



Toward further development and sustainability of the civil society in Serbia



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The largest part of this publication is devoted to the first annual conference “Permanent Dialogue Days”, since it will continue to represent an important area in future for intersectoral debate on current issues regarding development of cooperation between the state and civil sector. The overview of the course of discussion, conclusions and recommendations of the conference, which are the part of this publication, will introduce the readers with current situation in the civil society sector, key problems and the possibility of future development.

INTRODUCTION

A publication in front of you represents the Report on the project “Civil Society Enabling Environment” which was implemented with the financial support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) by the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Government of the Republic of Serbia in the period from 2014 to 2016.

Our intention is to present, in short, an overview of the most important results and long-term effects of this project, which include a part of the consultative process of developing the first Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Civil Society Development in the Republic of Serbia from 2016 to 2020, public discussions, trainings for representatives of public administration and civil society organizations (CSOs) concerning legal framework, mechanisms of cooperation between public and civil sector and transparent financing of the civil society activities from the budget of local government units, , then launch of the platform “OCDoskop” as a sort of database of active CSOs and space for their networking and joint activities, creation of the Strategic Plan for Capacity Building of CSOs as guidelines for future activities in this field, as well as trainings and study visits of the Office’s employees, which significantly improved the capacity of public administration and civil society organizations.

On behalf of the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, we would like to express gratitude to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for given support in strengthening our capacities for establishment of the dialogue between public and civil sector. We would also like to thank to all those who have participated in numerous activities during this project and thus helped the Office fulfil its mandate efficiently and contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for the civil society development in the Republic of Serbia.




Zarko Stepanovic
Acting Director of the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society
Government of the Republic of Serbia

ABOUT THE PROJECT

On the basis of the Assistance Agreement for Improvement of Government Operations, which was signed between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), as the representative of the United States of America on 23rd September 2010, funds were provided for supporting Serbia in strengthening democratic governance. A portion of these funds (214,834.00 dollars) was directed by the USAID to the work of the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Government of the Republic of Serbia through the Agreement on Implementation of the Project "Civil Society Enabling Environment" (hereinafter referred to as: the Project), which was signed on 14th February 2014. The project lasted for 25 months and it was completed on 13th March 2016.

 214.834\$

 02.14.2014. - 03.13.2016.

The project represents a set of activities that were aimed at strengthening the dialogue and cooperation between state administration and civil society organizations (hereinafter referred to as: CSOs), as well as capacity building for all active participants in this dialogue. As such, it represents a significant contribution to the development and regulation of participative democracy in the Republic of Serbia. The main objective of the project was the creation of an enabling environment for civil society development in Serbia, as well as harmonization with the relevant European principles, standards and best prac-


tices, which was implemented through two main components of the Project:

1. Creating an enabling environment for the development of civil society in Serbia and its empowerment through the consultative process;
2. Increasing the capacity of public administration for the efficient implementation of the Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Civil Society Development from 2016 to 2020.


In addition to those two mentioned components, through this Project the USAID also provided support to capacity building of the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society (hereinafter referred to as: the Office), in order to ensure the sustainability of the project activities, as well as the role of the Office in the creation of intersectoral cooperation.


A comprehensive consultation process was conducted (including consultation meetings and public discussions) in order to ensure the participation of all stakeholders in the creation of the first strategic document which regulates and promotes cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the civil society - Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Civil Society Development in the Republic of Serbia from 2016 to 2020 (hereinafter referred to as: the Strategy). The Strategy represents the key document that will contribute to the improvement of cooperation between public and civil sector in Serbia, while the long-term goal of the inclusive process of its adoption is that such model become the standard for making national documents and legal acts in the future.

10 consultative meetings were held in total across Serbia, which were attended by 433 representatives from local governments and civil society organizations (hereinafter referred to as: CSOs), as well as 3 public discussions in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Nis during the period of public discussion (23rd July - 14th August 2015) with 211 participants.

 10 consultative meetings

 3 public debates

 433 representatives of LGs and CSOs

 211 representatives

The baseline research was conducted in order to fulfil the needs of the first Strategy under the name "Co-operation between local government units and civil society organizations", which represents a necessary step in mapping of the initial context and enables precise measurement of the changes envisaged by the Strategy.

Another activity which significantly contributed to the creation of an enabling environment for civil society development is a series of six training sessions for the CSO conducted in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis and Zrenjanin.¹ Trainings were devoted to capacity building of CSOs for active operation at the local level when it comes to the promotion of best practices in the field of transparent funding, i.e. strengthening of the capacity of organizations for monitoring and improvement of transparent funding of programs and projects of CSOs from local budgets. They were realized in cooperation with the office of the project “Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations” (TACSO)² in Serbia, which further strengthened the partnership between the Office and the TACSO. The trainings were attended by 134 representatives of CSOs, from a total of 87 organizations.



6 training sessions for the CSO



134 representatives from a total of 87 organizations

In the course of the project ten training sessions were organized for representatives of local governments, with 211 representatives from 107 municipalities (101 local governments outside of Belgrade, 6 urban municipalities of the city of Belgrade, 5 city secretariats of the city of Belgrade), in cooperation with the TACSO office in Serbia. The aim of the trainings was dissemination of knowledge and understanding the importance and opportunities for cooperation with civil society, including the legal framework, effects and standards, as well as a better understanding of transparent financing activities of CSOs from local budgets and promotion of the best practices of cooperation in this field.



10 training sessions for representatives of local governments



211 representatives from 107 municipalities

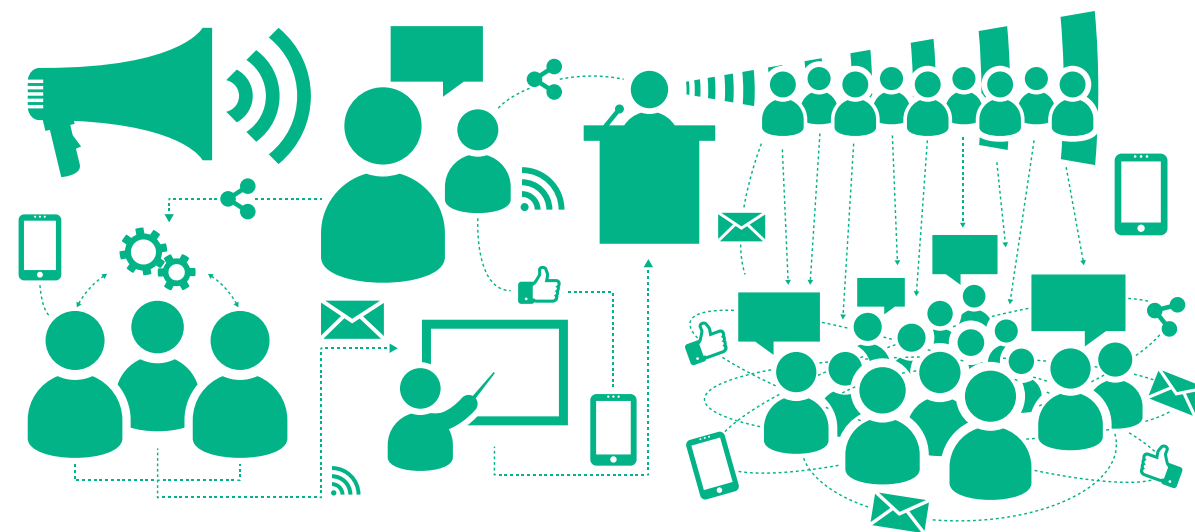
After numerous consultations with CSOs, an interactive web platform “OCDoskop” was created with the aim of increasing the visibility of the civil sector in Serbia and encouraging networking and cooperation

¹ Training in Zrenjanin was organized on the direct initiative of the City Administration of the city of Zrenjanin.

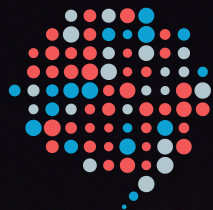
² This project is implemented in Serbia by the Swedish Institute for Public Administration (SIPA International) with the support of the European Union.

within the sector. The platform represents a solid base of active organizations and enables interaction between private, public and civil sector. It was published in June 2015 on the website www.ocdoskop.rs.

Also, the regional web platform under the name “Gov2Gov” at www.gov2gov.info, was developed within the Project and it is designed as a mechanism for strengthening cooperation between the governmental institutions of the countries of the Western Balkans, Croatia and Turkey which, in accordance with their mandate, are responsible for creating an enabling environment for the civil society development. The platform aims to encourage the exchange of the best practices among these institutions in order to enable joint work on strengthening of an enabling environment for the civil society development. The countries participating in the platform are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. Also, after the creation of the platform, the delegation of Kosovo³ expressed willingness to join it subsequently and the communication is in progress concerning this matter.



³ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and ICJ Advisory opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



Permanent
Dialogue
Days

Дани
Разговора

“PERMANENT DIALOGUE DAYS” CONFERENCE

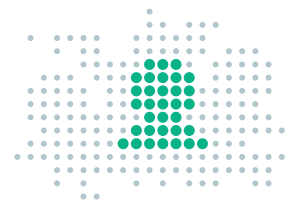
The final activity within the project was a two-day conference under the title “Permanent Dialogue Days - At the Common Scene on the Civil Society Development and Sustainability”, held from 9-10 March 2016 in the Cultural Centre “Vuk Karadzic”, with 8 panels, 34 speakers and 134 participants. This conference represented the first step in the long term establishment of public dialogue between different sectors in Serbia and in the region. Decentralization was of particular significance as well as the presence of local CSOs which had the opportunity to participate actively in the dialogue on the future of the sector.

The conference was designed as the first in a series of annual conferences organized by the Office in cooperation with representatives of civil society, public administration and donor community. It also represents an activity complementary to the process of developing the Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Civil Society Development in the Republic of Serbia from 2016 to 2020 and the accompanying Action Plan.

The aim of the conference, as a further step to formulation of legal framework, was to isolate, through an open and equal discussion “at the common scene,” the most essential issues for the further development of civil society in Serbia. The key outcome of the conference represents a specific overview of these important issues, which will be used for planning future activities of the Office and it represents the basis for more intensive and focused work on strengthening the cooperation of all stakeholders.

The first “Permanent Dialogue Days” covered the topics of cooperation between civil and state sector, relations between civil society and donor community, cooperation within the sector, social position and the role of civil society, relations between CSOs and local communities from which they originate, volunteering, economic potential of civil society and possibilities of using public properties as non-financial means of support to organizations. . In the plenary part of the conference, participants were addressed by Mr. Zarko Stepanovic, the Acting Director of the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Drazen Maravic, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government and Mr. Jeffrey Skarin, the Deputy Director of the Office for Democratic and Economic Growth (ODEG) . Eight conference panels were developed and later moderated by representatives of civil society who are recognized as experts in particular fields together with the Office’s staff. Among the speakers were representatives from the state and civil sectors and several topics also covered the experiences of organizations from the Republic of Croatia. The presence of participants from the Republic of Croatia had great significance in terms of exchange of experience and further development of already existing cooperation between the Office and its colleagues from associated institutions in Croatia. Panel

moderators are also the authors of the reports presented below, in which an overview of the current situation in each field is shown, but they also provide valuable guidance and recommendations for further work of the Office and other active participants involved in the creation of an enabling environment for the development of civil society in Serbia.



I PANEL

Together on the Same Task

Cooperation between Public Administration and Civil Society

Moderator:

Branka Andjelkovic, Public Policy Research Centre

Panellists:

Snezana Klasnja, the Ministry of Youth and Sports

Ninoslav Kekic, the Republic Secretariat for Public Policies

Milena Banovic, the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society

Maja Stojanovic, Civic Initiatives

Milan Antonijevic, YUCOM - The Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights

Djordje Popovic, Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence

Slobodan Markovic, Serbian National Internet Domain Register

Although it seems that the cooperation between the state and civil sector is porous and insufficient, numerous examples show that, even though the development is slower than expected, the cooperation is constantly developing. The institutional and legal framework for dialogue and partnership has been improving for years, with tremendous support and active encouragement of the civil society. For example, the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society and the Ministry of Youth and Sports did not exist ten years ago. Both institutions were created at the initiative of civil sector and today these institutions are of crucial importance for encouragement of dialogue between the state and organizations.

However, cooperation between governmental and non-governmental sectors is neither homogeneous nor uniform. Larger organizations, primarily from Belgrade, still have better access to the institutions, particularly in those parts of the state administration which are more open for cooperation. It is especially difficult for organizations dealing with protection of human rights to establish communication and cooperation with state institutions, as well as for smaller organizations and those operating outside of Belgrade.

Panel participants from state administration have determined mutual trust, the significance which the concrete initiative has for further development of the whole society and the existence of plans based on cooperation as key factors for establishment of successful cooperation between the two sectors. Led by these principles, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has become a reference state institution when the promotion of cooperation between the state and the civil society is in question. The Office for Cooperation with Civil Society also applies similar mode of operation and it represents one of the main bridges of cooperation between public administration and potential partners from the civil sector, while at the same time it promotes the value of partnership through improvement of legal and financial framework for the operation of organizations.

Participants from the civil society have pointed out that, nonetheless, it is not easy to establish cooperation and that there is still mistrust of state institution representatives toward CSOs, particularly at the local level, where organizations are often excluded from the creation of municipal and city policies. As the main preconditions for accomplishment of a successful dialogue with institutions, they have indicated good knowledge of the administration system, clear outlining and contextualizing of policy proposals, as well as persistence. The participation of CSOs in the process of the accession of Serbia to the EU (with a considerable space for further improvement through recognition of CSO's professional contribution), pointing out the legal vacuum concerning freedom of citizens' gatherings, proposal for the platform for Open Government Partnership in Serbia 2016 and similar have been identified as examples of the best practice.

Development of initiatives for improvement of lives of the Serbian citizens is a joint responsibility of both sectors and sincere cooperation is needed for their successful realization. A number of such initiatives are already in progress, such as the preparation of new laws on volunteering, social entrepreneurship, non-formal education, the inclusion of CSOs in the system of health services. However, stronger partner always has greater responsibility and, in this case, that is the state. The achieved results and the cooperation should not be underestimated also in the light of existence of organizations that do not share and do not represent democratic values, and both sectors should jointly oppose to their activities. In this context, the importance of primary and secondary education is highlighted, which should prepare new generations for active participation in social and political life.

Despite the expectations of the civil sector for faster development of cooperation with the state, however, it may be concluded that in current circumstances solid foundations for cooperation have been established owing to the legal and institutional framework. The adoption of the Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Civil Society Development in the Republic of Serbia from 2016 to 2020, which is eagerly expected, will be an essential step in the right direction - towards further strengthening of mutual communication and building trust between CSOs and the state.



II PANEL: Donor Community and Civil Society

Moderator:

Ivan Kuzminovic, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Belgrade

Panellists:

Aleksandra Kalinic, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Belgrade

Gordana Delic, Balkan Trust for Democracy

Biljana Dakic Djordjevic, Trag Foundation

Miodrag Milosavljevic, Open Society Foundations, Serbia

Since 2000, CSOs and donor community in Serbia have been working together in order to achieve positive changes, modernization and democratic consolidation of the society. During this process thousands of ideas and projects were developed and implemented. After long-term successful cooperation, an era came to the end - Serbia became a candidate country for membership in the EU and the organizations gave invaluable contribution to this process. Questions are posed concerning the partnership relation between CSOs and donors in this new phase of development of the state and society, whether there is available space for new partnerships and on what grounds the partnership relation will be built.

An impression is gained that there are less and less donors and grants available, however, they are still operating in Serbia sufficiently enough to support the initiatives and activities of the civil society. Also, CSOs often have very high expectations in relation to the capacities and potential donors. Development programs are being reduced and generally cannot be a substitute for activities that have to be covered from the state budget. Currently donors, primarily bilateral ones, are focused on finding strategic partners in the civil society that can contribute to the process of EU integration and other relevant processes. Due to the increase of efficiency of their work, in recent years the donors more frequently group the projects within a smaller number of topics, which are primarily dealing with the process of EU integration, but for this type of work CSOs must be more specialized.

Frequently asked question concerns the way donors are developing their programs and whether there is a mutual coordination of their activities. According to the experiences of the participants in the panel, coordination among donors is not institutionalized, because that is almost impossible in practice. However, coordination sometimes exists, but mostly at the level of informal cooperation between donors and it

occurs on an ad hoc basis. Also, programming cannot be unified, but it is adapted to the specific national interests of donors and national programming on development aid.

The participants have agreed that the role of CSOs in the development of society is still tremendously important and that donors are also interested in continuation of supporting the activities of CSOs, but some changes are expected in the way the organizations operate and their approach. It seems that during the continuous process of applying for funds, CSOs often do not follow donor policies sufficiently and do not realize the essential donor's priorities, although they are almost always public and easily accessible. It is necessary that CSOs adopt the principle of work according to which their individual projects should be part of broader programs and strategies, instead of frequent practice of writing projects for individual competitions. Organizations which continue to develop innovative services, which are capable of directing toward alternative sources of funding and are working on a clear specialization of topics and development of partnerships, will certainly be rated as donors' strategic partners in the future period.

In addition, philanthropy has been neglected, especially at the local level, although it represents a huge potential for sustainability of the whole sector. Therefore, it is important to develop awareness that international donor support is only one source of supporting for the civil society. Diversification of funding sources and development of new models for fundraising represent the direction in which the sector should continue to work, as well as the key for achieving its sustainability.





III PANEL

Between Ideals and Reality

Current Position and Further Development of Volunteering in the Republic of Serbia

Moderator:

Marija Bulat, National Youth Council of Serbia

Panellists:

Snezana Milajic, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy

Aleksandar Vostic, the Ministry of Youth and Sports

Ivana Kordic, Volunteer Center, Zagreb (Republic of Croatia)

Jelena Beronja, Young Researches of Serbia (Volunteer Service of Serbia)

Natasa Corbic, CSO Serbia on the Move

Among the key principles of volunteering are volunteerism, public welfare and non-profitability, while the culture of volunteering is primarily learnt through participation. The desire for changes in the community is the biggest driving force of volunteering. Citizens are willing to invest their time, knowledge and skills in the activity for which they can see it is leading to a clear goal and achievement of a concrete change. Also, it is important that they know how much time they need to invest and what exactly is expected of them, but they also need enough autonomy to carry out something by their own free will. Autonomy which reflects the principle of volunteerism is one of the key motivating factors in volunteering. Good volunteering management involves working in a team, understanding the motivation and interests of volunteers, as well as a clear division of roles and responsibilities.

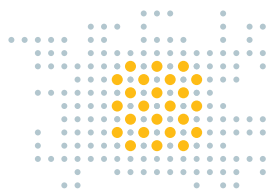
The Volunteering Law, which was adopted in 2010, established a legal basis for the implementation of voluntary activities, but it has not been implemented as intended, because a large number of organizers of voluntary activities consider that it is not affirmative and hinders and discourages volunteering. Some of the most common problems concerning the implementation of the legal framework are the abuse of the term "volunteering" for activities that are not in the spirit of volunteerism and avoidance of the obligation of registration in the register (only 250 volunteer organizers are registered) and submission of reports. Organizers consider legal obligations as a constraint, but the labour inspections do not file requests for penal responsibility, because the essence of the law is not punishment. These attitudes and problems have led to the launch of initiative for amendment of the legislative framework and CSOs have an important role and contribution in the Working Group for Amendments to the Law on Volunteering. Future amendments to this law must be directed toward promotion of volunteering as a set of values and deflection of under-

standing volunteering as an employment relationship. The National Youth Strategy 2015-2025 promotes and supports development of volunteering among young people. However, since volunteers are not only young people but also adults, a comprehensive strategy should be developed that would essentially contribute to the further development of volunteering in Serbia.

Croatian experience in improving support for volunteering involves diversified national structure in the form of volunteer centres, good cooperation between institutions and CSOs and developed standards for quality assurance of volunteering activities. The normative framework clearly made the difference between volunteering and internships (which is not the case in the legal framework which is applicable in Serbia) and volunteering was relocated from the framework regulating labour. The Ministry of Social Policy and Youth has provided financial support and assisted the coordination of the network of volunteer centres, but with the expectation that work in these centres should be in compliance with specific standards. The Office for Cooperation with NGOs of the Croatian Government is working on the inclusion of volunteering values in a number of other policies, but also in the requirements of open calls for supporting activities of CSOs. Croatian experience (the campaign "Croatia volunteers") emphasizes the importance of increasing the visibility of volunteer activities and promotions of volunteerism.

Important questions for future development of volunteering in Serbia could be introduction of volunteering in the educational system (for example, within the subject Civic Education), re-initiation of community working actions and the possibility of volunteering through corrective measures. The Office for Cooperation with Civil Society has an important role in these processes, as an institution that can connect all active participants which are relevant for improvement of volunteering in Serbia.





IV PANEL

The Power of Civil Sector and its Position in the Society

Moderator:

Mladen Jovanovic, National Coalition for Decentralization

Panellists:

Aleksandra Vesic, independent consultant

Zoran Stanojevic, editor and journalist, Radio Television of Serbia

Dusan Milisavljevic, MP in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia

Professor Vladimir Vuletic, PhD, the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

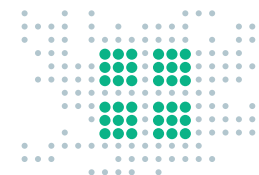
Jovana Djurbabic, CRTA – Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability

There is a belief that citizens generally do not perceive the civil sector as their own sector. The causes of this situation are different – from the lack of clear communication of CSOs with citizens, over vague concepts, values, mission and visions of CSOs, predominant focus on donor's requests and not on the needs of citizens, up to negative media image of the whole sector. There is a very small number of initiatives which CSOs implement together with citizens. This raises the question of legitimacy and credibility of such work of CSOs, especially if there is no regular two-way communication with citizens. The fact that the civil sector often introduces new socially significant topics into public discourse, despite the negative or indifferent attitude of citizens, must not be an excuse for the lack of permanent commitment of CSOs to honest dialogue and better cooperation with citizens. It is certain that the citizens' perception about civil sector is negatively affected by the fact that there is a significant number of associations that were directly created by political parties and representatives of state authorities and that are practically used for daily political purposes (PONGOs, GONGOs). During the panel it was agreed that CSOs should build their legitimacy and credibility through strengthening the number of supporters (consisting of their base - supporters and users), through strengthening of expertise and better promotion of the achieved results and achievements.

Although at the beginning of the panel it has been expressed that CSOs should not be involved in politics, during the discussion prevailed the view that, however, CSOs have an important role in articulating political demands of citizenship. Building a political consensus in the society about the future of the country is an area of which the civil sector should make better use. On the other hand, more open and honest approach to political sector is needed, which civil society predominantly considers as a political

opponent. The aim is that the space of political action becomes the space of constructive thinking and positive action. By advocating important social issues, civil society can contribute to the improvement of public discourse on politics and development of political dialogue culture. Also, by clearer articulation of its advocacy initiatives, CSOs can provide a more significant contribution to changes at the level of legislation and law enforcement. In order to achieve this, as well as to avoid often addressing the bodies and institutions which do not have adequate powers, CSOs need to get to know better the political system and decision-making processes at the local, provincial and national level.

Relationship between organizations and the media has been particularly disrupted recently with a series of extremely negative articles about the work of the sector. Although tabloid newspapers are at the forefront of promoting negative attitudes, reports published in major media are particularly worrying, because they show that the most powerful media, which are non-tabloid in content, encourage development of a negative image of the sector, refusing to obtain the opinion of "the other side". On the other hand, the representatives of civil sector themselves frequently have extremely negative attitude towards the media. Therefore, relationships between civil society and the media should be built, but also the language and dictionary should be cultivated for the purpose of better understanding.



V PANEL

Cooperation within the Civil Sector

Moderator:

Sonja Stojanovic Gajic, Belgrade Centre for Security Policy

Discussant:

Sasa Segrt, Platform 112, GONG (The Republic of Croatia)

One of the biggest problems of civil society in Serbia is the lack of mutual support within the sector, although the essence of this sector should be reflected precisely in solidarity. This situation is manifested through lack of cooperation, as well as inadequately informed representatives of the civil society on important initiatives of their colleagues in other local communities and barriers they face. It is indicative that more positive examples of cooperation were presented during the panel by local and activist organizations then non-activist organizations with headquarters in Belgrade. In addition, local and smaller organizations have more often mentioned institutions as key partners, while larger organizations have experience in participation and coordination of national and regional coalitions. Another factor to be taken into account is greater diversity of interests and ways of working within the sector today in comparison to '90s

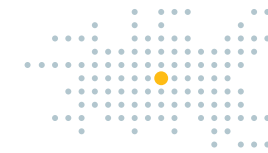
when there was a smaller number of organizations, while the existence of clear channels for information among CSOs and greater solidarity in relation to the regime should be also mentioned. Weakening of the sector not only affects its sustainability, but the lack of intrasectoral solidarity may also affect the willingness of citizens to participate and engage in the initiatives of the civil society.

On the other hand, numerous experiences and examples of intrasectoral cooperation are not sufficiently visible. Therefore, CSOs should work more on the visibility of joint initiatives, but also on the presentation of the importance their activities have for local community and wider society. Similarly, examples of the lack of support within the sector are also not sufficiently visible because CSOs are not sufficiently aware of the circumstances in which their colleagues from the sector need help and support. Fragmentation of public space, weak media interest in the activities of CSOs and the lack of communication between organizations are among the causes of this situation.

An example of good practice is the coalition “Platform 112”, which was established in Croatia as a reaction of CSOs to completion of negotiations on Croatian accession to the EU, despite the omissions regarding significant issues covered by Chapter 23 - Judiciary and Fundamental Rights. The Coalition gathered both large CSOs from Zagreb (both research and activist organizations) and organizations which represent the interests of minorities (e.g. Serbian Democratic Forum or organizations which represent the rights of the LGBT community), as well as the association from the Croatian inland, which cover a wide spectrum of issues and policies (ecology, human rights, corruption, etc.). This example indicates that CSOs with different profiles and priorities can gather and work together when it comes to important social issues, although they have different specific interests otherwise. This platform was created independently from any project and it was initially operated on a voluntary basis and without coordinating organization. Later, the platform has grown (more than 70 member organizations at the moment), and acted more and more as an incubator for the creation and development of other important initiatives. The conclusion of this part of the panel is that initiatives of CSOs which try to establish cooperation without money work best, but that does not necessarily mean that money affects negatively intrasectoral cooperation, especially because it is often necessary when it comes to institutionalization of cooperation.

Topics concerning democracy and enabling environment for the development of the sector are mentioned among the topics of particular importance for civil society in Serbia, in relation to which it is necessary to strengthen intrasectoral solidarity. The first group of topic covers the situations when joint reaction and help of colleagues are necessary in order to defend individual organizations and initiatives criticized or attacked by the government representatives, as well as public formulation of a unified sectoral position towards the development of non-democratic civil society. Associating for the purpose of providing support to the sector deals with issues of common interest, such as: the establishment of a legal framework en-

abling assignment of space which is in public property for use by organizations, promoting philanthropy, charitable foundations and innovative ways of financing the activities of the civil society, as well as issues related to the protection of the environment, especially at the local level.



VI PANEL

Who We are and Where We Come From?

Civil Society Organizations and Local Communities

Moderator:

Marko Kosutic, the Association for Mentally Challenged Persons “Plava ptica”

Panellists:

Natalija Simovic, Trag Foundation

Srdjan Djurovic, Open Society Foundations

Miroslav Tamburic, Forum of Civil Action “FORCA”

Bozena Stojic, informal group “Youth for Kaludjerica”

The need for development and strengthening of the capacity of CSOs often involves the risk that after several implemented projects and expansion of the number of associates, the management of the organization will focus on the sustainability of the organization, while at the same time, the organization will gradually depart from the needs of local community which represented the crucial mission at the beginning of its operation. In this context, the question is how much CSOs are forced to develop and specialize according to the requirements of donors, i.e. what are the possibilities for long-term work of informal groups which have been gathered in order to solve authentic problems of the environment in which they occur.

The prevailing view during the panel has been that specialization of CSOs' work is almost inevitable, but that does not necessarily lead to distancing from the initial motive for organizing. Registration and specialization of organizations facilitate provision of funding and improve opportunities for access to the funds and support of their ideas. Also, an organization specialized in one subject area enables better and deeper work focus. On the other hand, local organizations, especially those which do not have developed structures and do not expand beyond their communities, however, see the needs of the community more clearly and directly. Organizations that have been operating for a long time and have developed structures and programs, must “return” to the community from time to time and collect authentic information from citizens about their needs.

The management board of organizations, which are often neglected and only officially existing are actually the structures which through participating and democratic governance, should be guardians of the

mission of organizations. Accordingly, in order to enable proper operation of an organization, there must be a clear division of tasks and responsibilities between the management which takes care of organization and the management board which takes care of its mission. It is recommended that management boards should not be composed of the members of the organization, but of reputable representatives and representatives of the local community.

The problem of reduced innovation in the work of organizations is recognized, especially when it comes to formulation of responses to specific needs of the community. Established organizations need new and fresh ideas that bring new activist enthusiasm, but which can also point out if the organization has moved away from the community's needs. Therefore, greater openness to ideas and suggestions of individuals outside the structures of the organization, then communication, openness to everyone and listening to different views and needs are necessary. This can also be a model for achieving greater involvement of citizens in the activities of the civil society.



VII PANEL

Possibilities of using public premises by the Civil Society Organizations

Moderator:

Moderator: Marko Aksentijevic, CSO "Ministry of Space"

Panellists:

Sasa Novakovic, the Ministry of Finance

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According to available data from 2011, one in five CSOs in Serbia has no space, one in four rents it, 39% of them use the space that has been somehow assigned to them and only 17% of organizations have their own space. The space is the least accessible to young organizations with the smallest budgets, which affects the possibility of developing vibrant and diverse civil society in Serbia. Therefore, a good part of the answer to the question of sustainability of the civil society can be found precisely in providing access for basic infrastructure for work to CSOs. On the other hand, a large number of spaces in public ownership is not used, but it is inaccessible due to procedures that recognize only commercial criteria of assignment. The Regulation on conditions for obtaining and alienation of immovable property by direct negotiation, renting items in public ownership and procedures concerning public procurement and collection of written bids

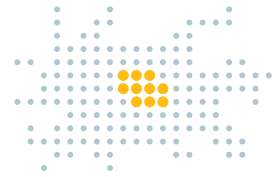
determined in more details the possible ways of allocation of public property, including the possibility of giving space to civil society organizations through direct negotiation. The amendment to the Regulation from 2015, stipulates that organizations that lease space in this way, should pay 20% of the market price of the rent, about which some organizations have already appealed to the Ministry of Finance. In addition, the Regulation stipulates that the organization cannot generate revenue in the leased space, although the Law on Associations stipulates that the association may also directly perform economic or other activity. Proposal for the Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Civil Society Development in the Republic of Serbia from 2016 to 2020 envisages development of a unified register of property in this field, with adequate legal framework and uniform criteria for the allocation of space.

The practice of assigning space to organizations almost exclusively exists at the level of local governments and dates back before the adoption of the Regulation, with smaller municipalities at the forefront in this matter. However, the Regulation is interpreted extensively and sometimes even unlawfully in order to meet to the greatest extent possible the needs of organizations for work space. Although the regulatory framework envisages that direct negotiation should be used only when it is the only solution in a particular case and does not prescribe any procedure, direct negotiation is almost the only form of leasing space to CSOs in practice. Also, it is not possible for anyone other than the holders of public property to be entitled to use the space free of charge, therefore organizations only have possibility to pay 20% of the market value of the lease, which for many CSOs still represent a huge financial burden. The representative of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities has proposed that there should be a model for the decision on space leasing, which would also elaborate the procedure of direct negotiation.

An indicative example from Croatia is the Social Centre Rojc, created within the action of local CSOs in 1997 in abandoned military barracks. Today the Social Centre Rojc is not only one of the most important examples in the region when it comes to the use of abandoned spaces for CSOs' activities, but it also testifies to the ability of the civil sector to create a new value through commitment for the society from unused resources. More than a hundred of organizations currently located in Rojc have got space for ten-year period in order to have enough time for undisturbed development, they pay only the basic bills and the city of Pula bears the costs of building maintenance. Organizations established the ROJC Board and the ROJC Union of Organizations and Associations in order to manage space in an efficient and responsible way. Rojc has enormous significance for cultural and tourist promotion of the city, but primarily for the community itself as an incubator of new ideas and knowledge. Another good example from the Republic of Croatia represents the establishment of procedures for decision making, by means of public tender, on the allocation of space for civil society organizations.

It is of utmost importance for the future development of the civil sector in Serbia in this context to over-

come the problems of unelaborated institute of direct negotiation and lack of transparency and clear criteria on the occasion of leasing space to CSOs. What remains is the question of responsibility of those who do not manage well the existing unused space resources, due to which these spaces deteriorate and therefore, do not serve to social development.



VIII PANEL

Everything is (not) about money

The Economic Potential of Civil Society Organizations and their Sustainability

Moderator:

Dina Rakin, European Movement in Serbia

Panellist:

Teo Petricevic, ACT Group (the Republic of Croatia)

Bojana Selakovic, Civic Initiatives

Aleksandra Vladislavljevic, independent consultant

Vladimir Radojicic, Trag Foundation

The economic potential of CSOs is conditioned by the overall economic situation in the society, legal, institutional and financial mechanisms which are available to organizations, but also by the situation and performances of the civil sector. Although the civil sector is not viewed primarily as economic (which is read on the occasion of creation of public policies, but also in the attitudes of the sector itself), the sector creates economic value through its operations, not only by contributing to GDP, but also indirectly – by recruitment, involvement of other economic forms in its chain of operations, by payment of state and local taxes.

Collection of relevant data from the sector represents a special challenge. It is considered that there is no adequate and sufficiently developed methodology, except in one part of the methodology of Monitoring Matrix, which is used for preparation of the Report on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development in 8 countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey. On the other hand, certain problems exist when it comes to transparency of the sector. One of the tools for better transparency can be the Report on Social Audit - measured social impact of CSOs - which includes economic, social and environmental dimension in CSO's operations. Besides the development of methodology for monitoring sector's performances and the establishment of records on the basis of which the economic power of the sector will be monitored annually, it is necessary to use adequate information and research results for development of stimulating policies in order to establish them on the needs of the sector and the society as a whole.

The legal framework for CSO's operations is solid, but not stimulating. The draft of the new Civil Code represents a negative example because CSOs are seen as non-economic entities, which is not in accordance with the concept of CSOs and legislation and it jeopardizes the business practice of CSOs. Therefore, it is necessary to re-examine the method of preparation and the impact that the adoption of the Civil Code can have on the work of CSOs and citizens.

On the other hand, the organizations themselves do not have developed capacities in order to deal in a greater extent with revenue-bringing and entrepreneurial activities. As a result of this, they do not exploit potentials and available resources in the local community in which they operate to the maximum, which is in coordinate connection with the important topic of financial sustainability of the civil sector in the context of withdrawal of international donors. In addition, the Croatian experience shows that greater availability of EU funds does not necessarily mean that funding opportunities for CSO's projects will be increased and bring greater stability and sustainability of the sector. As a participant from Croatia explained, the system of EU funds is not functioning adequately (public sector, contracting bodies and bodies for implementation continuously have a shortage of good-quality human resources and national policy does not maximize the potential of utilization of available resources), although CSOs have exceptionally developed capacities and mechanisms for absorption of resources from EU funds.

It is not sufficient to observe the relationship toward resources within the sector itself exclusively from the point of CSO's contribution to human capital development and social impact, but also through relationships within organizations themselves. There is a significant number of people which are recruited in the sector without adequate compensation and the infrastructure and working conditions are often not very favourable. This situation contributes to bad image of the civil sector in the society. Therefore, it is necessary to work on strengthening of the sector's operations through improvement of human and material resources, as well as procedures of internal and external operations in order to enable CSOs to focus on the concept of improving the quality of lives of their members, employees and the (local) community in which they operate. Recommendations in this context are directed toward the development of relations between CSOs and their members, enlargement of membership base and development of different modalities of membership fees; then development of mutual cooperation between CSOs and networking at the project and program level, as well as the level of service provision and through establishment of consortia; then development of capacities for revenue-bringing and entrepreneurial activities; development of internal system of sustainability (reserve, development, charity foundation and savings funds); improvement of cooperation with the private sector.

The fundamental prerequisite for improvement of the economic potential of the civil sector is the existence of a clear vision for the development of the society, which is built on the basis of dialogue and

consensus of all active participants in the society and later it is visible through the way public policies are shaped. Adequate support of the public sector to the civil sector is reflected in stimulating policies and instruments for the development of the civil society. It is necessary to promote measures of support to CSOs, both non-financial and financial ones in equal proportion. In addition to transparent allocation of funds from the budget lines intended for CSOs and transparent procurement of social services, it is also necessary to design the way that will enable credit financing of CSOs. It is also important to work on improvement of existing legal mechanisms (tax concessions) for the provision of generally useful purposes by individuals and legal entities, but also on creation of new opportunities in this field of interest. In order to achieve this, it is also important to strengthen human resources of public administration, especially in terms of utilization of EU funds.

