



BALKAN
CIVIL
SOCIETY
DEVELOPMENT
NETWORK

Annual Report 2008 - Short version-

Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) is network of 14 civil society organizations (CSOs) from 8 countries in the Balkan region: Albania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia and Serbia. MCIC manages the Secretariat of the network.

All plan activities under the annual plan were completed, except the publication of manual for IPA funds. Additional, one unplanned activity was started and finished, i.e. activity for monitoring of the visa facilitation regime.

Among the *information-sharing* activities, regular up-date and maintenance of the website as well as publication of bi-Weekly E-mail alerts continued. Bi-weekly e-mail alerts consist of news, funding information, calls for trainings and publications which are distributed to more than 250 organizations and individuals. In this year, 24 editions were published. During August and September a survey about the website and Bi-weekly E-mail alerts was conducted. The aim of the survey was to check satisfaction of users and to test planned measures for sustainability and improvements of both services.

The process of *formalization* of the network was taken forward with organization of 2 coordination meetings. On 1st April, the 5th Annual meeting of the Steering Group took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia. CNVOS from Slovenia was the host of the meeting. Representatives of 6 member organization and 2 new organizations (KCSF and Vesta), which became members, took part in the meeting. Members exchanged information on their national activities and agreed on steps for defining the future of the network. A strategic workshop hosted by CRNVO was organized on 12th and 13th September in Kotor, Montenegro. At the workshop, 16 participants reviewed the first draft statute and discussed the mid-term programme of the network. Follow-up steps and action points were agreed such as analysis of the legal framework, finalization of the statute and the mid-term programme.

Among *advocacy and lobbying activities*, a new (unplanned) project for monitoring the implementation of visa facilitation regime was launched in April. The project was a collaboration of local CSOs from the region and ECAS from Brussels. During the month of May and June, a survey of 774 visa applicants in Macedonia was conducted. A hot-line was opened between 10th June and 30th September for citizens to get more information and present problems they encounter in applying for a Schengen visa. 105 calls (55 requests for information, 6 and 44 complaints compliments) were registered. A preliminary hot-line report was published in mid-July and a final one in November. The reports contained both analysis of complaints and recommendations for improvements. The report was shared with all relevant institutions and media. Results were presented in a regional conference in Brussels on 10th December to inform European institutions and to discuss follow-up steps.

In June, a project focusing on research on the role of civil society in the EU integration process started. Filling-in of national questionnaires in most partner countries, including Macedonia, took place. The project was delayed due to partial indifference of some of the partners and the need to own (financial) participation of each organization. Planned study visit in the framework of this project was rescheduled for the first half of 2009 and thus, allows for completion of national activities and additional fundraising in the coming year.

The network continued its *networking* and *cooperation* with EU networks and organizations such as Aprovev, CONCORD and ECAS through participation in their meetings and their activities. The network was active in EU lobbying and advocacy by giving its contribution to IPA programming for 2008, participation in a conference of the European Commission and contribution to EU budget review. The Coordinator was elected as Vice-Chair CONCORD Working Group on Enlargement, Pre-Accession and Neighborhood (EPAN), a group of national development platforms from EU Member States. As a result of joint cooperation and networking members submitted joint application for EU funds on topics such as civil dialogue, media, etc.

Bottlenecks and lessons learned

Due to completion of the last joint project in December 2007 intensity of activities and contacts between members reduced. Minimum ongoing communication between members was maintained through the website and Bi-weekly E-mail Alerts. As a result of partnership between members and the need for new projects, at least 6 joint applications were submitted by members of the network, one of which was support to the network's strategic workshop.

The problem with involvement of CSOs from Bulgaria and Romania remains due to different development of the sectors and opportunities for activities within the EU. This issue was discussed within the strategic workshop.

On the one hand, the network has been strengthened with new members from BiH and Kosovo. On the other hand, the network was weakened in the area of ecumenical partners with advanced or underdeveloped civil society as in the region (i.e. namely Albania and Croatia). This phenomenon is a consequence of the dynamic political, economic and social developments in the region and individual countries and the network as a whole will not be able to bridge these, save it creates a flexible structure responsive to these outside dynamics. Situation with ecumenical partners will be partially bridged by a planned regional project on religious cooperation, involving ecumenical partners from Albania, Serbia and Macedonia.

Further steps in formalization of the network were the key development in this year and are to be completed in ½ of 2009. The process is led by MCIC and is a result of 7 years of partnerships efforts and cooperation of local CSOs in the region. Key factors that will influence the shaping and location of registration will be a result of legal possibilities and practicalities for the daily management and running of the network. It is expected that the formalization of relations will contribute to improved ownership, efficiency and transparency, while the registration should improve identity, visibility and the possibility for joint action.