

Strategic Consultation Meeting on the Future of the Black Sea NGO Forum

30th of June 2014

The Permanent Representation of Romania to the European Union, Brussels

(12 Montoyer Street, Brussels)

OPENING REMARKS: BLACK SEA NGO FORUM AND THE REGIONAL COOPERATION AT THE BLACK SEA: CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

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- **Olivia Baci**, President, The Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND / Executive Director, Partners Foundation for Local Development
- **Edward Iosiper**, Director, Analysis and Policy Planning Directorate, Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- **Dearbhla Doyle**, Coordinator for Regional Affairs, Department for Europe and Central Asia, European External Action Service
- **Carmen Falkenberg-Ambrosio**, Head of Section, Regional Programmes Neighbourhood East, Directorate-General Development and Cooperation, European Commission
- **Codrat-Alin Teclu**, Research Fellow at the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research (FRS-FNRS), University of Liege / FOND Research Associate

During the opening session, the speakers' presentations underlined their vision on the role of civil society organisations (CSOs), taking into consideration the recent developments in the region, and the importance of the Black Sea NGO Forum (BSNF) in terms of providing support to CSOs here.

Accordingly, CSOs play an essential role 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. Therefore, it is very important that CSOs identify common issues and initiatives in order to enhance the cooperation in the region.

As regards the Black Sea NGO Forum, this initiative was considered a success story of the Black Sea Synergy with an added value in the region. The speakers welcomed the Romanian NGDO Platform's proposal to start a consultation process in order to re-design the strategic approach and agenda of the Black Sea NGO Forum for the next years. Moreover, both the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission expressed their intention to support the Forum on a long term basis.

The session ended with a presentation of the standpoint of the CSOs in the region with regard to the future of the Black Sea NGO Forum, as highlighted in the study *"The Impact of the Black Sea NGO Forum - First 4 editions 2008-2011"*, elaborated by Codrat-Alin Teclu, Research Fellow at the University of Liège and FOND Research Associate. As part of the study, the participants highlighted the need to have a common framework with medium-term objectives; a permanent structure that would allow the Forum to develop into an assistance/resource centre for CSOs in the region; a policy and advocacy strategy with policy briefs/recommendations

elaborated and disseminated after each edition of the Forum; a longstanding media connection to promote concrete projects in the region and coordination with other regional initiatives.

STRATEGIC VISIONING SESSION: REDESIGNING THE FUTURE OF THE BLACK SEA NGO FORUM

Current regional context: The role of civil society and support from the Black Sea NGO Forum

<p>Current state of affairs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High volatility in the region, where countries are at different stages of development with a different status (some are candidate countries, some are not, some wish to be etc) => There is a need for improved dialogue, building trust and increase visibility in order to attract funds; • The level of knowledge of the region is not that high => opportunity to bring the region closer to the EU and raise awareness on specific issues; • In the future, the Black Sea region will become more extended (new EU members); that is why good relations should be developed with the newcomers or maintained with other countries (such as Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, etc).
<p>Role of civil society</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSOs have the role to create dialogue, networks, platforms in order to address common issues and provide ownership to policy initiatives by using a bottom-up approach; • One important role of CSOs is to fill in the gaps when governments are not active or cannot be active ; • CSOs should develop proposals to improve policy and legislation in the region; • Civil society is a promoter of democratic values: human rights, rule of law, good governance, anticorruption.
<p>Support from the BSNF</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The BSNF's added value is the fact that it addresses concrete topics and fosters regional cooperation in specific sectors => an idea would be to use the Forum as a tool for raising awareness on horizontal issues & advocate for raising the profile of the region; • The BSNF could become a very important tool to communicate to different stakeholders, raise awareness and contribute to policy & advocacy work in the region & at EU level (ex: sending policy recommendations to governments, the EU etc); • The Forum could have the role of facilitator in the region by becoming a resource centre for stakeholders; • The BSNF could have the role of promoting standards for civil society, according to the concept of creating an enabling environment for CSOs (reference to the global framework – Busan Partnership); • Through the Forum, a donors' network could be created or supported in the region for better coordination and increased impact of funded activities; • BSNF to be should be an open space of dialogue for civil societies

Future of the Black Sea NGO Forum: support from institutions and involvement other relevant stakeholders

<p>Future of the Black Sea NGO Forum</p>	<p>STRATEGIC VISION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The future of the Forum should provide participants with common incentives, tangible cooperation, partnerships in the region and increased networking between Eastern and Western representatives of CSOs; • The BSNF needs regional ownership => it should be organised also in other countries from the region or the location should remain the same and the follow-up events should be organised elsewhere; • An idea would be to change the format of the Forum into a permanent structure with working groups, a steering committee and a secretariat; • A specific thematic scope, networks and instruments should be elaborated / developed for the BSNF; • Local focal points should be established, based mainly on participants at the forum; • An idea could be to invest in capacity building CSOs in the region by providing know-how and technical assistance; • On long term, there should be a clearer link between the Black Sea Synergy with the Danube Strategy; • As regards financial matters, the BSNF should have stable funding. <p>FORMAT & THEMATIC ISSUES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is recommended to deepen exchange with the Baltic Sea network/forum; • The participation of civil society should be extended by inviting a large range of CSOs/institutions with different missions and keep a core of CSOs to provide stability (invited for at least 2 consecutive editions); • In-between meetings should be established (each 8-9 months, by presenting 2-3 projects , as results of group meetings) and follow-up activities organised; • South-Eastern Partnerships should be encouraged; • CSOs could prepare projects before the Forum takes place and at the Forum refine and develop those projects; • Joint thematic and country sessions; • Organizing special workshops on funding possibilities, writing proposals, working at the networks' format; • Organizing partnership fairs, informal setups (working lunch, dinner, side events etc.), open spaces dedicated for people to meet and connect or special donor session ; • Elaborating best practice examples;
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- The role of the media is very important in this region => journalists and independent media outlets should also be involved;
- Issues that could be relevant for the next Forum: security; environment; democracy & human rights; education; regional identity; maritime issues; environment; social issue; migration; youth.