Eurasia Meeting 10/4/2013

* Questions to be answered in this meeting, and in following meetings
  + Why are we doing this, in this way?
  + What is the framework for restructuring?
* Programs included in the new Eurasia structure
  + Central Eurasia Project
  + Russia Project
  + Office of International Operations
  + Caucasus and Central Asia Project
  + National Foundations
* Structure of the meeting
  + Chris Stone will speak on the big picture, timing, changes, geographic scope
  + Leonard Benardo will clarify the specifics of how this work is shaping up
  + Sandra Schwarzer will talk about the idea of how we are proceeding with the structuring
  + Q&A

**Chris Stone** opened the meeting, introducing what will be a series of conversations over next few years assessing the restructuring plan as it progresses. He covered the following points in his discussion of the issues at hand:

* Trips to the region over the course of the last 2 years have provided CS with a “tremendous education” regarding our work there, and the work of the National Foundations. He cited the National Foundations and the local knowledge that OSF possesses as a unique quality which separates OSF from other donors working in the region. The goal of the restructuring process will be to blend our local work/knowledge with the more global thematic programs. CS also cited Tajikistan as an example of a difficult context in which the value of our work on the ground was immediately apparent. He recognized that some of the most difficult and creative work is happening in Eurasia.
* In the plan for restructuring the current programs at OSF, he plans to have 7 directors with whom he will work directly, and who in turn will be able to work more closely with their regional foundations and geographic programs. Can we do more to overcome managerial division between regional and thematic programs?
  + The hope is that by integrating some of the support work more closely with thematics and geographies, we will be able to take better take advantage of opportunities for close collaboration between National Foundations and geographic/thematic programs
  + For other regions at OSF, such as the Middle East and Africa, there is already a structure in place that is conducive to this restructuring, and therefore the process has been relatively easy
    - This has involved changing the job descriptions of the regional Program Director roles to make them more authoritative and create a better line of reporting within the organization’s structure
  + However, the Eurasian region has proven to be the most complex and the area where we have the biggest stakes; the fact that the region is undergoing tremendous change currently only adds to its complexity
    - Some major issues that are affecting the environment in which we work in Eurasia include: the Euro crisis; the changing role of EU in the region; Russia’s changing global posture and internal politics; changes in the presence of NATO and the US in Afghanistan(which will most certainly influence changes in Central Asian nations)
    - There are also major dynamics within the region, and also within individual countries that will be affecting our work over the next few years; these include the large investment OSF has made on education in the region, the legacy of work done using the Emergency Fund, and OSF’s long-time campaigning work
    - This dynamism has caused CS be dissuaded from making a large and permanent structural change at this point
  + The one change that has appeared obvious during the course of the transition has been to associate the Western Balkans and Albania with the growing work we have in Europe
    - OSF will not putting these programs directly under the new Initiative for Europe but they will be linked in order to encourage increasing relations and collaboration
  + For Ukraine, Moldova, South Caucasus and Central Asia, National Foundations, Central Eurasia Project and Russia Project, the work in these regions could move in many different directions depending on what develops over the course of the next few years
    - For the time being, the goal is to learn some lessons from the restructuring of the Latin America program and Asia program as well as to take time to understand the changing dynamics in the Eurasian region
    - Then, in a couple of years, we will see how OSF has evolved and how the region has evolved, and come to a long term solution
  + In the interim, OSF is recruiting a 3 year contract for a Program Director for Eurasia
    - CS is also asking us to reconfigure our work to take advantage of increasing opportunities for collaboration, cooperation, and use of our local knowledge as much as possible over the next 3 years
  + The Global Board used its meeting in September to make an assessment of work in Russia over last few years
    - George Soros commented on how impressed he was with OSF’s deep knowledge of Russia
    - Ivan Krastev emphasized that it is very important to take a few years to see what changes occur in the region and he has the support of board for this approach
    - CS noted that OSF has a huge staff consisting of hundreds of people based in the region and that these people bring a lot of knowledge and creativity to OSF’s work
    - There is no simple way to capture the politics/context of the region or our work in it and there is still a lot of opportunity to bring it together in various ways
* **Q&A with Chris Stone**
  + **Daniel Sershen**- He points out that even though OSF sees the Eurasia restructuring as a temporary arrangement, it still has an impact on the staff and constitutes a big change for folks who are here in comparison to the way we have previously operated. So while there is a lot of excitement, there is an equal amount of anxiety involved in moving towards a different structure. He asks CS to comment on this.
  + **Chris Stone**- OSF has realized through the example of OSFJI’s transition that the challenge of throwing out everything and completely restructuring (starting from scratch) is both good and bad because while this process generates a lot of new ideas and creativity, it also becomes challenging because there can be a loss of prior knowledge. However, oppositely there is a worry about inertia stemming from long standing relationships and ways of doing things. The key is to find a balance between both approaches, and the goal here is to find a structure that balances these two approaches; something that keeps in mind the long standing relationships and knowledge but still mixes things up and brings in something new
    - CS doesn’t see this change as temporary—in 2 years there will be a big reassessment but it will be a developmental process throughout the entire period of transition, beginning now.
  + **Jonas**🡪What kind of profile are you looking for in the Program Director position?
  + **Chris Stone**🡪 Acknowledges that OSF is really open about that. While he is certain that they won’t find the perfect person, OSF is currently looking for a way to take advantage of who is available while also maintaining a balance with the rest of the team
    - The main characteristics he is looking for in a Program Director are as follows: regional knowledge, linguistic ability, strong cross cultural competence
      * roots, experience, and ambition in the region, not someone who is looking to do something else somewhere else
      * someone with knowledge, experience, ambition, and commitments to the region
      * substantive expertise, managerial team building skills, horizontal collaborative skills

**Rayna Gavrilova** took over after Chris Stone, and explained why the term “Eurasia” has been chosen for the new program and how this program will measure up in comparison to other regional programs. Rayna explained that while we are reluctant to use phrase “Eurasia,” it has proven to be the best option, given the lack of better alternatives. Rayna explained that the Eurasia unit will be an interim structure that has the potential to evolve into something bigger after the initial two years of its existence. The acting regional director who will be responsible for representing the program to the Board and senior management is Lenny Benardo. The new Program Director executive position will be responsible for running the day-to-day operations of the Eurasia Program.

**Lenny Benardo** spoke about the logistics leading up to the end of the planned 18 month transition period. Chris Stone has a very clear vision of seeing the transition end at the 18 month period, however, Lenny sees the transition continuing past this point in some ways. Lenny lamented the lack of communication and transparency heretofore around the restructuring process, but given the complexity of the issues and the broader reorganization of OSF as a whole, it was unavoidable. He further elaborated on the new Program Director position, indicating that it will be open to both internal and external applicants.

Lenny then went on to describe the specifics of the new interim structure for the Eurasia Program. The new structure will consist of three pillars, and this is different from the new structures of the other geographic programs. A regional manager will head up each of the pillars and will report to the Program Director. The three pillars while being distinct, will hopefully encourage fluidity and collaboration across the board as opposed to the previous almost silo-ized environment. The three pillars are as follows:

* National Foundations pillar (including those who work with NFs),
* grantmaking pillar
* advocacy/regional initiatives pillar

The opportunities going forward for thinking creatively are immense; there is a lot of fodder for potential innovation. Lenny mentioned a 1000 day plan for the next phase of the Eurasia program which will focus on establishing whether or not Eurasia as a region can stand on its own terms akin to the other regions in which OSF works. He posed the following empirical question: In both programmatic and operational terms, can we make a case for Eurasia to remain as its own region?

**Rayna Gavrilova** the posed the following questions to Lenny: what will happen to the work of the Eurasia programs for next year? In light of the submission of individual program strategies etc., how will we make this organizational shift work?

**Lenny Benardo** answered that the transition process will not be uncomplicated, that is the reality. Given that there is a CEP strategy and budget in review, an RP strategy and budget in review, and NF strategies and budgets in review, our job is to figure out issues such as how the grantmaking from CEP might be more effectively integrated with RP’s grantmaking; while also thinking about integrating advocacy strategies and new initiatives across these programs. He believes that this process will require a lot of reflection and will result in the formation of subcommittees. These small groups will need to work together and collaboratively think through how to do this. In addition to the problem of programs working in the region being silo’ed from each other, these programs have also been silo-ized from the rest of OSF. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate Eurasia into the broader conversations happening throughout the OSF complex.

**Sandra Schwarzer** spoke about the human resources issues involved in the restructuring process. HR is going to have many meetings with individuals to talk about new ideas, and where staff members feel they fit in the new structure, acknowledging that there will be difficult and easy conversations. HR is going to work extremely fast to post Program Director position next week

**Rayna Gavrilova** emphasized the need to collaborate between pillars once the new structure is rolled out, noting that it is quite clear that we cannot have one functional person doing one thing in one area..

**Lenny** emphasized that this interim structure should not be received as a make or break situation for Eurasia. If after two years it is determined that Eurasia as a geographical unit does not make sense, that does not mean that there will be no more work on Eurasia. The pressure is not on us to make certain that Eurasia can stand on its own vis a vis the other geographical regions; the task at hand is to pursue this question empirically, and come to a result. This is an exploratory few years, and there is a huge amount of very considered expertise within the staff here.

**General Q&A**-

* + **Beka**- Is Turkey going to be included at all in the new Eurasia structure?
  + **LB**: Annette L. has been the regional director for Turkey and that position is not now occupied by any one person. CS has demonstrated a very serious interest in Turkey, but it will be most likely within the new Initiative for Europe, rather than the Eurasia programs
  + **Alisher**- Given that much of CEP’s current work focuses on advocacy, how will this change/be incorporated within the new structure? Will it be within the grantmaking pillar or the advocacy pillar?
  + **Rayna G:** As far as the advocacy/regional initiatives pillar goes, we will be adding to it and “beefing it up” by potentially providing the team with resources at their disposal. We also might add research to this pillar as well. Therefore, some of the projects of CEP will be formally associated with advocacy pillar. In determining this, we will try to take into consideration your competencies, personal desires, and portfolios in order to see where everything will fit into the puzzle
  + **Sandra Schwarzer**-In terms of reporting structure and staff structure, there should always be one person (manager) who helps you set your objectives, evaluates your work, etc., but that may not be the person you spend the majority of your time working with in the new structure. Instead, the fluid part of this new structure is integral
  + **Jonas**- Given that this is the region that contains the majority of the NFs, and this is what makes Eurasia different from Asia/Latin America, will the utility of the NF model be evaluated in comparison to something more centralized?
  + **LB**- feels strongly that CS came away from NFs in CA and the Caucasus with many powerful impressions of the exceptional work being done there. He finds that one central issue is how we can ensure the basic principle of local knowledge in our work vis a vis the structure with which we are contending. Without NFs, can we have a Eurasia department that can legitimize itself vis a vis other departments? Rather than having a session with administrative bean counters looking at cost-benefit analysis about whether NFs merit continuation, we have the luxury spending the next 3 years seeing how these different parts integrate into one another. One of the questions we will ask is whether local knowledge is deriving principally from NFs or whether it happens in a much more complex way in which NFs play a role? The formation of this integrated Eurasia department will start to help us determine the answer to these questions
  + **RG:** There is a momentum and conversation driven by people from Legal and budget/finance/IT/HR to see how the relationship between NFs and OSF will evolve in the future
  + **Adna**- We have heard about the job description for the Program Director role, but where are we in the rest of the process of figuring out staff roles in the new structure? What is the processed involved in this?
  + **Answer:** Over next several weeks- RG, GV, LB, SS will hold individual conversations with current staff to determine people’s ambitions and interests and to understand where people might feel most acclimated within the new structure
    - For regional managers- they have a good idea what the job description should look like but they do not want to advertise before talking to everyone. This process will then be followed by individual offers for certain positions where HR will be involved
    - Sandra indicates that given the current workload of HR, things might progress more slowly over the next few weeks
  + **Sershen**- Pertaining to the regional manager roles, what is the balance between advertising for them, or recruiting from within? Are we recruiting externally or internally?
  + **Sandra S**—The decision has not yet been made as to whether to recruit internally, externally, or both for these roles.
  + **Beka V**- How many people are involved in this group?
  + **RG**: Currently there are 19 people
  + **LB**- For the past several months, he has been spearheading a bi-weekly conversation on individual grants. This conversation, in LB’s opinion, has established a real community at OSF consisting of vastly different people working on different areas on the sphere of individual grants. This in turn has created a community-like sensibility among individuals participating

The meeting ended on the note that the expectation going forward is the goal of pursuing reflective, deliberative conversations about Eurasia in order to develop a real collaborative community.