REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Across Europe and Eurasia, sharp distinctions have emerged between countries striving to make progress on democratic and economic reform, and those marked by anti-democratic tendencies. In countries with closing democratic space, CIPE works with its partners to use economic and business issues as a wedge to encourage dialogue and debate where other organizations lack the ability to operate. In countries that are seeking to strengthen democracy, CIPE is supporting efforts to overcome challenges to enacting and implementing comprehensive reforms at the national, regional, and local levels.

Around the region, CIPE works in a variety of ways with partners in the private sector, civil society, and government to ensure citizens are informed, to articulate reform priorities, to advocate for meaningful change, to pass and implement new laws; and to monitor implementation of reforms.
The 2013-2014 EuroMaidan protests marked a crucial shift in Ukraine, as citizens mobilized against the corruption and cronyism that long stifled the country’s development. Citizens’ desire to live in a prosperous and democratic society were echoed by the private sector’s demands for change, including closer integration with the West. Subsequent presidential and parliamentary elections brought to power a government with an ambitious pro-reform agenda, promising to overhaul Ukraine’s economic, social, and political environment.

As the government designs and implements necessary changes, independent voices must have channels to contribute to the dialogue on reform, and hold the government accountable for its pledges. In particular, CIPE recognized that greater efforts were needed to ensure representation of the interests of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Though SMEs represent over 75 percent of Ukraine’s total employment, and are crucial for building a thriving middle class who will be stakeholders in a democratic Ukraine, SMEs often have not had a seat at the table in the economic policy debate. Therefore, CIPE works closely with the business associations and chambers of commerce that represent SMEs, giving them the skills and tools to develop, propose, and advocate for key legal and regulatory reforms. CIPE is also providing technical assistance to Ukraine’s government to design and implement effective anti-corruption legislation that will create a more SME-friendly business environment.

From left: Svitlana Ichenskaya from CIPE partner Youth and Entrepreneurship in Sumy speaks at the National SME Conference in Kyiv, Ukraine; CIPE Ukraine holds a press conference on anti-corruption initiatives in Vinytsia, Ukraine; CIPE and its partners brainstorm advocacy issues at an SME conference in Kyiv, Ukraine as part of the USAID-funded SURE project.

Ukraine: In 2015, with significant SME input, four draft laws were developed and submitted to the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine’s Parliament. These laws are designed to eliminate unnecessary administrative burdens for SMEs, simplify tax procedures, improve access to justice for businesses, and better regulate claims filed by businesses. Further, in collaboration with the National Business Platform, a national coalition of associations, CIPE designed a web portal to convene online policy discussions, as well as to provide economic and business news, information about advocacy campaigns, and training materials. The portal allows business leaders to assess, comment on, and vote on draft proposals for policy changes. The portal has had over 60,000 unique visitors this year.
After a breakthrough election in 2009 brought a pro-reform government to power, Moldova embarked on a series of changes to align the country more closely with Europe, eventually signing an Association Agreement with the European Union. However, the reform process has repeatedly been stalled by a range of entrenched interests. Though parliamentary elections in 2014 gave a narrow win to parties with a declared pro-reform agenda, a massive banking scandal in 2015 demonstrated that civil society and the independent business community must remain vigilant in holding the government to its reform pledges.

Understanding the importance of ensuring that countries on Europe’s periphery consolidate as market democracies, CIPE is working closely with its Moldovan partners to improve governance, transparency, and the rule of law. To reinvigorate the reform agenda from the bottom-up, CIPE supports the National Business Agenda Network, a network of 35 business associations representing small and medium-sized enterprises, together with the country’s leading think tank, the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives. This coalition is advocating robust reforms, and calling for accountable and responsive government at the national and local levels.

CIPE is also working with Ukraine’s chambers of commerce to reform and build their organizations through training seminars on strategic planning, project management, fundraising, policy analysis, and legislative drafting. The country’s national Chamber has begun to evolve as a voice for reform, working with its regional branches to develop a 2016-2020 strategy document. In these ways, CIPE and its partners are building momentum for lasting democratic change in Ukraine, by strengthening institutions to enhance the rule of law, level the playing field for small business, root out corruption, and build a flourishing entrepreneurial ecosystem.

**Moldova:** The National Business Agenda (NBA) Network has become well-known in Moldova for advancing public-private dialogue on economic reform, and for enhancing cooperation among civil society, the business community, and government. The NBA Network has an impressive track record, for example spearheading a new national SME strategy with the Ministry of Economy. In 2015, Moldova’s government took concrete steps towards adopting over 50 percent of the NBA Network’s policy proposals, including initiatives to lower the cost of doing business and restructure the country’s technical and vocational universities to teach skills needed by the private sector. CIPE and the NBA Network have also institutionalized a way for citizens to provide input on important national debates, through so-called “public hearings,” where average Moldovans, civil society leaders, academics, entrepreneurs, and journalists can discuss issues with government officials, helping shape policy choices.

Recently, the NBA Network further strengthened its position as the country’s unified voice of the private sector by signing a memorandum of understanding with the Moldovan National Chamber of Commerce and Industry to develop local-level business agendas — a type of policy reform roadmap — in ten Moldovan regions.
ALBANIA
Strengthening the Role of Business in the Reform Process
Albanian Center for Economic Development

ARMENIA
Strengthening Pro-Reform Dialogue

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
Injecting Transparency and Accountability into Public Budgeting
Zasto Ne

GEORGIA
Governing for Growth

KAZAKHSTAN
Improving Anti-Corruption Legislation
Kazakhstan Bar Association

KYRGYZSTAN
Improving the Legal Framework for Business in Kyrgyzstan
BizExpert

MOLDOVA
Advocating for a Business-Led Anti-Corruption Agenda

UKRAINE
Activating Advocacy in Regional Coalitions

PROVIDING INDEPENDENT INPUT INTO THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS
Strengthening Anti-Corruption Compliance in Ukraine
Ukrainian Corporate Governance Professional Association

UNITING BUSINESS ADVOCACY

REGIONAL (EUROPE)
Building Unity and Support for Democratic and Market Values

Macedonia
Building the Next Generation of Youth Leaders
Youth Educational Forum

For more information, please contact CIPE at: eurasia@cipe.org

The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) strengthens democracy around the globe through private enterprise and market-oriented reform. CIPE is one of the four core institutes of the National Endowment for Democracy and an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Since 1983, CIPE has worked with business leaders, policymakers, and civil society to build the institutions vital to a democratic society. CIPE’s key program areas include enterprise ecosystems, business advocacy, democratic governance, and anti-corruption & ethics.

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