

Strategy of the Think Tank Fund 2011-12

Available at www.soros.org/initiatives/thinktank

Executive Summary

The Think Tank Fund (TTF) supports independent policy research centers that strengthen democratic processes by identifying political, economic, and social problems, and researching them in a nonpartisan and policy-relevant way. TTF further supports the interaction of policy research centers with governments to advance better policy responses, to involve nongovernmental stakeholders in policy debates, and disseminate their research findings widely. Much of the Fund's work until now has dealt with the sustainability of think tanks by supporting innovative policy research, improving of their external communication, and effective operations management¹. In addition to supporting well-established policy centers, the TTF has paid special attention to nurturing a new generation of think tanks and has underwritten research in topics that have been neglected in the region².

TTF pursues this mission through two distinct grantmaking programs: 1) Core and Institutional Grants, and 2) Open Society New Response Projects; and a nascent operational program 3) Innovation, Evaluation and Capacity Building of Think Tanks.

1. Core and Institutional Support to Independent Think Tanks³ - Building capacity for high quality policy research and advocacy

Policy development and debate are critical components for effective governance within a functioning democracy. Development of and access to policy alternatives, however, continues to be a serious challenge for all of the countries in the region. The result has been a dearth of high quality applied research with clear policy implications. Throughout the region only a small number of non-governmental organizations have emerged with a clear policy agenda. TTF provides up to 40 core and institutional grants per year to think tanks, producing relevant research creating both prospects for civil society, and an informed debate on governmental decision-making.

2. Open Society New Response Projects⁴ - Policy response to populism, intolerance, xenophobia and other threats to open society in new EU member states

There is a wide agreement that more should be done to systematically and consistently counter the persistent illiberal tendencies in the CEE region. However, given the current funding environment, tackling these types of issues is increasingly difficult. The aim of this competitive project fund, supporting up to 20 projects annually, is to confront negative tendencies and to promote policy research and alternatives on political and social issues critical to effective and accountable democratic governance in this region (and partly in comparative fashion with old EU members).

¹ We understand think tanks as being independent (and usually private or non-profit) policy research institutes containing people involved in studying a particular policy area or a broad range of policy issues, actively seeking to educate or advise policy makers and the public through a number of channels.

² This has particularly been the case with the new EU member states. We have supported research on subjects that have been purposely sidelined by political parties or ignored in the process of accession to the European Union.

³ *Geographical scope:* Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo, and Ukraine.

⁴ *Geographical scope:* Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. For the pilot twin-research scheme: 15 old EU member-states.

3. Innovation, Evaluation and Capacity Building of Think Tanks⁵ - Supporting innovative pilot policy-relevant research, capacity building for better communication and networking with other regions.

Providing grants is an essential but not sufficient part of supporting the region's think tanks. Although these organizations have made important strides in influencing policy processes, they still lag behind their more developed western peers in some important ways. TTF, in addition to its grantmaking, is devising a range of activities to support the fuller institutional development of think tanks in the region. The most pressing issues include enhancing think tanks' capacity for carrying out effective communication and advocacy strategies, understanding and using new media for effective presentation of research findings and advocacy, motivating young and talented researchers to join these organizations, or continue to improve their personal skills to undertake high quality analysis and exchanges beyond the boundaries of the region.

I. Key problems and issues to be addressed by TTF intervention

Achievements and successes

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, independent think-tanks in Central and Eastern Europe have been credited with keeping reform agendas alive during difficult times, challenging post-communist and new elites, and helping foreign specialists transform conceptual models into reforms tailored to local conditions. Slovakia's think-tanks have spearheaded a host of reform ideas – ranging from taxation to healthcare to anti-trust regulation – all of which were enthusiastically implemented once the pro-reform government took office, while Romania's think-tanks grew into the most resolute actors on governance issues once Romania's accession to the EU became feasible.

In Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania, too, think-tanks have had notable successes. They all witnessed the return of some Western-educated graduates in the last decade. These young people, equipped with rigorous academic knowledge and a belief in evidence-based policy analysis, created a new generation of think tanks that provide regular analysis. For example, GAP – the Institute for Advanced Studies from Prishtina cunningly analyzed the economic relations between Kosovo and Serbia explaining the economic rationale for the relative stability of the northern part of Kosovo. In Macedonia, the Center for Research and Policy Making revealed a tainted policy arrangement by which the local banks were unjustly collecting handsome profits from the second pillar of the pension system. This discovery resulted in the state's immediate response with a regulatory cut of the bank charges. These are only a few of the increasing successes that these small, effective, organizations are generating throughout the entire region.

Challenges and new opportunities for think tanks in the Western Balkans, South Caucasus, Moldova and Ukraine

In addition to weaknesses within the think tanks themselves, local demand for evidence-based policy research, especially outside the European Union, remains low for a number of reasons. First,

⁵ *Geographical scope:* In all of the above and exchanges with Latin America and South East Asia.

despite adopting freedom of information acts, public access to information is still erratic. Government data is scarce and often corrupted, as political deals tend to be made in a murky world of connections and backroom deal making. Second, consultations with stakeholders are cursory at best and do not galvanize public interest. The inability or unwillingness of state agencies to efficiently process sophisticated expert analysis reduces think tanks' impact on policy processes. Third, the rush to introduce, adapt or approximate EU regulation into/to national legislation has supplanted any urge for innovation in policy development. Finally, good governance is a mantra repeated in every ministry, but it is hardly given a second thought in practice. Implementation is not usually the point, as administrations may not even understand the laws the legislator has passed⁶.

In the light of these and many more challenges, influencing policy processes has become a ubiquitous aim of donor support (OSI included) to the non-profit sector in former communist countries. Many NGOs in the region have developed thematic expertise in the areas of their interest. Despite their ambitions, few of these organizations have managed to gain a nuanced understanding of how to solve the policy challenges that concern them. In particular, they often lack the capacity to carry out quality policy research or to propose viable alternatives to the existing policies. Sometimes, it is the non-grasping of policy processes and political incentives, rather than any shortage of thematic know-how, that undermines their ability to effect solutions⁷. The relative weakness or absence of think tanks in many contexts has thus curtailed the ability of the rest of civil society to influence policy. While other parts of the Open Society Institute remain committed to supporting human rights and watchdog groups in the traditional region of OSI, the Think Tank Fund provides continuous support to the independent research organizations – a small, but important segment of civil society.

The small and fragmented market for policy ideas across the entire region forces think tanks such as the European Movement Albania and the International Center for Policy Studies in Ukraine, both of which are highly critical of their governments, to rely almost solely on international support. While some donors⁸ have remained committed to think tanks, this support has often come at the expense of curtailing locally driven research agendas. Important but prescriptive donors, such as the European Commission, have dictated agendas, leaving little space for local ownership. Contrary to this approach, and given their countries' diverging paths, key policy problems are best identified by locals. While innovation in governance is most likely to happen with help of internationals, it will be only implemented when local policy analysts and makers assume ownership. There are

⁶ Analysis adapted from Buldioski, Goran. 2009. Think Tanks: Untangling the Gordian Knot of Policy Research in the Western Balkans. Western Balkans Security Observer English Edition (Western Balkans Security Observer English Edition), issue: 11-12/2009, pages: 53-67. Available at on www.ceeol.com.

⁷ This is not to suggest that think tanks miss thematic expertise, but rather to emphasize that good think tanks complement their thematic expertise with an understanding of the policy and political processes.

⁸ To name a few: the Balkan Trust for Democracy, the Black Sea Trust, National Endowment for Democracy, CEE Trust, and Open Society Institute's Think Tank Fund.

plenty of good technical solutions and sector strategies out there. Regrettably, most are not followed through on, or remain blocked by dysfunctional political processes. Current efforts on monitoring the implementation of policies, laws, and the execution of adopted budgets at the European, national, and local levels are either insufficient or incompetently carried out. Finally, there is a need to continue to support think tanks to act as a helping hand in envisioning a future for their societies; providing accurate and in-depth ad hoc analysis; monitoring policy implementation; and educating politicians and civil servants - their future customers. For these reasons, the Think Tank Fund requires policy research and advocacy agendas to be set by the grantees themselves in cooperation with other civil society organizations. The Fund's core and institutional grants are a key support in the execution of these agendas.

Challenges and new opportunities for think tanks in the Eastern member-states of the European Union

The issues that concern the Open Society Institute in the eastern EU10 member states⁹ continue to grow, despite EU accession. Increased populism, often at the expense of minorities, a surge of radical right-wing forces and the spreading of intolerance, and the fragmentation of identities and social changes that outpace the legal processes and democratic institutions are some of the rising challenges in new member states. While the European Union has continued to shower the region with funds for infrastructural projects, service delivery, and the advancement of open markets, it has shied away from supporting work on political and social issues that might even remotely be interpreted as interference in member states' internal affairs. This has led to a paradoxical situation in which think tanks have access to funds for a myriad of research topics that are in line with the EU priorities, but have not been able to address the most burning political issues of their societies.

The global economic crisis has only exacerbated these trends. Uncertainty and a sense of powerlessness are now characterizing many groups across European societies. This has created negative responses to the globalization processes, phenomena that have likened the east EU countries with their more developed western peers. The Think Tank Fund, through its Open Society New Response Projects, has already become a vehicle for generating new knowledge through the monitoring and analysis of existing populist policies and the presentation of new arguments for alternative policy solutions in the east. As such, the small grantmaking line has become an incubator of new ideas and has assisted think tanks in keeping some unpopular issues on the policy agenda (e.g. political party financing, monitoring government strategies for the inclusion of minorities and delivering on pre-election promises).

However, this only partly addresses current needs. In addition to the knowledge and ideas that are generated, it is essential to better frame and present the findings and to engage them in concrete

⁹ The ten eastern members of the European Union are comprised of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. In this strategy we refer to them as the new EU member states or the eastern EU member states.

advocacy at the national and European levels. TTF could further lead an effort in experimentation with new methods and by trying out new approaches, supporting networking with western European think tanks, and helping the region's think tanks with their advocacy efforts. Part of those efforts will remain confined to the traditional region, while the rest - especially those addressing intolerance in European societies - would aim to support comparative research projects and corresponding advocacy at European and national levels carried out jointly by eastern and western European think tanks addressing the same issue across borders¹⁰.

II. Summary of principal strategic priorities planned for 2011-12

1. Core and Institutional Support to Independent Think Tanks - *Building capacity for high quality policy research and advocacy*

Geographical focus: The Think Tank Fund, under this funding area, supports policy centers in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo, and Ukraine.

Policy development and debate are critical components for effective governance within a functioning democracy. Development of and access to policy alternatives, however, continues to be a serious challenge for many of the countries in which the Think Tank Fund is active. The result has been a dearth of high quality applied research with clear policy implications. Throughout the region only a small number of non-governmental organizations have emerged with a clear policy agenda. Using a variety of approaches, these organizations are producing relevant research and creating openings for civil society in the policy development process. The Think Tank Fund provides core and institutional support to think tanks working to promote alternative policy options, informed debate on governmental decision-making, and constructive advocacy interventions that enhance policy development processes.

The Fund understands core funding to include basic institutional costs such as payroll, rents and maintenance as well as some of the core program development expenses (e.g. publications, co-funding for key projects). Core funding should allow an organization to consider its strategy, to support developmental and innovative research, improve its communication and advocacy strategy, and to explore new areas of work. Groups are expected to emphasize institutional development and growth in their proposals, rather than simple maintenance or discrete project activities. While awarding grants on an annual basis, the Fund usually makes three year-long commitments in order to cater to mid-term planning and encourage the increased sustainability of its grantees.

¹⁰ The new program component would aim to support the efforts of OSI Brussels and their new program "Tolerance in European Societies." The decision making on the supported project will be made jointly by the TTF Sub-board and OSI Brussels.

The Think Tank Fund currently directs its support primarily to those groups examining economic, political and social reform issues in their countries, with an emphasis on governmental responsibility and effectiveness. The TTF strategy is not to support specific issues or themes but to encourage an approach to public policy work that promotes inclusive policy change using a combination of methods based on research and advocacy. Policy centers must undertake thorough research and develop thematic expertise in order to inform public debate responsibly and to position themselves as credible partners for the government and other actors. Recognizing that different issues will necessitate varying means of engagement with the government— often requiring an adversarial approach—organizations should be able to influence the government in both defining priorities and developing policy options. Meaningful communication strategy and public advocacy, therefore, is an essential ingredient of the contribution think tanks make to the policy development process.

In order to ensure that the policy development process does not end with simple declarations, but rather changes with concrete practices, some degree of monitoring is required. All too often changes in policy exist only on paper. By galvanizing public demand and monitoring governmental policy implementation, organizations not only promote policy options but also advocate change. Although many national and international stakeholders acknowledge monitoring, few of them support meaningful and comprehensive monitoring activities. We encourage think tanks to prioritize the needs they see as most pressing and act on them, rather than only be led by donors' priorities, a regular occurrence across the region.

The Think Tank Fund understands that the extent to which organizations employ each of these tools will vary, depending upon the national political context, the capacities of the individual organization, and the issues being addressed (thus tailoring each grant to the needs of the think tank in question). To this end, each TTF grant underwrites a unique combination of programmatic and organizational expenses that help an organization to advance their research and advocacy activities, improve quality of their work and outreach, but also increase the internal organizational capacity. In order to narrow down the myriad aspects of think tank operation, TTF staff has established specific performance indicators for monitoring of all grantees. Our performance indicators are clustered in three sections: a) quality of analytical products, b) communication and advocacy strategy, and c) mission, governance, management, internal development, institutional capacity and overall organizational sustainability. The grants and the organizational progress are systematically monitored and evaluated by the staff at these multiple levels. Occasionally, we also commission independent evaluation reports to complement our internal monitoring and evaluation efforts (app. five to seven grantees per year). This degree of monitoring, which is inexpensive albeit time consuming, is essential for developing our program's profound understanding of the operations and trends in development of think tanks specifically and the state of policy analysis in general throughout the region.

In the last three years, we have witnessed another emerging trend. Reputable advocacy groups and civil society organizations engaged in various developmental issues have realized the need for solid, evidence-based policy research to back up their advocacy efforts. Given that the small community of think tanks in their countries could not provide timely research on all issues, these advocacy organizations have started carrying out their own research. A few have resolved to develop their own internal research departments/units. The Think Tank Fund pilot grant awarded to Co-Plan – Institute for Habitat Development, and its rise into a respected policy research organization in addition to being development NGO is a case in point. Based on their excellent field work in urban planning, municipal and regional management, Co-Plan has built a commendable research department. The policy analysts have used the first hand experience and data collected through the organization’s extensive field work to suggest better policy solutions and they have been able to directly monitor the implementation of national policies at the municipal and regional level.

Building on this and several other positive examples, in 2011 we would aim to identify organizations that have already expressed interest, demonstrated some talent for policy research and produced few successful policy studies/briefs. Building or enhancing policy research departments of these organizations, improving their competences to carry out research in-house and assisting them to successfully integrate this department into the organizational design will be our main tasks. The key criteria for selection would be that the research component / unit becomes a complementary part of their work without putting at risk to their original functions; that there is a solid fundraising strategy to fund the analysis component beyond TTF funding, and the impact of advocacy activities is increased thanks to enhanced research. The most likely candidates for such support would be the region’s most developed advocacy organizations, some national-wide NGOs specialized in development issues or possessing a thematic expertise (e.g. migration in Group 484 in Serbia).

In this type of support to specialized units/departments, the Think Tank Fund identifies another sustainable model for promoting and supporting evidence-based policy research in the region. While the Fund’s strategy would continue to primarily rely on supporting full-fledged think tanks, a minor portion of our funds will be dedicated to supporting nascent research departments within recognized and developed organizations whose primary function is either advocacy or development. In this manner, we believe we will strengthen the overall capacity of civil society for carrying out evidence-based policy research.

2. Open Society New Response Projects - Policy Response to Populism, Intolerance, Xenophobia and other Threats to Open Society in new EU member states

Geographical scope: The Think Tank Fund, under this funding area, supports policy centers in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

For the pilot twin-research scheme: 15 old EU member-states

The political developments in Central Europe over the last four years have revealed that populism and anti-democratic values continue to thrive in some new EU member states. An increasing number of governments show little interest in the independent oversight of government activities, the protection of minority rights, media independence and the rule of law. Public discourse in some of the new EU member states has taken a particularly negative turn with attacks against vulnerable groups and minority communities as well as against NGOs promoting tolerance and accountability. Debates within EU member states on issues such as minority integration, immigration and security exacerbate negative discourse at the local level. Civil society in the region seems ill-prepared to counter these illiberal tendencies systematically and consistently.

Most CEE think tank leaders agree that more should be done, and that liberal democratic values are at the core of their missions. However, given the current funding environment, tackling these types of issues is increasingly difficult. The Think Tank Fund response was to create a competitive project fund that supports established policy centers in the region. The aim of this grantmaking line was to confront negative tendencies and to promote policy research and alternatives on political and social issues critical to effective and accountable democratic governance in their own countries. Open Society New Response Projects tackled the key social and political policy areas by providing think tanks with the opportunity to: a) sustain their work on sensitive and unpopular social and political issues, particularly work that seeks to improve the position of disadvantaged and marginalized groups; b) promote transparent and effective democratic processes in their countries and to counteract illiberal tendencies; and c) advance systems for monitoring the performance of governmental institutions in ensuring tolerance and public accountability, thus counteracting threats to open society.

With the rest of the European Union suffering from the similar trends, it is no longer possible to address some issues only in the Eastern EU member states. Creation of political discourses and negative examples of politicians' xenophobia as well as prejudiced responses of public in western societies have provided convenient excuses to eastern politicians for their own behavior inciting intolerance. In both east and west, liberal forces are yet to find proper response to mitigate or counteract the politics of fear that underlines xenophobia (for example influencing policies on immigration, existing provisions for cultural diversity and intolerant behavior towards various

types of minorities). Furthermore, in spite of the democratic set up and fair elections in all of these countries, resurgent authoritarianism tendencies and populist politics are eroding the trust and roles in core democratic institutions such as constitutions, judiciary and independent media to curtail xenophobia and intolerance. Finally, given the complex set-up of the European Union, the emerging trends against open society could be effectively tackled only if simultaneously addressed at national level– in both old and new EU-member states–, and at EU level¹¹.

‘Where OSI could particularly add value is to experiment with new methods, trying out new approaches and pilot projects which existing NGOs and other civil society actors could then take on and adapt to their own spheres. OSI is in an almost unique position among foundations at this time in having both the resources and freedom to innovate and experiment – while most organisations are retrenching and playing safe.’¹² In 2011, the Think Tank Fund, contributing to the general goals of Open Society Institute Foundation Europe (OSIFE), is taking the OS New Response projects in a new direction. We intend that half of the projects we fund will focus on issues around tolerance in European societies, complementing and providing programmatic input to the work under OSIFE, led by OSI Brussels Office. The projects supported by the Think Tank Fund will deal with joint initiatives of organizations in eastern and western EU members into comparative research and advocacy efforts tackling racism and xenophobia, while OSIFE is focusing primarily on pilot projects in Western Europe. Initial ideas about projects that we would be exploring include¹³:

- Trends in public and elite attitude: build a clearer picture of the beliefs, values and fears that underlie xenophobic attitudes in the elite and public (for example, to improve the evidence to support advocacy on measures of tolerance in open societies, explore if the views have really changed or whether intolerant behavior is simply more manifest and publicly reported now)
- Monitoring national and EU policies in fostering tolerant societies and providing for cultural diversity and the resources EU member states and the European Commission engage in carrying out those policies
- Analyzing and counteracting extremist political parties (For example identifying the common features of intolerant electoral platforms; scrutinizing political party finances of far right, exploring foreign policy of far right parties – often exposing murky links with leadership of non-democratic countries)

¹¹ The concept paper Tolerance in Europe prepared by OSI Brussels provides more thorough analysis of the underlying trends and OSI response as a network (concrete work by programs such as OSJI, Youth Initiative, Information Program, At Home in Europe and others)

¹² Quotation from Tolerance in European Societies – Concept paper drafted by Heather Grabbe in cooperation with Fiona Napier

¹³ List to be finalized after concluding discussion with OSI Brussels.

3. Innovation, Evaluation and Capacity Building of Think Tanks

Supporting innovative pilot policy-relevant research, capacity building for better communication and networking

Geographical focus: The Think Tank Fund, under this funding area, supports policy centers in all countries where it operates.

Providing grants is an essential but not sufficient part of supporting the region's think tanks. Although these organizations have made important strides in influencing policy processes, they still lag behind their more developed western peers in some important ways. The Think Tank Fund, in addition to its grantmaking, is devising a range of activities to support the fuller institutional development of its grantees and other think tanks in the region. The most pressing issues include enhancing think tanks' capacity for carrying out effective communication and advocacy strategies, understanding and using new media for effective presentation of research findings and advocacy, motivating young and talented researchers to join these organizations or continue to improve their personal skills to undertake high quality analysis and exchanges beyond the boundaries of the region. We will address these areas with a view to complementing other efforts in the field and the existing discussion space created by the PASOS network.

Improving their advocacy and communication strategies

Independent think tanks have tended to perceive communications as an optional, marginal activity. However, the creation of a comprehensive annual communications strategy is becoming integral to the activity of any think tank. Every organization requires a communications strategy to maximize its work's impact, but technological advancement and the perception that there is abundant information and analyses at policy makers' disposal¹⁴ complicate the task of choosing appropriate channels of communication.

Building on the relevance and success of our previous events, we will make this capacity building permanent with an aim to see all our grantees develop comprehensive communication strategies and to have at least one staff member of each of the 50 grantees acquire skills for effective communication with media and other target groups. To this end, we plan to organize two seminars per year in the following two years, in cooperation with PASOS and hosted by a reputable think tank in a western capital. Additionally, we would aim to award small organizational grants of \$2,000-3,000 USD for follow up work after the seminars. These tailored interventions would aim to assist specific organizations in devising and implementing their own communication strategy. The small grants will be awarded on demand and on a case-by-case basis.

¹⁴ Even though this statement is correct for Western European democracies, even in a region such as the CEE where research and analysis is not so common, the number of providers and would-be providers of policy analysis is increasing.

Data Initiative and Visualization of Policy research

One of the most valuable resources for policymakers and citizens concerned with a public issue is a high-quality data source. In transitional and emerging democracies such data sources are often scarce. Efforts to use evidence-based policy arguments to support advocacy and policymaking projects have often necessitated the creation and maintenance of information in databases, files, and collections of information buried in narrative text. In 2010, the OSI Information Program and the Think Tank Fund piloted a call for small project proposals up to \$25,000 USD to bring these data sources to light, and to enhance their usefulness by expansion, maintenance, and use of this information¹⁵. Forty-two organizations applied -- an indication of a well-received call -- and five were granted support for their projects. This pilot experience revealed three major trends in relation to this topic: many organizations possess large amounts of data and have solid ideas about their additional policy use; very few of them are aware of the relevant technical tools available for producing machine-readable data and user friendly formats; research organizations (think tanks) and advocacy watchdogs involved in joint undertakings would be the most effective partnerships to achieve success with these projects.

In 2011-12, in cooperation with the Information program we will continue to explore this area by organizing two seminars/workshops for both think tanks and advocacy organizations; we will also continue to operate the small grants scheme together with the IP program. With these activities, we aim to improve the understanding of new media and new data technologies among think tanks in the region, while showcasing up to 10 innovative projects in visualization of policy research projects per year.

Fellowships and Paid Internships

Human capital is the biggest asset of each and every think tank. In securing reliable and high-quality researchers, think tanks compete with much more powerful competitors i.e. governments, state agencies, private companies, banks and consulting companies. The region's think tanks therefore have to devise special motivation strategies to retain existing staff and attract new talented individuals to opt for this career. As a small part of civil society, despite being present in the public life, think tanks are not the first choice to fresh graduates who are interested in embarking on research/policy careers. Likewise, for people working in the think tanks, notwithstanding that monetary remuneration is important, it is crucial to have opportunities to grow professionally and further develop their skills, to learn new things and meet other colleagues across the continent and beyond.

¹⁵ Projects funded under this proposal seek to: a) Propose new uses of data for advocacy and target non-traditional stakeholders; b) Develop challenging and complementary information sets for broader application in the policy sphere; and c) Use data sets to challenge commonly accepted facts in a given policy field.

The Think Tank Fund has supported the efforts of think tanks by providing paid internships for returnees – fresh graduates from Western Universities -- and fellowships for junior researchers employed in one of the region’s think tanks to visit and spend up to three months in another of the regional or Western European think tanks. We plan to continue these two programs. The paid internship that we did not use in 2009 and 2010 will be revived in cooperation with the HRGGP and Network Scholarship Program. We will aim to support five to seven returnees to assume posts in think tanks interested in such a possibility. Regarding the fellowship for junior researchers, we plan to continue our successful collaboration with the European Fund for the Balkans¹⁶ in providing 10-12 fellowships per year. With these activities, we hope to help young, talented people enter the think tanks, assist the think tanks in recruiting new talent and provide additional skills and motivation for established young researchers within their ranks.¹⁷

Networking and exchange

Working with most of the region’s think tanks over the years we were surprised to learn of their limited cooperation and exchange with western European think tanks. Shaped by US experience and funded by US private and governmental resources, many of the CEE think tanks have developed a better understanding of think tank work in the US than those in the European capitals (to be truthful, this type of work is relatively new in some European countries). While US experience and transfer of know-how has played a paramount role in the creation and development of think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe, now there is a need for these organizations to broaden their horizons by learning from and exchanging practices with peers from other regions such as Western Europe, Latin America and South East Asia.

Through our previous experiences organizing events such as the one with the London-based think tanks and supporting fellowships to some Brussels-based think tanks, we identified the possibility for greater involvement and exchange of know-how. As mentioned above, we will continue our activities on communication strategies in cooperation with various western European think tanks. Judging from our experience to-date, some junior researchers will certainly choose western European think tanks for their fellowships. However, the new program on “Tolerance in European Societies” launched by the OSI Brussels creates additional opportunities. Using it as an overarching framework, we will foster building networks between Western European think tanks and think tanks in the OSI traditional region to build the capacity of the latter (including but not limited to advocacy and communication capacity).

¹⁶ The Think Tank Fund and the European Fund for the Balkans provide 25,000 EUR each in a scheme that supports 10-12 fellowships annually (max 7,000 USD per fellowship). EFB carries out all the administrative and promotional work as well grant administration.

¹⁷ In line with the goals of other OSI programs we are exploring possibilities to earmark some fellowships to returnees that have been supported by other OSI programs (OSI Roma Initiatives, a provider of a great number of scholarships for Masters Studies of the Roma minority, has expressed interest in this line of our work. We will explore possibilities for synergy between the two programs and maybe join efforts in 2011-12).

In cooperation with the OSI East East: Partnership Beyond Borders Program, we believe that there is a particular niche for facilitating and fostering direct bilateral exchange between think tanks based in the OSI traditional region and the new regions of interest to OSI (Latin America and South East Asia are to be part of this piloting effort, while other regions may be added if the pilot is successful)¹⁸. Open Society Institute, in line with its increasing mandate to support open society globally, is probably the single most relevant organization to pilot such a niche area – fostering bilateral exchanges between thinkers from two or three regions at peer level. East East: Partnership Beyond Borders, truthful to its founding goal, “promotes the movement of ideas by convening people to create communities of interest and to engage in practical collaborative actions.” The Think Tank Fund has become the region’s most preeminent donor and a pivotal locus for the development of think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe. Supporting bilateral exchanges between think tanks from the OSI traditional region and those in Latin America, and the traditional region and South East Asia will add value to and represent a smooth upgrade to the current work of both programs.

The overall goal of this joint initiative (in its pilot stage) is to bridge together critical masses of experts and policy analysts to discuss a specific issue and to compare policy solutions and pilot global thinking. The program would furthermore aim to contribute to the movement of ideas by convening people to create communities of interest and to engage in practical collaborative actions. We would aim to support up to five such exchanges in 2011.

III. A note on advocacy and communication

The Think Tank Fund, being primarily a grantmaking program, does not plan to initiate and suggest any advocacy approaches on behalf of OSI. Instead, the fund continuously supports and encourages

¹⁸ Expanded rationale for this novelty: Globalization processes have significantly altered the face of applied social science and policy-relevant research. While the developed “western” world still holds the leadership in this area, other regions and/or continents are increasingly becoming laboratories not only for policy experimentation but also for policy innovation. For example, the last 20 years of democratic and market transition in Central and Eastern Europe have been marked by a plethora of various experiences of policy design and implementation, some of which are in the process of significantly departing from their originating models. Several countries in South East Asia have been lauded as the world’s economic growth champions. The response of the research communities to these realities has been very centralized. International behemoths such as the United Nations agencies and the World Bank have responded by creating their own global epistemic communities. The Global Development Network, the latest addition to the UN family of organizations, perhaps is the best illustration of this still omnipresent “centralized approach.” Activities of such organizations usually bring regions such as Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe to one table only as part of global activities/studies focusing on the comparative aspects. They rarely dedicate special time for direct and bilateral exchange leaving this bit to comparative researchers (in centralized fashion). In addition to these ‘centralized’ efforts at global level, the rest of the efforts are almost exclusively connected with transfer of know-how from a donor country to a recipient country (e.g. Overseas Development Institute or OECD). Notwithstanding these “centralized” or “aid-inspired” exchanges/transfers of know-how, we believe that there is a particular niche for facilitating and fostering direct bilateral exchange between peers based in the OSI traditional region and the new regions of interest to OSI (Latin America and South East Asia to be part of this piloting effort).

the advocacy activities of its grantees. To this end, it regularly links its grantees with the OSI office in Brussels and other OSI programs, thus fostering potential partnerships. Similarly, the fund regularly provides information and feedback to OSI advocacy activities¹⁹ pertaining to the EU Neighborhood Policy, the EU accession of the Western Balkan countries and the newly launched work on tolerance in European societies by OSIFE.

V. Geographical Foci (dots indicate planned support for 2011-12)

	Western Balkans	South Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova	New EU member states	Western Europe (only in collaboration with new EU member states)	Other OSI regions (only through exchanges not direct support)
Core and Institutional Grants					
Core grants to think tanks	✓	✓			
Core grants for developing policy research units	✓	✓			
OS New Response projects					
Regular research and advocacy projects			✓		
Comparative research East-West			✓	✓	
Capacity Building					
<i>Improving advocacy and communication strategies</i>	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Data Initiative and Visualization of Policy research</i>	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Fellowships and Paid Internships</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Networking and exchange</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

¹⁹ OSI Brussels coordinates these activities.