

CONCEPT

“Enabling Environment for CSOs: Towards a Strategy of Civil Society in the Black Sea Region”

7th edition, December 2014

DATE: 8-10 December

LOCATION: Kiev, Ukraine

CONTEXT:

Considering the growing importance of the space provided by the Black Sea NGO Forum annually for the civil society organizations and their partners, as well as the recent developments in the region, it is necessary to **re-design the strategic approach of this traditional forum through a multi-stakeholder consultation process**, in order to enhance its effectiveness and sustainability in terms of regional cooperation at the Black Sea.

A first step in this directions was made through The “Strategic Consultation Meeting on the Future of the Black Sea NGO Forum”, organized on the 30th of June 2014 at the Permanent Representation of Romania to the European Union in Brussels, which provided useful input for the next edition(s) of the Black Sea NGO Forum.

During this meeting, it was recognized the essential role of CSOs in the region at a time of great challenges, but also opportunities, especially in the following areas: raising awareness on regional cooperation, providing policy input, building confidence and partnerships, initiating dialogue between citizens and institutions, holding governments accountable, promoting democracy, human rights & the rule of law, advocating for transparent and effective institutions, ensuring sustainable development and delivering social services.

The Black Sea NGO Forum (BSNF) was considered a success story of the Black Sea Synergy with an added value in the region, which enables and supports CSOs in fulfilling their role. Based on the participants’ input the future of the BSNF should focus on:

- its role of resources facilitator in the region by becoming a centre for the regional stakeholders;
- promoting standards for civil society, according to the concept of creating an enabling environment for CSOs (reference to the global framework – Busan Partnership);
- providing the participants & Forum alumni tangible cooperation & partnerships incentives and opportunities in the region;
- increased regional ownership of the BSNF and a more sustainable institutional framework.

And, of course, developing the role of the BSNF as a very important instrument to communicate to different stakeholders, raise awareness and contribute to policy & advocacy work in the region & at the European level.

MAIN THEME PROPOSED:

“ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CSOS: TOWARDS A STRATEGY OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE BLACK SEA REGION”

This year’s edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum is dedicated to initiating a strategic process at regional level, which aims to make the transition of the Forum from a mere event to a sustainable framework. In this context, a first step is to identify, through a regional multi-stakeholder consultation, the common needs and challenges of the civil society sector in the region, as well as to find potential solutions through concrete regional cooperation initiatives.

As mentioned in the conclusions of the Strategic Meeting, **an essential role of the Black Sea NGO Forum is to enable and support civil society organisations (CSOs) to fulfil their role.** This mission carried out at regional level fits in the broader international framework established at the 2011 High Level Forum on Development Effectiveness held in Busan, which recognises the vital role of CSOs in promoting democracy and human rights, contributing to policy-making and ensuring development.

In the light of recent developments in the region **civil society cooperation can hold the key to building trust, solidarity and regional initiatives that address common challenges.** However, civil society does not always “operate in an environment which maximises its engagement in and contribution to development” (indicator no. 2 of the Busan Partnership).

On the contrary, according to reports and indexes which analyse civil society sectors worldwide (CIVICUS Enabling Environment Index, USAID Civil Society Sustainability Index, CPDE’s assessment on the progress made towards achieving an enabling environment since Busan), **CSOs in the Black Sea Region face a series of common challenges** such as: restrictive legislation regarding CSO registration & functioning; infringements on human rights and freedoms; limited access to information; limited public policy influence; lack of core funding or dependency on external funds.

In this respect, the Black Sea NGO Forum 2014 proposes **a regional multi-stakeholder consultation process on the current context of enabling environment for civil society**, organised with the support of the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness – CPDE. Moreover, the Forum also comprises **a series of thematic workshops** in which the results of the consultation are carried a step further by **identifying ways of improving the environment in which civil society from specific sectors operates**, such as: democracy & human rights; child protection; environment; local development; or youth.

Specifically, the consultation will look **into three specific dimensions**, part of the analysis made by the CPDE Working Group - “Enabling environment for CSOs” to measure the progress made towards the achievement of the 2nd indicator of the Busan Partnership:

- **Universally accepted human rights and freedoms affecting CSOs** (recognising these rights and freedoms, ensuring a supportive legal framework; respecting the rights of specific groups);
- **Policy influencing** (providing CSOs with spaces for dialogue and debate in order to influence decision-making);
- **Donor - CSOs relationships** (encouraging partnerships and participation of CSOs from partner countries, greater predictability in allocating funds, ensuring core funding, avoiding dependency on external funds).

In the framework of the future *Strategy of Civil Society in the Black Sea Region*, this consultation is an important step towards **elaborating a regional index on enabling environment for CSOs**. This index will take the pulse of the region, showing where are the challenges, as well as the opportunities and potential solutions, and serving as a periodical assessment instrument that will allow for the strategy to adapt to the existing context. Moreover, encouraging CSOs and other stakeholders from the region to find solutions to common problems in specific areas of interest, will contribute to **the development of more concrete regional initiatives and projects** that respond to the priorities identified by the strategy.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Black Sea NGO Forum was launched in 2008 by FOND, in collaboration with civil society organizations from the extended region of the Black Sea and with the support of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Commission's Representation to Romania and the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation.

The vision of the Black Sea NGO Forum is that the Black Sea represents a cooperation space rather than a barrier. In this sense, the Black Sea NGO Forum aims **to create an open space for debate, mutual knowledge and understanding, communication and cooperation** among civil society representatives, Governments and international organizations active in the wider Black Sea region, with a focus on sharing good practices in various domains and success stories of regional cooperation.

Since its first edition, **the Forum has reunited more than 700 participants** from NGOs working in various activity areas, experts and government representatives from the region: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine, Romania and Russia.