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

Follow-up Report

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**Methodological Note: Research scope, Data Gathering and Analysis**

- **Goal**: monitoring of transformation processes of the civil society from the eight countries in the Black Sea region: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Turkey;

- **Timeframe**: this study was developed during June-October 2016;

- **Research tools**: interviews via skype, email, facebook and conducted face to face, including through study visits in the region. Observation was also used, as well as historical method in order to highlight the main qualitative and quantitative changes:
  
  - First stage: documents, legislation, strategies and other policy proposals, national and international reports,
  
  - Second stage: small analyzes were developed on how are respected the freedom of association, assembly and expression for each of eight countries involved in the project and interviews with experts from the region.
Research design:

- different opinions, identifying representatives of NGOs in fields as different as possible, who actively participate in public debates, people who have more than a 10 years experience in civil society or who have recently went through the experience of NGO registration;

- the attempt to organize interviews not only with the participants of the Black Sea NGO Forum;

- the interviewed experts are active participants and new members of several civil society platform for cooperation in the region;

- More than 30 interviews were conducted during the study, these interviews had both formal and informal character, with a strong commitment from the authors of this study to preserve the anonymity of the experts who contributed to its development;

- it became possible to cover the void of the available information in Russian and even Ukrainian languages, which was mentioned by the authors of the first edition.
Freedom of association

- Still **limited** by governmental authorities in some countries - interference of governmental authorities in the work of NGOs;

- Restrictions on foreign financing – **label** of „foreign agent”;

- Often the situation is **influenced by the political regime** promoted by governmental authorities;

- Cases of the refusal to register NGOs **without arguments**, promotion of high registration fees;

- Conditions for **unfair calls for competition**, in which are promoted pro-government NGOs.
**Freedom of peaceful assembly**

- compared to 2015 the situation has not improved much:
  - restrictions: the time, place, number of participants to the free assemblies (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia);
  - cases when individual protests have been restricted (Russia);
  - law enforcement forces did not hesitate to use force against peaceful protesters (Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Turkey);
  - cases of intimidation of journalists (Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine);
Freedom of expression

- Hate speech, against minorities (sometimes supported by authorities – LGBT, ethnic and religious minorities);

- Media publications are controlled by various political actors or oligarchs;

- The press is partially free and independent, and in some countries, it still remains a dangerous profession;

- A small number of publications succeed to protect their editorial independence:
  - These publications are financed through international programs to which these have access because they are registered as NGOs.
Other important topics:

- the fiscal system and taxes - no significant improvements have been observed:
  - The recent amendments to the law 2% were intensely debated by civil society in Moldova.

- volunteering is still an important subject on the agendas of civil societies:
  - Ukraine

- financial support from the state is still limited:
  - this is due mostly to socioeconomic status or political situation (authoritarian political regimes) in each state;
  - is not so popular among civil society representatives due to the fact that these projects are politicized, the procedures lack transparency or do not fully correspond to the actual needs of NGOs.
Public Institutions – CSOs cooperation

- Lack of effective strategies, oriented to produce basic normative framework for a pragmatic dialogue;

  - Lack of vision!!!

- The content of cooperation is often influenced by the political agendas’ of economic elites;

- The dialogue turns into a relationship of financial subordination;

- The criteria for selection of experts from civil society are not always transparent;

- Civil society must remain independent, to criticize, to evaluate decisions makers.
Donors – NGOs relationship

I. foreign and domestic donors;

II. funding from the state budget is not intended for projects aimed at providing an alternative to the official policy;

III. relationships between NGOs and the external donors still remain a challenge
   - there are restrictions imposed by governmental authorities of certain countries in terms of accessing external funds;
   - insufficient understanding of the needs that the civil societies Sea region Black are facing;
   - the preference of foreign donors to work with the same non-governmental organizations for more than 10 years;
   - the equal conditions for participation in the same funding program for NGOs and public institutions.
Donors – NGOs relationship

- Ukraine as an example:
  - the paradigm shift of external funding:
    - orientation to the regions,
    - supporting training programs for local experts, both from NGOs and from public institutions,
    - encouraging local initiatives, not just those in the capital,
    - trying to avoid duplication of funding programs on the same subject in the same region or county - consultation among donors on funding programs.
Common interests and trends:

- availability and openness to regional cooperation,

- regional level - most representatives of non-governmental organizations in these countries mention the importance of unifying interests in those areas where support can be received from regional initiatives;

- common topics for cooperation:
  - justice, corruption, youth policies, child protection, border management, ecology, energy efficiency, sustainable development, implementing standards for the production of goods and services.
Thank you!