



Luisa Balbi, Civil Society Engagement Unit: A year working on public control mechanisms

With the new year off to a start, it's time to look back at what happened over the course of 2020. Besides dealing with the unexpected pandemic, 2020 was a year which shone a light on public control mechanisms. It is this that is a *fil rouge* connecting the dots of my work over the year. The working year started symbolically on 8 January 2020, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). This MoU, amongst other things, acknowledged the role of civil society in establishing public oversight and the need to protect the civic space for this to happen. Last November, in collaboration with the newly established Agency for Anti-Corruption in Uzbekistan and with the participation of relevant anti-corruption authorities from all the countries in Central Asia, we kicked off a joint EBRD-UNODC project aimed at supporting the implementation of the 2019 Public Control Law in Uzbekistan through the establishment of a private-public platform for dialogue. We are also aiming to consolidate the mechanisms of public participation for the review of the United Nations Anti-Corruption Convention, the only legally binding instrument on anti-corruption in the world.

On Valentine's day, together with the Legal Transition Team (LTT), we hosted the signing of an MoU with Open Contracting Partnership, an NGO at the frontline of utilising open data for making governments accountable on public procurement issues. The outbreak of the COVID-19 emergency disrupted our original plan. However, it also spurred new thinking on how to monitor the sudden and increasing volume of spending to face the pandemics and provide oxygen to the economies. We kicked off two pilots respectively in Kosovo and the Kyrgyz Republic, which are already publishing procurement according to open data contracting standard methodology.

The collaboration with Open Contracting Partnership also led to the integration of a monitoring component to the innovative publishing of smart contracts in Greece and Poland, a project funded by Director General (DG) Regio and led by LTT. Here, a civil society component has been mainstreamed to embed a public control mechanism in a larger project related to procurement and legal reform.

While I was delivering introductory remarks for the launch of the Business Integrity Country Assessment for Serbia in late December, I realised how much persistence is required here at the EBRD to achieve results that go beyond the myopia of the one-year assessment cycle. The partnership with Transparency International started a while ago, when as a Bank we were involved in the early work of developing a methodology aimed at assessing business integrity based on a set of indicators identified through a strong multi-stakeholder process. Five years down the road, in 2020 we launched two Business Integrity Country Assessments reports respectively for Romania and Serbia, which are based on the works of national advisory groups on anti-corruption.

In early 2020, the European Commission shared the findings of the evaluation of an integrity pacts pilot implemented in 11 countries and associated to 18 investment projects. This led to lot of exchange and thinking about how the integrity pact tool could be adapted and associated with EBRD investments to ensure public participation in the planning and monitoring of investments for the benefit of the communities they serve. Lessons learnt - ever stop exploring- this is already a good starting point for next year.

Inclusive public participation is the first premise of any public control mechanism, which are essential components of democratic processes and related systems of check and balances. This is the next layer of focus and engagement for a transition that is just, centred around people and our precious environment - already a good objective for 2021!
