

## BLACK SEA NGO FORUM, 7<sup>TH</sup> EDITION

*“Enabling environment for CSOs:  
Towards a strategy of civil society in the Black Sea Region”*

8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> of December 2014, Kyiv, Ukraine

### CONTEXT

#### HISTORY

The Black Sea NGO Forum was first organised in 2008 as a unique regional event, by the Romanian NGDO Platform (FOND), with the support of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Representation of the European Commission and the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation. The event was initiated within the framework of the **Black Sea Synergy**, a European policy launched at the initiative of Romania, Bulgaria and Greece with the purpose of consolidating regional cooperation at the Black Sea.

#### VISION

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.

#### MISSION

The Black Sea NGO Forum aims to:

- ✧ Increase the level of **dialogue and cooperation** among CSOs in the wider Black Sea Region;
- ✧ Strengthen CSOs' **capacity to influence regional and national policies**;
- ✧ Increase the number and quality of **regional partnerships and projects**.



### BLACK SEA NGO FORUM - A SUCCESS STORY

#### DIVERSITY OF STAKEHOLDERS AND THEMES APPROACHED

Since its first edition, the Forum has been a **driver of change in the region**, reuniting **more than 700 participants** from CSOs working in various activity areas, international and multilateral organisations, international donors, experts and government representatives from the region: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine, Romania and Russia.

Over the years, the Forum has explored together with participants **a diversity of themes of regional interest** (democracy & human rights; local development; youth; children rights; environment; social economy; citizen participation; policy influencing and advocacy; financial sustainability), encouraged **multi-stakeholder dialogue** and **sharing of best practices and creation partnerships**, supported **fellowships** in the region, organised **study visits to CSOs** and offered **awards to CSOs** for excellence in promoting regional cooperation. All these activities contributed to **building trust and confidence**, identifying common challenges and opportunities and addressing them together.



**NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN RECOGNITION**

The Black Sea NGO Forum is considered a story of success of the Black Sea Synergy, with an added value in the region, which enables and supports CSOs in fulfilling their role. The crucial importance of the Black Sea NGO Forum was emphasized both by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission.

**NATIONAL**

At the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Black Sea Summit (3 October 2014, Bucharest), the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs highlighted in his speech<sup>1</sup> the **importance of CSOs in fostering regional dialogue**, contributing with their experience at the **elaboration of regional initiatives** and **holding governments accountable**. In this context, he mentioned the importance of the Black Sea NGO Forum for regional cooperation in the framework of the Black Sea Synergy.

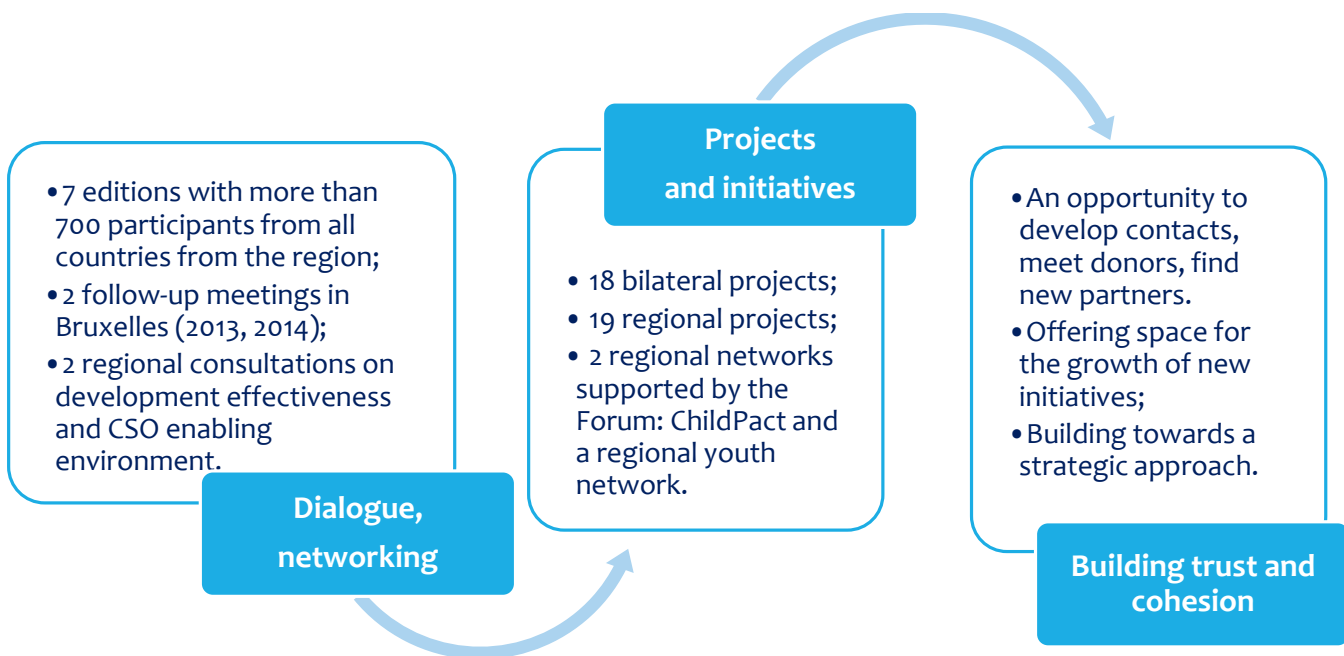
<sup>1</sup><http://www.blackseango.org/the-black-sea-ngo-forum-recognized-as-an-important-event-for-regional-cooperation-at-the-black-sea-summit-october-3rd-2014-bucharest/>

EUROPEAN

In January 2015, the European Commission together with the European External Action Service published a **Joint Staff Working Document**<sup>2</sup>, evaluating the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy policy between 2009-2014. The report mentions the **Black Sea NGO Forum as the main success of the Black Sea Synergy policy in the field of “Democracy, Civil Society and Youth”**, highlighting its results.

RESULTS

During its 7 editions, the Forum has facilitated **18 bilateral projects** and **19 regional projects** and supported the creation of **two regional networks**: The Coalition for Child Protection in the Wider Black Sea Area – ChildPact and a regional youth network initiated by the National Youth Council of Moldova. Beyond these concrete projects, the Black Sea NGO Forum has managed to **build trust in the region** by encouraging NGOs to develop contacts, make their projects visible, meet donors, find new partners, and offering the space for the creation and growth of new initiatives. In this respect, the Forum builds each year strategically on the objectives of the previous editions, thus contributing to the emergence of common regional goals.



NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Since 2013, the Black Sea NGO Forum received substantial support from important partners. On the one side, the Forum gained more visibility and sustainability through the multi-annual support offered by the **European Commission**. On the other side, the Forum developed a partnership with the global network **CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness – CPDE** which aims to bring the regional discussions of the Forum in the broader global context of development.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.blackseango.org/the-black-sea-ngo-forum-an-example-of-succes-of-the-black-sea-synergy-policy/>



## THE 7<sup>th</sup> EDITION OF THE BLACK SEA NGO FORUM

The 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum (8<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> of December 2014, Kyiv, Ukraine) was in many ways a cornerstone in the history of this event.

### FIRST EDITION IN THE REGION

First and foremost, it was **the first time the Forum was organised in another country** from the Black Sea Region (other than Romania – the host country of the first six editions of the forum), in this way **reflecting and strengthening the regional ownership** of the Forum. Of all options, **Kyiv (Ukraine)** was thought to be the most appropriate as recent developments here revealed great challenges, but also great opportunities for democracy, human rights and civil society which apply also for the entire Black Sea Region. Behind this decision was the strong belief that **civil society cooperation holds the key to building trust, solidarity and regional initiatives that address common challenges.**

### OBJECTIVE

The 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum was a result of a **process of building on previous editions, taking into consideration the participants' recommendations** present in the evaluation reports of the event, and in the impact study of the first 4 editions of the Forum<sup>3</sup>.

In order to fulfil these expectations, **the goal of the 2014 edition of the Forum was to launch the process of creating a Strategy of Civil Society in the Black Sea Region**, with the purpose of transforming civil society from a beneficiary into a partner in development and strengthening civil society cooperation that will foster regional cooperation at political level.

In this context, a first step was to identify, through **a regional multi-stakeholder consultation**, the **common needs and challenges for having an enabling environment** in which civil society carries out its activity. Furthermore, the Forum comprised a **series of thematic workshops** in which the results of the consultation were carried a step further by identifying ways of improving the environment in which CSOs from specific domains operate, such as: **democracy & human rights, local development, environment, child protection or youth.**

In this regard, participants were asked to think of the existing resources at regional level to address these needs / reduce these challenges and the way in which the Black Sea NGO Forum could support civil society in this endeavour.



<sup>3</sup>[http://issuu.com/fondromaniaorg/docs/the\\_impact\\_of\\_the\\_black\\_sea\\_ngo\\_for](http://issuu.com/fondromaniaorg/docs/the_impact_of_the_black_sea_ngo_for)

**ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**

The 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum focused on **enabling environment for civil society**, a theme of great importance for the region, as many CSOs here face common challenges related to the environment in which they carry out their activity. Our initiative aimed at:

- ✧ **Bringing the regional discussions of the Forum in the broader global context of development**, as ensuring an enabling environment for CSOs is a commitment assumed at global level through the Busan Partnership (2011).
- ✧ **Mapping the needs and challenges of CSOs in the region** related to enabling environment, through a multi-stakeholder consultation, as **an important first step in the process** of elaborating a future Strategy of Civil Society in the Black Sea Region. This regional consultation could be developed into a **more substantial research** that will take the pulse of the region, provide a more in-depth perspective on the existing challenges and potential solutions, and serve as a **periodical assessment instrument that will allow for the strategy to adapt to the existing context**.

**OUTCOMES OF THE REGIONAL CONSULTATION**

**The regional multi-stakeholder consultation on enabling environment for CSOs** was based on CPDE's monitoring framework which focuses on three major dimensions: legal framework, policy influencing and donor – CSOs relationships.

The main critical points highlighted during the consultations are the following:

- ✧ **There is a pressing need of ensuring an enabling legal framework for CSOs in the region.** Many organisations face similar problems related to registration restrictions, increased administrative burdens, lack of transparency and accountability, restrictions to receive foreign funding, and even intimidation, harassment and legal abuses.
- ✧ **Policy influencing is still weak in many countries from the Black Sea Region.** In some countries there is no institutionalised mechanism for policy dialogue, while in others consultations are only formal, selective in both content and invited CSOs. In some countries, governmental NGOs (CONGOs) are an extended phenomenon which affect CSOs in terms of policy influencing and financing. Moreover, the recommendations of CSOs are rarely taken into consideration and implemented. This situation is explained partially by a lack of democratic tradition to view civil society as a partner in policy-making, but also by a limited advocacy capacity of CSOs.

- ✧ **Donor – CSOs relationships** are often based on a top-down approach, with donors setting the agenda, which in turn affects the possibility of CSOs to follow their own priorities in accordance with grassroots needs. It is rare for donors to support core-funding for CSOs and there is usually limited funding to small CSOs with reduced financial capacity. There is a need for more flexibility in the financial support offered to civil society, one solution being to provide funding for programme rather than project funding. There are currently initiatives meant to improve the donor – CSOs relationship, one of them being the elaboration of EU Country Roadmaps by EuropeAid with the purpose of having a more strategic engagement with civil society at country level.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

According to the participants, the Black Sea NGO Forum could provide support in addressing the identified needs and challenges of civil society in the region – both from the perspective of ensuring an enabling environment and from a broader strategic perspective –, by:

- ✧ **Monitoring civil society enabling environment** using the models presented at the Forum (CPDE's monitoring framework/ BCSDN's monitoring matrix);
- ✧ **Encouraging the creation of regional thematic coalitions;**
- ✧ **Encouraging dialogue between CSOs and donors;**
- ✧ **Stimulating communication and interaction between CSOs in the region** throughout the year by using the latest communication technologies (online platforms, forums, social media etc);
- ✧ **Supporting capacity building for CSOs**, establish programmes and projects to support the transfer of know-how and best practices among CSOs across the region.



#### TOWARDS A STRATEGIC APPROACH

##### STRATEGIC PROCESS

The above-mentioned challenges that civil society in the region face can only be addressed by a **common and coherent effort**. A Strategy of Civil Society in the Black Sea Region will offer the base for a **solid cooperation among CSOs on clearly defined thematic and cross-cutting priorities** that in turn will **increase civil society capacity** to address local needs, contribute to development efforts, cooperate on thematic issues and engage in policy influencing.

The road to launching this strategic process began in 2011 with the elaboration of **an impact study of the first 4 editions of the Black Sea NGO Forum** (launched in June 2013 at a follow-up event organized at the European Parliament), where participants expressed the need for having a common sustainable cooperation framework, with a permanent secretariat and regional meetings organised in between annual forums.

In June 2014, a **Strategic Meeting** was organised in Brussels at the Permanent Representation of Romania to the EU on the future of the Black Sea NGO Forum in fostering regional cooperation. Following the discussions, it was decided to launch a process for creating a **Strategy of Civil Society in the Black Sea Region** at the 2014 edition of the Forum, beginning with a **regional multi-stakeholder consultation on enabling environment** for civil society.



## FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES FOR THE NEXT PERIOD

### FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Taking into consideration our participants' recommendations, the following activities are envisioned for the next period:

- ✧ Coordinating with CPDE in the activity of **monitoring the enabling environment in the Black Sea Region** through supporting **more research on this issue** in the region using already existing monitoring frameworks;
- ✧ Organising **2 regional meetings in between forums** to discuss more in-depth the ideas expressed at the Forum regarding the improvement of enabling environment and the role of the Black Sea NGO Forum in supporting this;
- ✧ **Elaborating a draft paper on strategic directions**, following an open participatory process in which all the Forum's participants will be engaged. This paper will be at the core of the discussions at 2015 edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum.
- ✧ **More coordinated action with similar regional initiatives**, such as the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, the Baltic and the Mediterranean cooperation initiatives.