



## EU's Support to Empowerment and Capacity-building of Civil Society in (Pre-) accession Countries

### Position (update 01/02/2017)

Since the Enlargement Strategy 2007-2008, civil society development (CSDDev) is one of the key reform (Political) priorities for accession of Western Balkans countries with the objective *"to support better communication of enlargement processes and mutual understanding between EU MS and candidate countries' societies, but also to strengthen the role of civil society in the democratization and reconciliation process"*. This objective has been translated into concrete country-specific benchmarks to be achieved by the potential and candidate countries, and a financing facility – the Civil Society Facility - has been launched to support the realization of the objective with three mechanisms: grants to CSOs (Partnership Actions, national grants), support to exchange (P2P) and capacity-building for CSOs (TACSO).

BCSDN has prepared several times a position or gave concrete recommendations for better tailoring the EU's support for civil society development. For the purpose of making it more efficient and effective, BCSDN would once again present its views based on its findings and experience about the way forward reiterating on the **principles** and **strategies** in supporting sustainable and developed civil society.

- The **regional approach** for EU's relations with civil society organizations (CSOs) of the Western Balkans and Turkey should remain linked to the common objective for these countries which is to contribute to the consolidation of democracy and the future accession to the EU. In all the enlargement countries, especially in the past two years, we have been witnessing narrowing down of the space for civil society development, in all areas, including basic legal guarantees of freedoms – freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, both within the legal framework and in practice. In this context, priority to the regional support should be:
  - To promote and support adequate legal environments for the activities of CSOs;
  - To support diversification of CSOs' financial resources, including transparent and accountable public funding mechanisms, as well as sufficient public funding;
  - To support the creation of efficient institutional frameworks for CSO - authorities cooperation;
  - To ensure effective involvement of CSOs in the policy- and decision-making processes as well as participation in cross-sector bodies,
  - To strengthen and support regional civil society networks and to increase the exchange of experiences and best practices and support joint advocacy efforts.

Finally, bearing in mind that the enlargement countries share common traits and issues, but also taking into consideration their common history and similar future perspective, a genuine regional approach and efforts are required so as to achieve greater in-country effectiveness.

- The role of technical assistance to capacity building of CSOs in IPA countries should be accompanied by clearly defined **role of the civil society in the EU accession** process and it needs to support the overall CSDev, involving local CSOs as implementers; Furthermore, future EU support and technical assistance should give preference to **CSOs for delivering expert services** rather than individual experts. In this way, the EU will increase the support to capacity development of civil society organizations as well as their financial viability.
- Local civil society organizations and initiatives need constant support through further and continuous empowerment and capacity-building, but also an adequate and prompt **political support** of their actions.
- Monitoring the enabling environment in which civil society operates is crucial and should continue to be done through the **Guidelines for EU support to Civil Society in Enlargement Countries 2014-2020**.
- The Guidelines with its benchmarks and country targets provide the backbone of the more in-depth understanding and monitoring of the conditions in which civil society activists and CSOs need to operate. Bearing in mind the lack of considerable progress in the structural reform process in all countries and the political instability providing background for increased pressure on civil society activists and CSOs, EC should aim to provide:
  - Evidence of clear progress (or its lack) against EU CS Guidelines targets;
  - Concrete results and achievements with the Guidelines and needed adjustments on the road ahead to 2020;
  - Political support both in the EU and Enlargement countries endorsing the EU CS Guidelines.

Finally, strong **involvement of local civil society** actors in the monitoring process will only strengthen its legitimacy and sustainability and will contribute in achieving better results by 2020.