



EECMD

AMID PANDEMIC

NEW CHALLENGES, NEW REALITY





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The COVID-19 pandemic that started in 2020 turned the world upside down and changed the lifestyle or future plans of many people or organizations. The EECMD was no exception. Although EECMD has a vast experience of working in digital and remote formats, the full transition to this model has revealed the need for significant fluctuations. So, how did the organization act in force majeure situation and how did the team adapt to the new reality?

In the current situation, two important issues were important: what problems the pandemic and its related constraints posed to the democratic process in the country, and what opportunities could be found to foster this situation; how would EECMD, as an organization, be able to switch to a new working format and continue its activities?

The first and most important thing was to maintain close communication between the government and the public, for which a series of online meetings with local government officials was planned in various cities of Georgia. In addition to the beneficiaries of the Democracy Schools, the meetings were attended by NGO representatives and civil activists. In such cases, the maintenance of an impartial and credible information channel is of utmost importance for the public. Meetings of this type have become an additional means for citizens to discuss their problems related to the pandemic, get the information they needed from the government officials, get reported on what the government was doing to solve the existing problems and, if possible, outline the ways to solve the crisis.

The second direction EECMD has been developing for a long time and has intensified its work during this period was to create digital opportunities for civil movements and political parties to be able to continue the due operation, manage internal processes within the party and strengthen communication with voters, even under quarantine restrictions. All this has become even more relevant in the election year.

The digital applications developed by the EECMD allow NGOs and political parties to easily move online activities such as policy discussions, internal elections, budget revisions, public debates, etc. All this is equally important even after the removal of the restrictions, because at this stage the development of future events is less predictable; organizations need flexibility and adaptability to the environment to be able to work effectively amid any constraints. ➤



Levan Tsutskiridze
EECMD Executive Director

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“During the crisis, EECMD bared a high standard of professionalism and worked efficiently in all areas: on the one hand, we created a communication channel between the civil society and the government and held several interesting online meetings and discussions; Having developed new opportunities for digital democracy, we intend to continue to be active in this regard in the future.

As for non-political issues, even though it was not easy, we swiftly and efficiently switched to the remote working model. Much of our work in the past has relied on digital capabilities - the organization’s complete communication, all documents and important materials are remotely available to the employees. Transfer of Democracy Schools and lecture-discussion spaces to the online format was another objective. Naturally, this process required some changes, which we managed to do efficiently, thanks to the professionalism of our staff.

One of the first events during the pandemic was the Graduation Ceremony of the Democracy Schools in Ukraine, which was creatively and dynamically conducted in digital format. Amid the quarantine, we tried to alleviate the difficulty of isolation for our listeners or staff, for which we offered a number of interesting meetings and lectures especially on acute topics such as domestic violence and human rights, which unfortunately became even more relevant during this period. We tried to adapt to the current situation and turn the crisis into an opportunity”.

- These efforts were also important to the organization in terms of showing the team the optimal ways to allocate working time, resources and human resources and use them effectively. During this period, EECMD staff showed themselves at their best. Our virtual offices were working full time and despite the stressful environment, the team members have shown to be top-notch professionals who can efficiently deal with any crisis.

COVID-19 AND POLITICAL PARTY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Political Party Assistance Program, one of the principle areas of the EECMD's activities, has been fully online since March 12th. It was not just up to the organization - the new format and circumstances had to be adapted to the EECMD partners and beneficiaries as well. The activities planned through joint efforts were carried out in a timely and successful manner.

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“I would like to single out the strategic planning process, which we have been carrying out since 2011, but it has never been transferred to the virtual space. Given the difficult situation during the pandemic, the project was successfully implemented. It is gratifying that the partner political parties have boldly cooperated with us not only in Georgia, but also in Moldova and Kyrgyzstan, where we carried out our activities envisaged by the project in March and April.

Obviously, the digital mode has its difficulties for both employees and consultants, as we had to work in a completely different format. Consequently, there was additional stress and workload. However, we achieved the set goal. Projects completed on time, participant activities and a quality end product are proof of this. We have had very fruitful months. After all, the program worked flexibly, and that flexibility is also to be emphasized. It is very important to decipher how adequately the team will be able to adapt to the new reality. Fortunately, this is one of the characteristics of us as a distinguished organization”.



Salome Mukhuradze
Senior Program Officer
for the Political Party
Assistance Program

Since March, a number of events have been held within the framework of the Political Party Assistance Program: **9 online meetings were held with the Women's Council of Lelo for Georgia party**, on the basis of which a two-year institutional development plan of the Council was elaborated; **Four workshops were convened with Kyrgyz and Moldovan participants under REACH for Democracy project**; Within the framework of the same project, the work on the research **“Rational and Irrational Aspects of Electoral Behavior of Female Voters”** was accomplished and then presented in the multi-party dialogue format. As for future plans, many things will continue to be online again until the end of the year. Face-to-face meetings and presentations are also planned for certain projects.

PANDEMIC AND DEMOCRACY EDUCATION PROGRAM

Remote working mode was a big challenge for the Democracy Education Program as well, however, important steps have been taken here in terms of transitioning to the online teaching format. The activities planned under the program were arranged in a way that the ongoing projects were not obstructed.

In total, 9 similar meetings were held with the participation of various officials. During the pandemic, Democracy School graduates demonstrated high civic responsibility and became actively involved in various types of volunteer work across the country, helping the most vulnerable groups - elderly people and people with disabilities.

In addition, the program included online meetings on various topical issues, such as “Hybrid threats coming from Russia, Kremlin’s anti-Western propaganda, information warfare and conspiracy theories”, as well as an online lecture on education and its current challenges.

Clearly, the pandemic has affected the future plans of the democracy education program. It was therefore impossible for the alumni to travel to the regions and meet with citizens as part of the USAID-funded DRIVE Democracy project. Hence, some of the events have been held online. The education program itself is fully operational and all activities are managed remotely. In the near future, in accordance with the quarantine regulations, small groups will also meet in a working format, where Democracy School Alumni will be able to plan their future activities.



Nino Khitarishvili

Senior Program Officer for
the Democracy Education
Program

” *“We had already selected new participants for the Batumi and Gori Democracy Schools for this period, and we had planned to start teaching in February, but later switched to the online mode. This format was a novelty for us, as the Democracy Schools program focuses on face-to-face meetings and discussions. Consequently, we had to make some changes: for example, we reduced the lecture time from 5 to 2 hours to keep the participants engaged and motivated. On the other hand, trainings were held twice a week in Gori and Batumi according to the traditional module.*

In addition, as part of a project funded by the Dutch Embassy, we hosted meetings with local government officials to increase their accountability. We had scheduled online meetings with mayors and governors, but instead of summarizing their annual activities, at this stage, we preferred to learn more on what was happening in the municipalities in terms of preventing and combating COVID-19 crisis and what additional activities were envisaged in this regard. We held meetings in 5 cities: Gori, Telavi, Batumi, Kutaisi and Tbilisi, which were attended by our alumni and the Ambassador of the Netherlands to Georgia, Maaïke Van Koldam”.

EECMD ACTIVITIES IN UKRAINE



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“Covid-19 crisis has yielded a special impact on our program activities across the country. Under the restrictions and quarantine regulations imposed by the Ukrainian government, we were forced to complete all five Democracy Schools online, thus adapting to the new reality. With the successful experience of Georgian Democracy Schools transitioning to digital format, EECMD was able to quickly develop an online teaching plan and streamline the curriculum, and current activities”.

Maia Machavariani

Senior Programs
Coordinator

The year 2020 started with the first online graduation ceremony of the EECMD Democracy School for graduates of study cycle 2019-2020. The event was attended by 75 students from four regions of Ukraine (Odessa, Dnipro, Lviv and Poltava).

To increase the involvement and motivation of Democracy School participants, EECMD has created an additional online platform - weekly online discussions/webinars on important issues in Ukraine such as the COVID-19 crisis, impact of the pandemic on human rights, domestic violence against women, current economic situation and the upcoming 2020 local elections in Ukraine. Graduates of Ukrainian and Georgian Democracy Schools, representatives of political parties, civil society, activists and others actively participated in the online discussions.



Oksana Lesyk
Program Coordinator in
Ukraine

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“In the wake of the crisis in Ukraine and the cessation of face-to-face meetings, the EECMD has developed an alternative teaching format to enable schools to function as effectively as possible from the new academic year. In addition to the curriculum modification, as well as the training of facilitators and trainers in digital format, it is planned to create a new digital platform that will be tailored to the specifics of school and increase participants’ motivation and interest. Keeping the contacts and strengthening the cooperation with local partners and stakeholders across Ukraine is one of our priorities, so hopefully we continue our activities in the regions this year by expanding the network and implementing common project both in the online and offline format”.

- **Eventually, EECMD successfully coped with all the difficulties brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.** Moreover, the organization has managed to create platforms that are flexible and fully adapted to the new challenges, which will make our activities even more efficient. At the same time, it will offer our partners the new type of assistance in order to better adapt to similar difficult working conditions in the future and to endure the activities that are of paramount importance for their own countries.