



International Conference

Civil Society Transformations on the Way to the EU

Looking at the Past, the Present and the Future

Zagreb, Croatia

17 - 19 April, 2013

Final Conference Report

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Introduction

On 17-19 April, 2013, in Zagreb, TACSO Croatia Office, in collaboration with other TACSO offices, organized an international conference on Civil Society Transformations on the Way to the European Union. Over hundred representatives of the civil society organizations of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey took part in the Conference together with guests from the countries of the European Union.

The main objective was to articulate the lessons learned in the course of the accession process, especially during the four years of TACSO's presence in the region, and to assist CSOs in the Western Balkans and Turkey to cope with the challenges ahead. The conference provided a forum for discussion and reflection on the changes experienced by CSOs in Western Balkans and Turkey in the course of the accession process.

Since Croatia has often been regarded as a model to be followed by other IPA countries when it comes to an enabling environment for civil society development, the conference placed slightly more emphasis on the experience of Croatian CSOs. In doing so, however, an attempt was made to take a critical stance towards the "Croatian model" in the sense of its sustainability upon Croatian accession to the EU and its applicability in other IPA countries. In addition, the experiences of EU-based CSOs, primarily of those involved in partnerships and networking with CSOs from the Western Balkans and Turkey, provided more insight into the opportunities and risks awaiting CSOs upon completion of the accession process.

The conference's proceedings were organized as a mix of plenary sessions with presentations and moderated discussions, and interactive, facilitated small group sessions following the World Café method. The outcome of discussions resulted in a set of recommendations for civil society in the Western Balkans and Turkey, the national governments of this region and DG Enlargement.

This report provides summaries of presentations and discussions in plenary and interactive sessions, including the links to power point presentations used during the conference. We would like to thank to all speakers and participants for their contributions to lively discussions during the formal and less formal parts of the conference, to our colleagues from other TACSO offices in supporting us during preparation and at the conference itself, and also to our moderators and facilitators who helped us to prepare the final report.

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Opening Speeches

Zrinka Vrabec Mojzeš, advisor to the President, sent greetings on behalf of the President of the Republic of Croatia who has widely supported civil society development. She stated that civil society has played a key role in the democratization process, and that partnerships with civil society have helped in achieving relevant goals such as Croatian accession to the European Union. Additionally, she emphasized the role of Croatian CSOs in developing educational, cultural and other policies. According to her, during the nineties only the civic organisations stood up against human rights violations and discrimination and insisted on a pluralistic society, culture of dialogue and resistance to authoritarian regimes. Now, we live in a different time, Ms Vrabec Mojzeš said, where NGOs and media enjoy higher degrees of freedom and are free of political pressure.

In addition to this, she reminded conference participants of the serious consequences we are surrounded by due to criminal privatisation, decline in industrial production, high unemployment, low investment in the welfare state, huge social stratification and poverty. The economic crisis has seriously affected all of us, especially the vulnerable (children, minorities etc.). NGOs, in her opinion, have had a major role in overcoming these serious deficiencies.

She advocated a strong position of civil society organisations in society and their transparent financing, since their work strongly encourages participatory democracy. Finally, she urged all participants to create a common vision of development in the European family together with countries in the SEE region to whose governments she expects participants to submit concise recommendations.

Assistant minister of foreign and European affairs **Vesna Batistić Kos**, on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, thanked the TACSO office for their invitation and expressed deep and strong support to civil society. At the beginning of her speech she expressed the necessity of creating the conditions for community development based on sustainable development and public benefit.

This conference, in her opinion, represented an opportunity for regional partners to discuss challenges for CSOs in the EU enlargement process where high formalization and complexity of reforms are required under the *acquis*. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs perceives Croatian CSOs as invaluable for the development and growth of democracy as well as because of the knowledge and expertise of CSOs in

the negotiation process, which was also enriched by the monitoring work of negotiations on fundamental rights.

Ms Batistić Kos advised CSOs on the opportunities for new partnerships within the European umbrella organisations which are mutually beneficial and highly recommended. She also sees CSOs as an important factor in strengthening regional cooperation as one of the main goals of Croatian foreign policy. The Open Government Partnership initiative was mentioned as a positive example of the participation of CSOs in initiatives on transparency and openness of government towards citizens. Croatia joined the partnership as one of the first countries and at the end of 2011 had adopted its main priorities, one of which is devoted to civil society. That is extremely important especially due to preparation for structural and cohesion funds but also in reaching the objectives of EU 2020.

The head of the Political Affairs Department of the Delegation of the European Commission in Croatia, **Paolo Berizzi** congratulated Croatia on its success and forthcoming accession to the European Union. Given the historical breakdown of Croatia's accession path, Mr Berizzi pointed out the relevance of joining to the EU, grounded on values of respect for human rights, equality, justice, solidarity and pluralism, for which it was awarded the Nobel Prize. The European Commission has been fostering cooperation with civil society on legal, economic and social improvements, has built strong partnerships with civil society organizations, jointly creating an NGO-friendly environment, he added. Through several funding sources, the EC has continuously supported NGOs in the whole country in various sectors, human rights and democracy, transparency and openness of government administrations, protection of natural resources, building local partnerships, raising awareness of EU integration, effective implementation of EU standards, promotion of social dialogue and strengthening of socio-economic growth.

He noted that the process of building and developing institutions has come to an end. It was a silent revolution that has fundamentally changed Croatian society. In particular, he thanked NGOs that played a key role in raising awareness and supporting the EU delegation in Croatia. He believes Croatian NGOs were stronger when they joined forces and created synergies, naming Platform 112, established by some 60 human rights organisations with intention to monitor the status of human rights and the rule of law in the context of the finalization of Croatia's Accession Negotiations with the EU and which was extremely helpful to the EU specifically. He thanked the government and urged it to make sure CSOs remain strong and keep a critical voice in society. He noted that this is a new time in Croatia with many new reforms but also with a lot of work that remains to be done. Croatia will not only benefit from this but will contribute to developing old and new European ideas, according to Berizzi.

Nicola Bertolini, head of sector, Regional Programmes and Cooperation Unit, DG Enlargement, European Commission, introduced the principles of equality, human dignity, freedom, rule of law, respect of human

rights and minorities as grounds of the European Union devoted to fighting corruption and organized crime and striving for sustainable economy and social cohesion which remain major challenges for member states today. According to him, civil society organisations have a key role in advocacy, lobbying and oversight especially due to the fact that life and problems do not stop at the gates to Europe. The call for transparency, accountability and effectiveness for public institutions remains strong. Also needed is a deepening of understanding by citizens who are well informed on membership and the EU processes. Mr Bertolini mentioned the recent discussions held in Brussels on the necessity of the legal and regulatory role of CSOs to boost domestic accountability. CSOs need to work on accountability and representativeness with the need for quality research and not simple opposition to the government. CSOs need partnerships and networking especially with grass-root organizations that are closer to the citizens and stimulate participatory democracy.

Mr Bertolini expressed two main goals of the EU – supporting the legal and financial environment for civil society and building CSOs as competent actors through dialogue between CSOs and authorities according to the guidelines to the EU support to Western Balkans and Turkey for the next 7 years. Indicators and measures that will help EU to monitor their main objectives were to be developed the next week in Brussels. He pointed out that the EU should focus on monitoring and dialogue, long-term partnership, coalition and networks but also support NGOs to be less dependent on international donors' funds. He noted we should all work on domestic funds, philanthropy and responsibility in favour of increasing low-value grants for grass-root NGOs. He ended his speech with a notion expressing that CSOs live long-term, governments stay short-term.

Åke Sahlin, TACSO Project Director at SIPU International, expressed his pleasure in being at the conference. He introduced the work of TACSO in 8 countries with 10 offices, 32 staff members, 100 experts that have contributed in various ways to TACSO activities. The main strategy of TACSO's work has been: working for the region with resources from the region, a policy of total openness and transparency (assignments and reports published publicly) and making projects and civil society visible through promoting the values of civil society. He presented a number of examples of TACSO's work in the Western Balkans and Turkey such as media training, radio programmes at Istanbul radio stations with 4000 listeners, advocating open public budgets, cooperation with government offices for NGOs, development of quality assurance and quality control systems, legislation providing cooperation and communication between governments and civil society, study visits, civil society sustainability promotion, promoting new legislation on social entrepreneurship based on in-depth research, individual capacity building through TACSO's training provision, capacity building of NGOs, developing models for mentoring and coaching, publishing different publications, reports, etc.

Expectations from the Conference

The session was introduced by a screening of a documentary on the development of Croatian civil society, entitled *Neko novo vrijeme/Different Times, New Times*. It presents a series of experiences of civil society actors related to the changes brought about by the EU accession of the Republic of Croatia. The emphasis was placed on the processes of applying for and managing EU-sponsored projects, as well as on visibility of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Croatian society, especially in the context of public advocacy and influencing public policies. Some trends, presented by the documentary, include a drive toward increased institutional change in Croatian society, as well as challenges to balance the need for professionalization and maintaining the initial mission/orientation of Croatian CSOs. This is of special importance, as a new wave of Croatian activism is being formed and articulated in the form of civil society initiatives such as *Pravo na grad*.

Framed by such a presentation of trends in the Croatian civil society, two issues were raised by the facilitators:

- a. Bearing in mind your experiences from other (civil society-related) conferences, what would you like to happen at this one?
- b. Regarding the conference topics, what would you like to see as the results at the end of the conference?

The participants worked in groups, with members coming from different countries (Croatia, as the host country; EU member states; accession countries). Regarding their expectations from the conference, relative to experiences from similar events, participants expected the conference to identify practical experiences of regional CSOs relevant for the process of civil society development during EU accession. This was especially related to insights from Croatian CSOs – on how to develop projects relevant for EU financing, as well as how to increase overall organizational capacity. The conference was expected to proceed by employing a highly participative process, involving all present stakeholders of regional civil society.

Regarding the expected outcomes of the conference, participants emphasized their wish to identify regional initiatives, conduct networking activities and establish new contacts relevant for cross-border cooperation of CSOs and hear/learn how CSOs throughout the region are dealing with the challenges of civil society development in the context of EU accession. The contacts established at the conference should be used to work together on EU-funded projects. In addition, learning from the Croatian experience with accession and transferring it to other countries in the region were singled out as relevant outcomes of the conference. Participants also emphasized the need to identify good practices in reaching decision-makers, in the process of influencing public policies, as well as in reaching out to citizens and presenting the

results of their work to them. It was important for participants to avoid the negative influence of “corruption”, which is often ascribed to some public institutions in countries across the region and could be mirrored by public opinion on civil society.

Impact of the EU Accession Process on Civil Society

The plenary session was moderated by Predrag Bajović and consisted of three presentations:

- Indraneel Sircar, PhD (University of Essex, UK): *Groundhog Day or Judgment Day? Donor-driven Civil Society Development in the Western Balkans*,
- Marijana Sumpor, PhD, and Irena Đokić, PhD (Institute of Economics Zagreb, Croatia): *The Role of Croatian CSOs in the EU Accession Process*,
- Meriç Özgüneş, PhD (Hellenic League for Human Rights, Greece/Turkey): *What Has the EU Done to/for Minority CSOs? Minority Rights Norms and EU Funds in Context*.

Indraneel analysed the impact of donors on the development of CSOs in the region. He used metaphors from the world of Hollywood movies to frame the discussion of:

- a. repeated donor attempts to facilitate CSO development in different countries across the region, but without applying previously learned lessons, and
- b. the projected end of donor support to CSOs in countries joining the EU, which could bring civil society development to a halt.

His findings are based on a research project, conducted jointly by the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) and the School of Politics and International Relations, Queen Mary, University of London. Based on a sample of 48 donors and additional country-level analysis, the research revealed some patterns of donor-driven trends in civil society across the IPA region. Firstly, researchers in this project identified a problem of sample identification, since many donors did not recognize themselves as such, as they provided ‘only’ non-financial assistance and worked on programming/overall civil society themes, instead of assisting individual CSOs. Apart from methodological problems, research findings demonstrate that mostly short-term (project) funding is awarded to CSOs, except for network-building activities. The majority of funds are directed towards technical assistance/capacity building and themes related to democratization and minority rights protection. It is interesting that less than a third of donors included in this research, focus on grass-roots CSOs, while multilateral donors seem to be focusing exclusively on professional organizations, which suggests that civil society development is, indeed, driven by donors’ agenda-setting activities. Indraneel suggests that donors should implement more sustainable exit strategies and focus more on institutional reforms. Since almost two-thirds of donors surveyed said they did not coordinate their activities, the presented results also call for a more coordinated approach to the

region.

Further research results can be accessed in the research paper *Promoting Democracy in the Western Balkans after the Global Financial Crisis*, which can be downloaded at:

<http://www2.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/research/LSEE/PDFs/Publications/Adam-Fagan-Paper-For-Publication.pdf>.

The discussion seemed to confirm the orientation toward short-term project grants, since they are easy to administer and provide “nice looking”, verifiable results that create good content for donors’ public relations. The need for increased sustainability of donors’ initiatives was emphasized, in order to achieve long-lasting ‘legacies’ of their work, which is especially applicable in the currently neglected field of developing CSO capabilities for sustainable fundraising. Civil society (i.e. local civil society structures and institutions) should coordinate the donors (instead of the other way around, as seems to be the current situation). This required development of dialogue with local stakeholders, enabling donors to get their priorities right.

Irena and Marijana reflected on the role of CSOs on the Croatian EU accession process. They identified areas of CSO involvement in terms of: implementing IPA projects, public policy influence and advocacy, as well as some involvement in the EU negotiations and programming. Their research was conducted within the TACSO project, wishing to explain the role of civil society in Croatia’s EU accession. This is not an easy task, due to problems in identifying active and relevant CSOs, among the more than 48,000 organizations registered with the Croatian authorities (as in April 2013). Based on the 2011 annual report of the Croatian government office for NGOs, they have reported on more than 1.6 billion HRK (220 million EUR) of CSO grants, administered by national, regional and local government. Approximately one-third of total funds came from national sources, used to fund 5258 projects and programmes in 2011. Only 2% of national funding are related to national contributions to EU funded projects. The sources for these contributions were diverse, including different public budgets, organizational activities, CSO partners, loans, etc.

Irena and Marijana surveyed a sample of 251 Croatian CSOs, from a TACSO-produced list of 1156 organizations, engaged in EU-related issues. Their findings show that approximately one-third of these CSOs focused their work on EU-funded projects, while a little more than one-fifth occasionally participated in such project activities. However, more than a half of responding CSOs reported that they have (at least somewhat) changed their activities, due to EU funding. The CSO involvement in programming was indirect and unsystematic, with 40% of surveyed organizations participating in the agenda-setting. In addition, EU accession has improved the CSO capacities, especially in the fields of networking/partnership-building, knowledge related to EU issues and competence to transfer own knowledge and skills. Their role in the

society after Croatia's accession is expected to change significantly only for a quarter of surveyed CSOs.

Following the presentation, there was an active discussion which emphasized the need for CSOs to be more actively involved in programming, as well as overall EU accession activities (including negotiations, screening, etc.). Representatives of *Zelena akcija/Friends of Earth Croatia* believe that the Croatian experience of EU negotiations was not especially inclusive of CSOs, which were expected to legitimize the process by sending their representatives to, for example, IPA working bodies.

Meriç discussed the lively debate on previously taboo issues in Turkish society and the impetus for reform provided by conditionalities after Turkey's official candidacy in 1999. She discussed a growing shift in the European discourse from an emphasis on group, minority rights to individual rights and diversity which has had consequences in the way in which minority rights are discussed in Turkey. In the process, and looking at EU-funded programmes supporting minority and cultural rights in Turkey, she believes that a political understanding of difference has been promoted and in Turkey this has led to the "folklorisation" of difference, focusing on neutral expressions of cultural differences. With only 10% of all CSO projects dealing with minority rights, the majority of CSO activity focuses on preserving local language, cuisine, folklore and similar aspects of local culture. Meriç describes the way in which difference is treated in Turkey in terms of promoting an "innocent and static multiculturalism", which follows the neo-liberal notion of CSOs as de-politicized actors who should cooperate with a shrinking public sector in order to achieve social consensus and participate in social service provision. The predominance of this discourse has had consequences in the way in which civil society actors in Turkey imagine and narrate their work; emphasizing the non-political nature of their work, and focusing on professionalization and increased specialization. The non-conflicting relationship between CSOs and the state leads to a "technocratic" approach to human rights, which instrumentalizes CSOs in the reform process. Simultaneously, state institutions project an image of co-operation with civil society, which is, in reality, "tamed", as it becomes difficult to raise political issues, build wide coalitions and work across human rights issues. Therefore, instead of project-based funding with pre-identified priorities originating from donors, it is recommended to award long-term core operational funding to a range of civil society actors, including individual defenders of human rights, unregistered civil initiatives and social movements.

The discussion held after the presentation started with the viewpoint that human rights CSOs lose their credibility once they enter the political arena. Comments following this viewpoint emphasised the difference between *political* engagements and becoming *politicized*, i.e. engaged in the political process. However, the idea of active political participation for CSOs has been acknowledged as a viable option, if democratization is one of the fundamental objectives to be achieved by civil society.

Impact of Civil Society on the Accession Process

The plenary session was moderated by Emina Bužinkić and consisted of three presentations:

- Paul Stubbs, PhD (Institute of Economics Zagreb, Croatia): *Dreaming of Europe? Narratives and Shapes of Three Waves of Associational Activism in Croatia*,
- Natasha Wunsch (Alfred von Oppenheim Centre for European Policy Studies at the German Council on Foreign Relations – DGAP): *Using Europe – CSOs in the EU Accession Process*,
- Sezin Dereci (Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences/University of Bremen): *The Role of Environmental NGOs in Governing Turkey's Europeanisation Process*.

Paul vividly described his work in terms of “persuasive provocation”, referring to the presentation by Meriç Özgüneş in the previous session. In his view, activism in general is endangered by the particular kind of professionalization which she described, so that: “It’s not just Turkey, and it’s not just minority rights.” In this context, Paul used his research, recently published in the Croatian scientific journal *Polemos* (http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id_clanak_jezik=145099), to identify three waves of what he termed “associational activism” in independent Croatia.

The first wave of activism can be traced to anti-war activism, which, to an extent, appropriated protest networks dating back to the Yugoslav Socialist Federation. This wave is exemplified by the *Antiratna kampanja Hrvatske (ARK)/Anti-war Campaign Croatia* network, out of which a number of still active peace, human rights and gender equality organizations emerged. At this stage, EU involvement was rather disengaged politically and limited to *humanitarian aid*. The second wave of development brought about the transformation of activism into the confusing notion of “civil society organizations”, usually seen as equivalent to “non-governmental organizations”, compatible with the notion of securing employment for those involved and being issue focused. This wave saw the rise of a kind of “techno-politics” of the kind needed to benefit from significant European Union and other funding. The third wave of activism can be interpreted as a grass-roots reaction to the neo-liberal and clientelistic political economy. *The rise of a “new left” is important because it tends to view NGOs not as a solution, but rather as a part of the problem*. He introduced two examples: the struggle over public space in Varšavska Street (viewed in the film only through the lens of the right to protest) and the campaign, led by students at the University of Zagreb’s Faculty of Philosophy, for free higher education. Paul concluded by raising two key questions: (a) how to create new spaces for genuine inter-generational learning, (b) how to bring together radicalism and inclusivity in the activist movement(s).

The complete text of Paul’s speech can be downloaded at www.scribd.com/doc/135970125/Stubbs-Dreaming-of-Europe.

Paul's presentation was followed by **Natasha**, who discussed the difference between patterns of EU accession during the 2004 EU enlargement, versus the emerging Western Balkans accession process. She sees the Central & Eastern Europe (CEE) enlargement, which happened almost a decade ago, as having focused on formal adaptation, led by national political executives, in a "top-down" fashion. At the other hand, the Western Balkans accession is seen as a more inclusive process, with the limited effectiveness of conditionalities imposed by the EU. This results in a two-way relationship between the EU and national CSOs during the accession process. On the one hand, there is a lot of EU influence on local actors, in order to involve CSOs in the accession process, with the best practices being implemented throughout the region. For instance, Croatian examples of setting up a government office for cooperation with CSOs, as well as administering EU funding through national public administration, have now been accepted as best practices throughout the region. On the other hand, CSOs are also encouraged to take part in the accession process, especially in monitoring how laws are being implemented. Outcomes for civil society in the region are multifaceted, as well: (a) CSOs are becoming professionalized, with the transformation of grass-roots into policy-oriented organizations; (b) organizational capacity for EU accession-related issues is created; (c) cross-border CSO networks and partnerships are fostered, which enables the exchange of learning among the countries in the region.

However, Natasha also identified a number of pitfalls, with the most significant being identified in terms of "Access is not influence", since low receptivity for CSO inputs and their limited involvement in the accession can serve to legitimize the actions of political actors. The CSOs' leverage is also limited, as the level of public support for EU enlargement is declining and "transition fatigue" emerges. Another issue might be related to the reduced legitimization of CSOs, due to their involvement in the policy-making process and the perception of CSOs as a source of EU influence on shaping the behaviour of new member states. In addition, capacity building in civil society is not adequately followed by enhancing the capacity of public administration. Public sector capacity can be even diminished, as CSOs emerge as partners in the provision of social services to citizens.

These problems may be alleviated by redirecting funds from project-based provision of social services to high-capacity CSOs able to monitor governments and their policies. Funding should, furthermore, target the development of long-term capacity for public advocacy and policy monitoring. This is to be followed by lending credibility to CSOs with local policy makers, which can be achieved by citing CSO input in official EU reports. In the long-term, CSOs targeted for EU assistance should be able to follow up issues and provide evidence-based, constructive advice to the government. This is exemplified by the case of the Croatian organization *GONG (Gradani Organizirano Nadziru Izvore – 'citizens organized to monitor elections')*, which has built long-term capacity in their field of activity.

In the concluding presentation for this session, **Sezin** analysed the role of environmental CSOs in

addressing the “legitimacy deficit”, as perceived by many actors, since the EU has the upper hand in defining acquis-related mechanisms. “Europeanization”, as a process, is not completely coherent and straightforward – there may be reversions in the acceptance of the acquis, depending on local policy makers and the involvement of local civil society. To overcome these challenges, the level of CSO involvement in EU accession, measured by the inclusion of the term “civil society” in EU enlargement documents, is being steadily increased. The EU-CSO relationship helps create a better cultural context for accession and legitimize the entire process. This is applicable in the case of Turkey, as well.

Civil society in Turkey is not especially developed, with stakeholder consultation processes being also rather undefined and left to the interpretation of government bodies, on a case-to-case basis. In such an environment, environmental CSOs present a case of good practice, since they have a high capacity for volunteer fundraising (and, thus, independent funding), a higher level of expertise in environmental acquis than government officials, as well as a working knowledge of how to partner with the public sector. Although their role in influencing public policy is limited, environmental CSOs are invited to technical committees and provided consultation opportunities due to their expertise. Other constraints for the more prominent sector of environmental CSOs in Turkey include a very slow accession process, which decreases EU influence, as well as the intention of these CSOs to set their own agenda instead of accepting the one set by the EU. Sezin concluded her presentation by recommending that a formal code of conduct for cooperation between government and CSOs in Turkey be established, followed by funding mechanisms, which should assist further government-CSO dialogue and partnerships.

In the discussion that followed, a range of opinions were voiced, including a suggestion that the EU should move from project-based funding towards funding the institutional development of CSOs in the Western Balkans (WB), in order to involve less developed organizations in the accession process. Favouring high-capacity CSOs, ready to implement EU-funded projects, even leads to EU-based, well-developed organizations winning projects in the WB area. Therefore, effectiveness in using funds should not be prioritized over local civil society development. The practice of channelling EU funds through local public administration(s) was also criticized, as it opens up opportunities for silencing CSOs critical of local government(s), as well as creating unresponsive administrative procedures. All these comments were voiced as especially applicable to smaller, activist organizations, which currently seem to be excluded from opportunities to participate in sectoral partnerships and CSO-government dialogue. A solution to this issue might be *re-granting*, i.e. channelling EU funds through high-capacity local CSOs (instead of government bodies), which have good knowledge of smaller, grass-roots organizations.

Lack of political/associational culture in CEE/WB is another problem, which cannot be easily solved, especially due to the existing gap between citizens and highly technicized CSOs and civil society experts. This gap may, however, be beneficial for local governments and some EU institutions, since it legitimizes

the democratic/representational deficit, “mystifies” the EU accession process and hides the effects of institutional changes (in terms of whether they deliver real social transformation).

World Café: Civil Society and EU Accession

The World Café session enabled participants to connect and exchange their views and opinions about experiences of CSOs during the EU pre-accession period, as well as to explore their fears concerning the processes and challenges they are facing. This session was planned to prepare the participants and serve as a foundation for the last interactive session – on the third day of conference – during which the participants worked out their recommendations to the target audiences.

At the beginning, the facilitators briefly gave the context for the **World Café** and provided an overview of the process and explained World Café principles:

- a. Focus on what matters.
- b. Contribute your thinking.
- c. Speak your mind and heart.
- d. Listen to understand.
- e. Link and connect ideas.
- f. Listen together for insights and deeper questions.
- g. Play, doodle, draw – writing on the “tablecloths” is encouraged!
- h. Have fun!

In three subsequent conversation rounds, each lasting for about 40 minutes, participants discussed following questions:

- From your own experience and observations what are your key insights regarding influence of the EU pre-accession period on civil society and CSOs? What are the most important questions that still need to be explored regarding influence of EU pre-accession on CSOs?
- In thinking about the EU pre-accession period what do you fear most, regarding the development and work of Civil Society Organizations?
- Which concrete challenges do you see in front of you when you think about CSOs in the EU pre-accession period?

The most important outcome of the World Café conversations, in addition to enabling participants to get to know each other better, has been a deeper insight into challenges the CSOs face in the EU pre-accession period.

More than half of the challenges are related to the relationships of CSOs with other actors in the pre-accession phase and generally the preparedness of the environment – local governments, media, and citizens. The challenge of quality relations, understanding and recognition of CSOs by citizens, government and the EU are very much indicated in the listed challenges. Participation on a policy level, real participation, not cosmetic with just access to some documents, seems to be a highly rated challenge in the pre-accession phase. Specifically, involvement in the definition of laws and consultation processes was listed as a challenge in some countries, like Turkey.

Many challenges are connected to the financing of CSOs. Most of the challenges in this area are connected to finding financing from non-EU sources, avoiding dependency on only one source but also to secure successful co-financing when needed in combination with EU funds.

Some challenges are related to the capacity of CSOs to absorb EU funds – gaining knowledge of the process and getting to know the EU market are examples of this. Also some concerns were raised regarding focusing on project results, instead on the real impact.

What to Expect? Lessons Learnt from Accession to the EU

This plenary session was moderated by Emina Bužinkić and consisted of four presentations:

- Marko Kovačić (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana): *Perspectives of Civil Society in Croatia: European Union and Civil Society*,
- Diana Bercenau (Civil Society Development Foundation, Romania): *Romanian NGOs in the Process of EU Accession*,
- Adam Aduszkiewicz (Foundation in Support of Local Democracy, Poland): *Accession to the EU: What to Expect? The Polish Experience*,
- Christine Bedoya Mendoza (TRIALOG project, Austria): *Linking EU and WBT Through Development Cooperation: the Experience of TRIALOG*.

In the opening presentation, **Marko** introduced the views voiced at the conference *Perspectives of the Civil Society in Croatia: Different Views* (held in January this year with many civil society organizations represented) and already formulated in the form of a discussion paper. A special panel on civil society and EU accession, held at this conference, came to the conclusion that, in the pre-accession period, CSOs have unique opportunities for exercising social influence. Additional benefits for CSOs emerge from access to EU networks/associations, as well as from the pre-existing high level of “Europeanization”, since “CSOs became EU members long before Croatia did,” according to Marko. Fears, articulated by participants of the described panel, include the perception of stakeholders, represented in the European Economic and Social Committee, as conservative and not inclusive enough of civil society. In addition, CSOs might be used to

legitimize/promote EU directives, while regional cooperation between Croatia and countries left outside the EU might be endangered, or even incapacitated. These problems might be emphasized by developments in the pre-accession period, as Croatian CSOs were extremely busy with absorbing EU funds through project work. This has led some of them to adjust their original mission and values, in order to better fit the EU agenda, while losing the people's trust. The presentation was concluded by a range of relevant open questions (related to questioning the administration of EU projects, funding mechanisms, institutional support to CSOs in Croatia and their capacity for absorbing structural and cohesion funds). Answering these dilemmas should be in the context of enabling Croatian CSOs to continue monitoring Croatian institutions.

Diana presented a view of Romanian national institution/foundation for civil society development, whose main activities are related to CSO capacity building and technical assistance. With a large number of CSOs registered in Romania (31,152), their role throughout the accession process is described in terms of promoting democratization, educating and representing citizens and local communities, as well as providing a major share of social services (approximately 45%). Since accession, new opportunities have opened up (new funds, visa-free travel, cooperation on regional and EU-wide projects...), but some new constraints have emerged as well. Comparable to the situation in other countries in the region, the amount of funds and technical assistance has decreased considerably, while professionalization and opportunities for larger, high-capacity CSOs have burgeoned. Namely, access to structural/cohesion funds has represented the "devil's kiss" for many larger Romanian CSOs, according to Diana. Many projects have been developed for the sake of funding only, without regard for the needs of Romanian society, as the large sizes and project budgets enable many professionals to obtain very high salaries. This is especially visible after the financial/economic crisis, as many contracted projects contain activities that are actually wasteful, since they do not correspond to the new realities in the economy.

Diana's recommendations included the need for government bodies and CSOs to work together in programming and advising, as related to structural/cohesion funds. She also pointed out the importance of civil society coalitions/networks, in order to provide a stronger "single voice", when facing the government and other social stakeholders, which are much less interested in CSO inputs than they were in the pre-accession period. In addition, the loss of expertise due to the "brain drain" from CSOs to the profit sector should be taken into account, as well as the development of independent, long-term sources of CSO funding.

Adam discussed the Polish experience, dating back to the development of CSOs in the 1980s, arising from the *Solidarnosc* movement and other "underground" organizations. He emphasized the embeddedness of Polish CSOs (with more than 80,000 registered organizations) in local communities and activities, including sport, culture, etc. There is a large difference between the few large national, professionalized,

high-capacity CSOs and the majority of smaller, locally/regionally oriented organizations, supported mostly by local/regional fundraising. Once again, EU funding is available only to larger organizations, for which new opportunities are opening up, due to participation in EU-funded projects and involvement in public policy processes. Challenges brought about by these transformations include large project scopes and the increased bureaucracy, which may hinder their original mission(s), introduce formalization and "fund hunting". At the end of his presentation, Adam, nevertheless, referred to a large Polish CSO, which still demonstrates a high level of societal embeddedness and successful fundraising, not relying on international/multilateral funds.

In the last presentation in this session, **Christine** introduced the Vienna-based TRIALOG project, which seeks to strengthen CSOs in the EU-12, as well as in accession countries, with the objective of securing their active participation in global development processes. The project structure is based on dialogue among the old EU member states (EU-15), the new EU member states (EU-12)/Accession Countries/Pre-Accession Countries and developing countries, which consist of the traditional "South" in Africa, Latin America and Asia as well as countries neighbouring the EU in the East and South. The project seeks to utilize the recent democratization and transition experiences of the EU-12 countries, which should have their own perspectives of how development assistance actually works. Its regular activities focus on building national CSO platforms, to build a "single voice" for civil society and, thus, increase its visibility/status in influencing public policies. In addition, international networking and partnerships are facilitated, as well as the exchange of good practices/experiences through conferences, study visits, international training, etc. By emphasizing civil society platform building (both nationally, and internationally), TRIALOG hopes to assist in building long-term CSO financial and organisational sustainability.

Christine's presentation can be downloaded at

www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/tacso_croatia_conference_04_2013_bedoya.pdf

The following discussion concentrated on the issues of CSO funding and coalition-building. Once again, access of smaller organizations to EU funds was brought up, with the Croatian experience of granting decentralization (as developed by the National Foundation for Civil Society Development) being singled out as a good practice. Such an initiative might be a solution to the uneven distribution of CSO funds to more developed regions within countries, especially to larger urban areas, being home to larger, high-capacity CSOs. Polish experience speaks of as much as 49% of the CSO budget being attributed to local authorities, who treat local organizations as partners in local development, which can also serve as a good benchmark for other countries. In this way, the imperative of CSO professionalization may be viewed as imposed, which has been illustrated by the case of the Croatian civil association *Franak*, which advocates the interests of users of loans denominated in Swiss Francs. Its success cannot be attributed to

bureaucratization and development of policy departments, as it is a small CSO, with a lean organization and informal structure.

The issue of coalition-building, especially at sectoral level, is viewed both as a benefit, which creates a “single voice” for CSOs and creates additional credibility with the national government, but also as a potential pitfall, which may silence smaller and less “mainstream” CSOs. Nevertheless, the EU context makes it very difficult to achieve adequate visibility or influence, since only CSO coalitions (and not individual organizations) are comparable to associations of businesses and other relevant stakeholders.

World Café: Where do we go from here? Future of Civil Society in the Western Balkans and Turkey

Interactive session on the last day of the conference was designed to enable the whole group to work on recommendations to EU DG Enlargement, national governments and CSOs. Each small group convened around tables developed a set of recommendations. Each table was given a large template, size 60x90 cm, with predefined sections for each needed focus of recommendations. All groups worked on the same questions, creating together answers and putting them in the predefined template:

- What can we do to meet challenges?
- What would we recommend to CSOs in IPA countries?
- What would we recommend to EU DG Enlargement in order to foster a more active role of CSOs in IPA countries concerning EU accession?
- What would we recommend to governments?

Meeting the challenges

In order to meet the challenges identified during the World Café of CSOs in the EU pre-accession period, participants specified following areas of possible improvement: proactive role of CSOs in the negotiation process, awareness of political pressure, capacity building and exchange of knowledge, social innovations and integrated innovative approaches, self-sustainability, transparency, independence from donors and evaluation of concrete social changes.

Participants emphasized need for networking and partnership among CSOs, collaboration and

partnership with municipalities and national governments as well as cooperation and effective participation of CSOs on EU level.

Recommendations to CSOs in IPA countries

Participants highlighted the following areas as important for further development: capacity building, networking, citizens' support, advocacy and policy making, visibility and financial sustainability.

More than half of recommendations are related to networking among CSOs and financial sustainability of CSOs. In the field of **networking**, participants stressed networking and cooperation among CSOs at national and EU levels, building effective networks among CSOs and sharing information and knowledge. In the field of **financial sustainability**, the recommendations are focused on developing innovative approaches in fundraising, diversification of donors, ensuring sustainability throughout social entrepreneurship, philanthropy, and social contracting.

Approximately one fifth of recommendations are related to **advocacy and policy making** with a focus on networking to influence policies on national and EU levels, on being more active in policy making, permanently monitoring the government sector and lobbying for increasing transparency of public consultation. In relation with **capacity building of CSOs**, participants consider building capacities for participation in consultative processes and policy making as an important area for improvement. Participants considered important the promotion of successful practices, capacity building of local CSOs and better use of opportunities for gaining knowledge and cooperation with other organizations.

A minor part of the recommendations is related to **strengthening relationships and communication with citizens** and bringing EU issues to citizens as well as increasing visibility of national CSOs at EU level in cooperation with the media.

Recommendations to the EC - DG Enlargement

The most important area of recommendations to the DG Enlargement is focused on **procedures for grants and contracts** under the relevant EU external aid programmes.

Participants singled out following four major areas of improvement:

- Promotion of good/successful practices in management of grants (examples of documents, successful and unsuccessful situations from practice, instructions for grant beneficiaries, contracting authorities, etc.)
- Grant schemes should target more local communities and work of local CSOs with special emphases on re-granting and sub-granting mechanisms.
- To simplify application procedures and provide shorter and effective evaluation processes for EU funds.
- To provide operational grants for CSOs as well as grants for advocacy and participation in

policy making

The second most important area is a **participatory and inclusive approach in consultation processes of planning/programming EU funds**. Participants are asking for recognition of the CSO sector and inclusion of CSO representative in all stages from programming to evaluation procedures.

In the area of **policy making**, participants are making recommendations for including local CSOs in consultations, programming and policy making through functional and active dialogue between DG Enlargement, national governments and civil society. There is a specific recommendation for establishing national commissions within the EP for NGOs, designing a strategy of cooperation and involving CSOs in policy making.

The last important area is related to **transparency of the accession process**. Participants consider it important to find tools and mechanisms for increasing the understanding of the accession process, making the process and content more visible to the general public and civil society and to influence governments on a national level to be more transparent and open for communication and cooperation.

Recommendations to national governments

In the scope of the recommendations to national governments participants emphasized procedures for grants and contracts. Participants developed the following specific recommendations which are very similar to the recommendations to the DG Enlargement.

- To improve funding and management procedures with emphasis on transparency, evaluation and monitoring
- To simplify procedures, to shorten grant evaluation processes and to provide evidence-based practice of evaluation procedures
- To provide small scale grant schemes for local/small CSOs and to continue to build strong capacities for EU funds project management
- To develop mechanisms for bridging gaps within the EU project's phases with transparent processes for continuous financial support through grants
- To provide public funds to CSOs for pre-financing and co-financing of projects

Another important area is **mechanisms for cooperation with CSOs** and participants strongly recommended the establishment of an institutional mechanism and legal framework for cooperation with CSOs and to recognize CSOs as essential partners in ensuring transparency of local and national governments. It is important to include CSOs in negotiations and the accession process as well in consultation processes and programming for EU funds in systematic way. Participants consider that governments should involve CSOs and networks of CSOs in early stage programming as well as the

peer-review processes of projects.

In relation to **policy-making processes** governments should cooperate with other sectors in creating and implementing public policies and to include CSOs in policy making. Governments should provide space for political involvement of different actors in society.

In scope of the recommendations participant mentioned a variety of issues that are important for future civil society development with a focus on **creating a legal environment to enable the sustainability of CSOs**: to define organizations that have public benefit status, to create a favourable legal environment for social economic development (social entrepreneurship), to define tax-employment benefits for CSOs and to raise awareness and create a culture of philanthropy.