trainers trained in the ELF Regional Academy for Liberalism 2017. 2 local trainers were employed as moderators of the REN1 and REN2 events.

CONCLUSIONS AND POINTS TO IMPROVE:

REN concept proved to be an attractive method of capacity building for both partner organizations and beneficiary organizations as evidenced by the high level of trainers and a large number of applications for each of the training events.

REN also effectively accomplished the core goal of the project by creating a platform that enabled participants to exchange ideas, experiences and good practices of their organizations. Other goals such as creating a blueprint of internal operations and establishing a vibrant network of experts have been only partially achieved as the project presupposes a multiannual framework to complete its objectives.

Nonetheless, experiences gathered during implementation of the 2018 project also suggest a need to re-evaluate a number of elements of the programme as well as the ambitiousness of the project objectives:

- 1. More focus on teambuilding elements** – creating a community of experts requires not only formal elements such as trainings and presentations of good practices but also an effort to create bonds between people participating in the programme.
- 2. More time to train** – original programming of events envisaged three day events which was cut to two days due to budgetary constraints. This proved to be an obstacle for trainers as they had to rush through the weekend programme. Time limitations also constrained free discussion which is a cornerstone of a exchanging experiences effort.
- 3. Inclusion of pre-event prepwork and assignments** – in order to make the most of the exchange of good practices, it would be recommendable that participants come to events with completed assignments/ written papers on the topic. Written contributions make a better source of data for mapping internal processes of participating organizations.
- 4. Potential expert Groups management goal re-evaluation** – while the initial objective was to build expert groups that would eventually self-manage themselves, difficulties in creating and maintaining group cohesion and the fact that group coordination will inevitably be a very time consuming task suggests that management and initiative should remain with project leaders who would take into account feedback and initiative from the groups.

REPORT BY

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