Consultancy to Complete Diversity and Inclusion Audit
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Diversity and Inclusion Audit

of

BCSDN

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The Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) is a network of 14 civil society organizations from 10 countries and territories in southeast Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Montenegro, Slovenia, Serbia, and Turkey). The mission of BCSDN is to empower the civil society and influence European and national policies towards a more enabling environment for civil society development in order to ensure sustainable and functioning democracies in the Balkans.

The BCSDN consists of partner organizations, which are equal in their rights and duties as members of the network. The Network comprises of the Council, the Board, the Executive Office (also known as the Secretariat) and the Executive Director. The Council is the highest governance body of the BCSDN and it is composed of one authorized representative of each member organization. It meets at least once a year to discuss the management and the work strategy of BCSDN. The Board is the governing and supervisory organ of the BCSDN. It meets at least twice per calendar year. The daily work of the BCSDN is organized by the Executive Office, i.e. the Secretariat. At the time of the audit, the Secretariat grew in size from four to seven staff members working alongside the Executive Director.

BCSDN activities are organized around four key pillars: monitoring the enabling environment for civil society development in the Balkans; improving European Union policies for civil society development in the enlargement countries; capacity building for civil society; influencing donor strategies and policies. All the activities organized and implemented by the BCSDN are in the service of increasing the role of civil society in the Balkans by increasing its voice in policy- and decision-making at national, regional and EU levels; developing advocacy knowledge and skills and increasing the accountability of civil society organizations as a base for their greater impact; and strengthening the communication, coordination and cooperation between the civil society actors in the Balkan region.

| About Europe&Southeast and consultants |

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market capitalism in Southeastern Europe by promoting political, social and economic responsibility, inclusion and access to opportunity.

Dr. Maja Nenadovic is a non-profit organization management consultant and non-formal education trainer. She has worked with organizations including the Anne Frank Stichting, Porticus Foundation, Open Society Foundations, European Roma Rights Centre, and the International Debate Education Association. Dr. Nenadovic has delivered workshops and trainings in 40+ countries worldwide. She received her PhD from the University of Amsterdam, where she evaluated the impact of international political party assistance and democratization in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo within the wider framework of democracy promotion. Her experience most relevant to this consultancy pertains to assisting the capacity building and improvement of several international organizations in their (children & youth) safeguarding policies and practices and organizational integrity assessment, including policy and practice (revision) recommendations. Maja is a partner at Europe&Southeast consultancy company.

Mario Mažić has been an advocate for human rights and democracy for over 12 years. He is the Founding Partner at Europe&Southeast consultancy company based in his hometown of Petrinja, Croatia, a Program Advisor at PeaceNexus Foundation in Prangins, Switzerland, a Board Member at the Humanitarian Law Center in Prishtina, Kosovo, the initiator of Political Youth Network which gathers young political leaders from post-Yugoslav nations, the Co-founder of Arterarij, a Zagreb, Croatia-based organization promoting participation and tolerance through art projects and part of Balkans 2030 initiative by the International Institute for Peace from Vienna, Austria. He holds an MA in International Development and Policy from the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and is part of the inaugural cohort of the Obama Foundation Scholars. Mario holds a BA in International Relations from Libertas International University in Zagreb, and has taken undergraduate courses also at the University of Zagreb, University of Oslo, Northwestern University and University of Belgrade. In 2012 he was a Fellow in Historical Dialogue and Accountability at the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University in New York. He founded and led the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Zagreb, Croatia, an NGO focused on reconciliation and transitional justice, between 2008 and 2018. For two years (2015-17) he led the efforts of Reach for Change Foundation in Croatia (based in Stockholm, Sweden) as its Country Manager and Representative.

Overview of the audit process

A key assumption with which this audit process was started was that, in order for it to be truly informative, it needs to be particularly tailored for the organization in question. Understanding and assessing Diversity & Inclusion (hereafter: D&I) performance of an organization depends on many factors that are both under the control of the organization and its management, and those that are out of its control. Before we committed to a particular methodological framework and process, we (a) studied the wider and imminent environment and context elements of the organization, as well as (b) studied the key documents of the organization to understand its underlying values and purpose. Only then were we able to address the question of how to apply various methodological tools and devices we mapped before, during the preparatory phase.

We were guided by the Gender at Work's methodological framework and analytical model, even though it became apparent from the outset of our research that the organization we were auditing, as well as most (if not all) of its member organizations were rather small (most have less than 10 staff members). This is why, for example, it was not really possible or practical to organize focus group interviews, but only the key informant

interviews. The Gender at Work's model seems to fit better the analysis of informal norms and formal practices of larger organizations. Furthermore, the BCSDN and its member organizations have a gender imbalance in their (leadership) structures, as the staff of most organizations seems to be about 70% female and 30% male. In the BCSDN Secretariat itself, at the time of the audit's conclusion, there were 4 women and 1 man employed (with an ongoing recruitment for 3 more positions). However, having said that, we did our best to corroborate the qualitative information gathered during the interviews with the desk review of relevant policies and codes provided to us by the organizations we audited. As the general findings point to an incipient stage of D&I policies development, most of our recommendations were geared towards improving this process for the BCSDN Network.

The identity and structure of BCSDN also heavily affected our approach. This is a non-governmental organization whose members are organizations from various countries in the Balkans. Even though the subject of this audit was BCSDN itself (its governance structure and the Secretariat), we studied its member organizations for two main reasons: (a) the member organizations partake in the governance of BCSDN as a network, thus necessarily impacting and building its organizational structure and (b) vast part of BCSDN's program is implemented through its member organizations and in cooperation with them, so D&I performance of BCSDN's member organizations rather directly (in most cases) translates into BCSDN's own D&I performance.

| Timeline |

Activity	Details	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Preliminary activities	Inception meeting	█				
	Finalization of audit plan	█				
	Conference calls	█				
Diversity and Inclusion Audit Interviews	Conducting interviews		█	█		
	Collecting relevant policies, documents and information		█	█		
Report	Synthesizing research findings, observations				█	
	Creating a report and recommendations plan				█	
	Writing the draft report				█	
	Submitting the draft report					█
	Editing and revising the draft report					█
	Submitting the final report					█

During the preliminary planning phase (September 15 – 30, 2019), we familiarized ourselves with the Gender at Work D&I analytical framework and methodologies, conducted the preliminary Skype calls with our BCSDN contact person Biljana Spasovska and made the logistical plans for the field visits. As the BCSDN was at the time in the process of recruitment and interviews for adding additional three members to their

team, some preliminary D&I advice was issued for the recruitment process, per BCSDN's own request. During this stage, we also collected relevant policies and internal documents, as well as key project narratives, to be fully informed on the organization's structure, its constituents and approaches.

The first field visit to Skopje, Northern Macedonia, was conducted by consultant Maja Nenadović in early October (October 02 – 05, 2019). During this time interviews were conducted with all of the BCSDN Secretariat staff in the office at the time (four people), as well as with the director of one of the BCSDN member organizations, the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC). Additional documentation for analysis was collected during this visit, and preliminary recommendation areas were identified on the basis of the elements determined as missing (e.g. formal complaints mechanism). Initial contact was made with the BCSDN Network member organizations, for further interviews that would take place online.

The member interviews phase took place in October and early November, and during this time both consultants Mario Mažić and Maja Nenadović conducted Skype interviews with BCSDN member organizations. During this period, we interviewed:

- Tina Divjak (Deputy Director/Head of Advocacy) from the Center for Information Service, Cooperation and Development of NGO (CNVOS - Slovenia);

- Bojana Selaković (Program Director) of Civic Initiatives (Serbia);

- Ana Novaković (Executive Director) from the Center for Development of Non-Governmental Organizations (CRNVO – Montenegro);

- Tevfik Başak Ersen (Secretary General) from the Third Sector Foundation (TUSEV – Turkey);

- Klotilda Tavani (Director of Programs) from the Partners Albania for Change and Development (Albania);

- Taulant Hoxha (Director) from the Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF – Kosovo);

- Slaviša Prorok (Project Manager) from the Center for Promotion of Civil Society (CPCD – Bosnia and Herzegovina).

All the interviews were transcribed and the consultants conducted the overall analysis of the collected data, as a means of preparing for the audit's second field visit.

The preliminary analysis phase took place prior to the second field visit. In this phase, the interviews, as well as documents and other data collected during research thus far was studied and analysed so that during the second field visit we would be able to test the assumptions made on this basis and fill-in the gaps that still remained in our understanding. This phase included individual work of both consultants, as well as face-to-face deliberative analysis sessions where assessment of D&I performance took place. Likewise, this phase served to identify the key issues needed to be addressed in the report, as well as to outline recommendations.

The second field visit took place at the end of October (October 28 – October 31, 2019), conducted by consultant Mario Mažić. This visit's purpose was to fill the information and perception gaps that persisted after the first visit and the interim online interviews. The dates were chosen due to several BCSDN Network member organizations' representatives being present in Skopje at the time at a BCSDN meeting, which gave the opportunity to Mario Mažić to engage them in dialogue about the D&I norms and practices. The proposed recommendations for the audit were further discussed and detailed with the BCSDN Secretariat, which enabled the Europe&Southeast team to finalize the audit report. During this second visit, preliminary outline of assessment and recommendations were shared with the Secretariat in order to ensure that the recommendations are not just fitting with the assessment, but also conceivably and reasonably implementable.

The report finalization took place in the first week of November (November 01 – 08, 2019).

| Summary recommendations |

This chapter presents the summary of recommendations arising from this audit. In order to be instrumentally useful to BCSDN, they mostly refer to processes or mechanisms that already exist in BCSDN's work or regulations, since this should make them more easily implementable. In order to clearly direct the recommendations to the level which they are aimed to address, they are presented here in 3 groups: (a) Internal level pertaining to the Secretariat, (b) Network level pertaining to the BCSDN's Secretariat and its member organizations and (c) External level which refers to what BCSDN can do to promote D&I across civil society sector in the region.

At internal (Secretariat) level:

- To proactively seek and share information on platforms and forums where representatives of organizations advocating rights and liberties of marginalized groups, and organizations that might be sidelined from the 'mainstream' civil society trends, share and receive information.

- To provide an explicit equal opportunity or anti-discrimination claim on all recruitment ads.

- To proactively share ads to minority organizations, media and other information channels, during recruitment.

- To integrate training on D&I (and Code of Conduct) as part of the onboarding process for new staff.

At Network level:

- To implement a process aimed at informing all relevant stakeholders (primarily staff of Secretariat and member organizations) of the Code of Conduct Committee as a complaint mechanism and generally on its mandate, preferably in the form of a training.

- To integrate in its Statute a standard of anti-discrimination measures as a requirement for membership status in BCSDN.

- To integrate targets regarding D&I performance and compliance with Code of Conduct commitments in the next BCSDN strategy.

- To activate the Advisory Board, established by the 2013 Council decision, as a mechanism with mandate to advise on and contribute to resolution of integrity issues.

Externally:

- To promote D&I within civil society in the region by leading on a consultative process, either on a regional level, or on national levels with its member organizations in respective countries, inspired by the model of Diversity Charters.

In-depth analysis and recommendations

Policies:

The inquiry into policies was conducted through a lens of D&I on two levels. First, we looked if and where D&I is directly and explicitly addressed in the key policies of the organization and secondly, we assessed various mechanisms in policies that less explicitly address D&I. The key documents we studied in our inquiry are the Statute of BCSDN, Code of Conduct and strategy papers (Strategy of BCSDN from 2009, mid-term Strategy 2012-2016 and Strategic outlook 2017-2020). The subject of our inquiry was anti-discrimination mechanisms (gender, ethnic, LGBT, ability) and (sexual) harassement policies/provisions, as well as any provisions that proactively mandate the governance or management vis a vis diversity considerations.

- Statute

The current Statute of BCSDN was adopted in Skopje, (North) Macedonia on June 18th, 2014. In its Part II (Vision and Mission), Article 7 (Values), the provision explicitly states "respect for diversity and non-violence" as one of BCSDN's values. This is the only explicit mention of a D&I-relevant provision. In its Part III (Organizations with member and consultative status), Article 11, the provisions define eligibility requirements for organizations to become members of BCSDN. The criteria outlined here are minimal and refer only to candidate organizations being registered as CSOs and working on civil society development. These minimal provisions do not set any criteria for organizations vis a vis their D&I performance, reputation, policies, etc. In the same part, in Article 15 which lists the criteria for termination of membership, there are the following provisions: [Member status can be terminated if the organization] "violates the Statute or other BCSDN acts" and "works contrary to the goals, tasks or reputation of BCSDN". Given that the Code of Conduct is an operational act of BCSDN and given the values and principles of BCSDN, it is conceivable that these provisions might be activated in case a member organization fails to respect diversity or acts in a discriminatory manner in its work. Finally, there are no hard provisions on diversity in governance structures or diversity within the Secretariat. In its Part IV (Governance, management and organizational structure), Article 36, Item 3, the Statute mandates the Executive Director to hire "staff based on principles of efficacy, competency and integrity".

- Code of Conduct

The BCSDN Code of Conduct was adopted in December 2017. The document, as explained in the preamble and 'use of terms' applies to BCSDN Executive Office (Secretariat) and its member organizations. This is also reflected in the document's objectives, e.g. Objective 1: "To enable high standards of practice by BCSDN members, governing and executive bodies". In BCSDN's 2018 annual report it is presented that the "Code has been a result of an active two-year long process of consultation and collaboration among BCSDN Executive Office, members, experts and stakeholders. The BCSDN Code of Conduct is a set of principles and commitments on how we carry out our work and it sets out actions on how to improve our results." The Code of Conduct directly addresses D&I issues. In its 'Commitments', part 3 refers to 'good governance'. Commitment 3.6. provides that "We will have policies prohibiting discrimination and promoting gender equality and participation of disadvantaged groups at all levels of the organization". Further, in part 6 which refers to 'well-handled human resources', commitment 6.1. provides that "We will have clear, well-defined, written policies and procedures related to the employees, and ensure that the policies protect the diversity and right of each individual". The Code of Conduct has a separate part that refers to its own implementation and mandates the creation of a Code of Conduct Committee to verify and assess compliance of BCSDN and member organizations with the Code, monitor adherence, develop indicators and serve as a complaint mechanism. There are provisions integrated in the Code that can significantly help ensure fair treatment of persons submitting complaints, such as the following: "If an elected member of the Code of Conduct Committee represents an organization that is subject to a Code of Conduct complaint, the member will step down from their position when the complaint is received until the outcome of the complaint is known". The Code of Conduct Committee was established and the members were invited to submit candidacies for membership in it. Three persons were elected to the Committee, which is currently operational. However, in the interviews it was established that the complaint mechanism is not known to member organizations well, as some of them did not know if the Committee has been established or if it is operational. The BCSDN has, however, developed an internal tool "Template for BCSDN's Self-Assessment against the BCSDN Code of Conduct" that helps the Secretariat and member organizations gauge their performance on commitments from the Code of Conduct.

- Rulebook

The Rulebook on working relations between employees and the BCSDN serves to regulate the relationship of employees with the BCSDN, alongside the local labor law and employment contracts. The Rulebook regulates a number of employment relationship issues, such as working hours and overtime work, holidays, annual leave, maternity leave, conflict of interest, disciplinary processes, salary and benefits, etc. The Rulebook, in its principles, in Article 2, stipulates that "BCSDN is committed to the policy of non-discrimination, regardless of gender, race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, political belief, physical ability, sexual orientation and age. BCSDN strives to create a working atmosphere in which: staff is respected and valued, both professionally and personally; values equality and diversity; there is a common idea and understanding of BCSDN vision, mission and goals; staff are dedicated to the fulfillment of its obligations and in achieving the goals of BCSDN." The Rulebook provides equitable benefits to employees, with explained differences in a few instances: (a) some benefits on leave depend on 'time in working relations', and provide more benefits to employees who have been with the organization longer, (b) some benefits on leave depend on 'complexity of work' so more senior employees have more days of annual leave, (c) some benefits on leave depend on 'work conditions' where those who work more hours weekly have more days of annual

leave. Maternity leave is regulated in the Rulebook and is aligned with the local labor law. Fathers are entitled to 2 days of leave for the birth or adoption of a child, but the Rulebook does not provide for paternity leave. In its Article 56, the Rulebook protects against penalization of employees who raise the issues of possible violations of regulations, and directs the employees to report such violations to the Executive Director or to the Board in case the issue pertains to the Executive Director.

- Strategy

In the 2009 Strategy, in part referring to results and activities (Part 4), a strategic element is specified as follows: "4.4. Respect for multiculturalism and shared culture of resource sharing as a base for development [of] societies in the Balkans". Here, the BCSDN commits to promoting multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue in its work. In the 2017-2020 Strategic outlook, there is a horizontal pillar referring to organizational development. Point 6.1.2. stipulates that BCSDN will work to "Create a rewarding working environment for the employees".

Assessment and recommendations regarding policies:

As evident, numerous D&I considerations are addressed in the policies of BCSDN. On a declarative level, there is often (within specific regulation) a high-level, explicit claim or a provision that supports a diverse and inclusive environment, or prohibits discrimination. In operational terms, measures protecting employees (and constituents) against discrimination are present in regulation, but the major concern in this regard is the non-recognition or unequitable recognition and level of information among the staff and members on the Code of Conduct Committee as a complaint mechanism. The Code of Conduct Committee is fully mandated and regulated to serve the purpose of a complaint mechanism, but it is surely unable to serve this purpose effectively if it is not recognized as such. Given its membership (representatives of member organizations) there is a concern that individuals might refrain from reporting for fear of retribution. However, this concern is addressed in the Code of Conduct, in the following provision: "If an elected member of the Code of Conduct Committee represents an organization that is subject to a Code of Conduct complaint, the member will step down from their position when the complaint is received until the outcome of the complaint is known".

Pursuant to this assessment, our primary recommendation is for BCSDN and its member organizations to implement a process aimed at informing all relevant stakeholders (primarily staff of Secretariat and member organizations) of the Code of Conduct Committee as a complaint mechanism and generally on its mandate. This process should necessarily reach all staff and relevant stakeholders. Our proposal is to organize this information-sharing initiative as a specific training for staff, possibly provided by the members of the Code of Conduct Committee directly.

Given that the Code of Conduct is an active policy that was developed in an inclusive manner, given that it is operational (i.e. its members have been elected) and given that indicators for monitoring performance on Code of Conduct commitments have been developed, we recommend that BCSDN integrates targets regarding such performance in its next strategy. The strategy development process is set to begin before the end of this year. We believe that this would strengthen the commitment of BCSDN to the provisions of the Code and result in better planning and more intentionality in meeting those commitments. We also believe

this would by definition strengthen the Code of Conduct Committee itself by helping translate commitments (which can still be understood somewhat ethereally) into concrete actions.

Finally, we recommend that BCSDN adds to its Statute's Article 11 (Eligibility for member status) an explicit provision that requires candidates for membership to (a) have policies against discrimination and for promotion of diversity, (b) accept, in full, the commitments from the Code of Conduct and (c) has a specific and operational complaint mechanism.

Processes:

- Decision-making

As explained above, BCSDN's governance structure comprises of the Council, the Board, the Executive Office (Secretariat) and the Executive Director. The Statute provides mandates to each element of the governance structure and defines decision-making process for them. For the purpose of this audit, however, we engaged with interlocutors to understand what decision-making processes are like within the team in the organization. There are no procedures related to this, other than assigned mandates, ToRs and roles of employees as defined in various regulations. Thus, our focus was to understand how transparently and inclusively decisions are made at the Secretariat level, and particularly how comfortable do employees feel to share their views and participate in decision-making. All interviewed interlocutors claimed a safe and inviting environment that enables them to share their opinions freely and openly. Likewise, the team seems to be working in a way that relies on expertize of its members and on daily consultation and communication around work matters. On the level to which we were able to understand decision-making within the Secretariat, there seems to be a fair balance of respect for different functions and their mandates or responsibilities and open communication, free from fear of possible retribution in case of disagreement.

- Constituent relations

The primary constituents of BCSDN are their member organizations, but there is a shared understanding among the staff and members that BCSDN also serves civil society in the Balkans as constituents as well. This notion, although shared, is understood to a somewhat different degree within the Network's members. There is some discrepancy related to the question of BCSDN directly serving other (non-member) civil society organizations, or serving them primarily indirectly, through its members in a respective country where BCSDN's members operate. This discrepancy may result in problems in situations when political or other events pose a threat to civil society organizations or the sector on the whole in a respective country, but where BCSDN member organizations do not feel called upon to act. All member organizations have mandates of providing support to civil society organizations and to overall civil society development and development of an enabling environment for CSOs. BCSDN has close and uninterrupted relationships with its members, as they are part of the Network's governance structures. When studying the work of BCSDN, it becomes clear that it serves the wider civil society in at least three ways: (a) by engaging them directly in capacity-building, peer-learning activities, consultations and other events (BCSDN is at the moment conducting preparations to initiate a sub-granting scheme as well, so this direct support will also entail financial support provision); (b) by engaging in advocacy related to policies and regulations that impact civil society development, for which purpose BCSDN and partners also developed a monitoring matrix that enables them to monitor enabling environment and notice its drivers and trends; (c) by working to influence donors and their

strategies in a way to assist them in planning and implementing exit strategies in a way that does not negatively impact the civil society environment in the region. BCSDN and its member organizations implement a number of measures to consult and engage their constituents in assessing, evaluating or planning their own work, most often periodically.

- Recruitment

This audit was conducted at a time when BCSDN was recruiting additional staff in its Secretariat, and this allowed us to observe and understand the practices around recruitment and onboarding. The Secretariat does not have detailed regulations when it comes to recruitment, other than what is specified in the Law and internal regulations. The guiding principle in recruitment, as noticed and claimed by the interlocutors, is merit-based employment. Some interlocutors expressed they would like to recruit diverse staff, but would prioritize merit and qualification over diversity considerations in recruitment. Thus far, BCSDN has not been taking active measures of outreach towards marginalized groups specifically with their ads.

Assessment and recommendations regarding processes:

Our audit found no 'red flags' related to processes in the organization, when assessing through a D&I lens. Decision-making on the level of Secretariat seems to be open and transparent, staff does not fear to voice disagreement or to proactively take part in decision-making. No interlocutor communicated emotions of marginalization or identity-based discrimination, and all have claimed to be comfortable in raising concerns or sharing grievances with the management and colleagues. Likewise, the staff seems content with the opportunities to move-up in the organization's structure on the basis of merit.

The representatives of member organizations claimed a high level of satisfaction with the way Secretariat is managed, the way it facilitates and enables governance structure and all have expressed the feeling that the BCSDN as an organization responds to the needs of its members and the wider civil society. However, when serving their constituents (in the understanding of constituents as wider civil society), BCSDN casts a wide net, but is not particularly focused on reaching and engaging organizations of minorities and marginalized groups. Such organizations do take part in and benefit from BCSDN's work, but our assessment is that BCSDN's performance in this regard can be further improved with a better planned outreach to such organizations. We thus recommend the BCSDN and its member organizations to proactively look for platforms and forums where representatives of organizations advocating rights and liberties of marginalized groups, and organizations that might be sidelined from the 'mainstream' civil society trends, share and receive information.

There is a noticed lack of intentionality and set practice when it comes to D&I considerations in recruitment. We have raised and addressed this explicitly with the management of BCSDN and during this audit, as they have been proactive in seeking recommendations on how to perform better. Some recommendations we provided for the ongoing recruitment were immediately implemented. Our recommendations in that regard are firstly to provide an explicit equal opportunity claim on all recruitment ads. We were informed that this is a usual practice, but was unintentionally missed in the current recruitment ads. Although just a claim, this can, in the social setting in which BCSDN operates, set them apart from (most) other employers and thus signal to potential applicants that they shall not be discriminated against on the basis of their ethnic, sexual, gender identity or level of (dis)ability. We also recommend proactive outreach to marginalized and diversity

groups. It is reasonable to expect that groups often exposed to discrimination will be discouraged to apply to jobs announced in forums and information-sharing platforms where they are often met with discrimination. Thus, proactively sharing ads to minority organizations, media and other information channels can result in more applications from persons belonging to marginalized groups. We also recommend that BCSDN integrates training on D&I (Code of Conduct and other measures) in the onboarding process and to go beyond the claim and invite new staff to share any issues they might have that prevent them from feeling included or accepted.

Culture and attitudes:

- General attitudes/definitions (interpretations/understanding) on D&I

The starting point of our inquiry was to determine the general attitudes and definition of diversity and inclusion in our interlocutors. 'Diversity' and 'inclusion' do not translate easily to the languages of the BCSDN Network's members and this is why we asked our key informants to provide the translation of those key terms to their respective languages. 'Diversity' was being translated as both 'raznolikost' (diversity) and 'različitost' (difference). 'Inclusion' was translated as either 'uključenost' or more frequently, its Anglicism counterpart – 'inkluzija'. It is interesting to note that during the interviews, when we discussed language and communications and inquired about whether the language of the BCSDN and its Network members was inclusive, or internally/externally accessible – most key informants exhibited high awareness of this issue, and pointed to steps that their organization had done in order to ensure that their language and communications did not create any barriers. At the same time, most key informants agreed that the terms 'diversity' and 'inclusion' – no matter what their translation to local languages – sounded somewhat 'foreign' and that this may also explain the reluctance on behalf of the civil society organizations to engage with topics that may be perceived as 'foreign' constructs - especially since CSO language was already deemed problematic and inaccessible to the general population.

- Gender considerations

Gender considerations were discussed at length with the key informants. The BCSDN Secretariat, as mentioned before, is currently staffed by 4 women and 1 man. In most other BCSDN Network member organizations, there are approximately 70% of women and 30% of men among employees. The imbalance was acknowledged throughout our conversations, and our interviewees openly hypothesized about the underlying causes behind this imbalance. We learned that the gender balance situation shifted over the years in the civil society sector, and while before it was customary to have men-dominated leadership positions, nowadays it was more often the case that the organizations were predominantly staffed by women, as well as in leadership positions. The informants saw this as a natural result of the nature of the civil society sector, expressing that "men are less interested in dealing with social issues" and that the salaries in the civil society sector did not make it as appealing as the private or the public (government) sectors. Furthermore, it was stated that while some older NGOs still had the 'man at the top, with majority female staff-model, this type of management was decreasing, as many of the 'old guard' civil society leaders were nearing retirement age, and new generations were succeeding them in leadership positions. With this generational change, it is also believed that a more gender-sensitive (and in the Balkans context, progressive) mindset was taking hold within the civil society sector.

- Ethnic and sexual minorities

When the subject of ethnic minorities was brought up, different BCSDN Network members had different responses, depending on the general ethnic homogeneity/heterogeneity in their respective countries. In all the cases, it was explicitly stated that ethnicity did not factor in recruiting and that discrimination on ethnicity grounds was not allowed or practiced. Within the BCSDN itself, there was an awareness and open discussion about the need to have an Albanian staff member, both for internal/external representativeness as well as for the language sake.

Regarding the topic of sexual minorities, all the interlocutors believed that while the national legislative frameworks and internal policies/codes clearly safeguard against discrimination on sexual orientation grounds, that this is a private matter and that it should not play an active role in recruitment efforts. Moreover, concerns were expressed that intentionally inquiring about one's sexual orientation or 'outing' people was a misguided way of attempting to increase diversity within an organization. The questions, "Is there an effort to recruit different parts of the population in order to encourage a more diverse staff?" and "Does the organization have set quotas/affirmative action programs directed at certain groups?" inspired a discussion on meritocracy, and there was a general consensus that in recruitment and hiring efforts, it was the candidates' experience, skills and organizational culture fit that played the most important role in the decision that led to their eventual hiring. All of our interlocutors assessed their organizations and individual staff as non-discriminating on ethnicity, religious or sexual orientation grounds.

- Organizational culture

The questions that pertained to organizational culture were answered by all of our interviewees positively. The BCSDN Secretariat, and most of the Network's member organizations are small teams (under 10, or between 10-20 employees); many have long-standing team members that have been working together for a long time; most interlocutors spoke of positive and friendly working atmosphere with organized team-building/fun activities, as well as informal socializing outside of the workplace. Considering the small team size and the often long-standing working relationships, turning to a manager for personal or professional problems was seen as a non-issue.

Assessment and recommendations regarding culture and attitudes:

The BCSDN Secretariat and its member organizations' representatives exhibited an overarching professional and forthcoming attitude when discussing both D&I elements, and the specifics pertaining to gender considerations, ethnic and sexual minorities and their internal organizational cultures. In general, the impression that was created was that the member organizations, as well as the BCSDN, have thoughtful consideration of these matters within their respective circles, and that attitudes or organizational culture as such do not constitute impediments to promoting or implementing D&I norms and practices within the BCSDN Network. When it comes to the general attitudes on D&I, gender considerations, attitudes and practices as pertaining to ethnic or sexual minorities as well as the organizational culture, this audit has revealed that the culture and general attitudes within the BCSDN Network are generally aligned with D&I principles. As such, we do not have any recommendations in this domain, except to keep up with the positive organizational culture, focus on work-life balance and safeguarding against burnout and chronic work-related stress. Regarding the general promotion of D&I values in the future, it is recommended that the

BCSDN Network includes, in their future agenda, the item to discuss and consider unifying the language (translation and interpretation) of D&I in the region, to be aligned and consistent in how these terms are used and applied.

Given this assessment, we believe that BCSDN has both the established position within the civil societies in the Balkans and the organizational culture that enables it to not only sustain principled D&I measures and processes within the Network, but also to champion the promotion of D&I across the sector in the region. Thus, we recommend that, similarly to the model of EU Diversity Charters, the BCSDN starts and leads on a consultative process for CSO-tailored diversity charter(s) in the region.

Other (integrity-related) areas of concerns:

While this finding does not necessarily fall under the D&I heading, we felt that since it influences the overall civil society accountability and legitimacy perceptions, it merited being addressed within this audit.

- Conflict of interest

During the interviews with the BCSDN Secretariat as well as its Network member organizations, a discrepancy surfaced in the understanding of the Network's overall constituents. While some believed that the BCSDN is meant to serve the civil society organizations, or the civil society sector throughout the Balkans, others expressed that the Secretariat of the BCSDN was primarily responsible towards its member organizations, perceived as BCSDN's primary constituents. It was from this difference of opinions that in some situations, when there was a serious shrinking of civic space, members had different standpoints on how the network should react. It is important to clarify BCSDN's principles and what its response in such a situation should be. Moreover, such issues should not be left to the matter of a majority vote within the member organizations as they are represented in the BCSDN Board as this may lead to differences in opinion, conflict of interest or ensuing inaction. Instead, we believe that they should instead be discussed within another body whose task would be to advise on issues that affect the civil society in the Balkans, its accountability, legitimacy, shrinking space or other challenges that may arise.

A decision to establish a body that could fulfill that mandate was reached already in April 2013, at the 5th Annual Council Meeting. The decision defines the Advisory Board's role as follows: "to advise the BCSDN organs and bodies on general policy, strategy and outreach. The advisory body will also serve as a fundraising and programmatic body that will advise the general decision making of the network." In its decision, the Council mandated the Board with the selection of members of the Advisory Board, and defined their profile: "Advisory Board members should be prominent, relevant, credible persons, coming from a sector of strategic engagement or stakeholder of strategic importance to the work of the network in achieving its strategic goals etc."

Assessment and recommendations regarding other (integrity-related) areas of concern:

While not directly related to D&I norms, this audit uncovered a potentially problematic element within the BCSDN Network and its perceptions on their primary constituents, when it comes to responding to rising threats to the civil society in the Balkans. Our primary recommendation in this domain is that BCSDN engages in the activation of the Advisory Board. Currently existing only on paper, but not in practice, the

existence and work of the Advisory Board can resolve future potential conflicts of interest arising from the differences in understanding and responding to various threats to civil society organizations in the region. We recommend that the Advisory Board be tasked with advising on: (a) policies and actions related to conflicts of interest arising from the differences of opinion among BCSDN member organizations; and (b) ethical issues and concerns pertaining to the questions of accountability, transparency, integrity and overall legitimacy of the BCSDN and its member organizations' work serving the civil society sector in the Balkans. We see this as aligned with the 2013 BCSDN Council decision to establish the Board, where it was mandated to "advise the BCSDN organs and bodies on general policy, strategy and outreach. The advisory body will also serve as a fundraising and programmatic body that will advise the general decision making of the network." We also see that the profile of persons that the Council decided should comprise the Board (presented in the section above) corresponds well to such functions.

Connection to trends in larger civil society

In the Balkans, civil society finds itself in the early stage of systemic approach to D&I. This audit has uncovered a limited presence of D&I elements in various CSO policies, and a general lack of prioritizing this issue. This comes as no surprise, when taking into account the overarching context of other challenges and concerns that the civil society is experiencing in the region. As elsewhere in the world, civil society in the Balkans is faced with increasingly shrinking space, caused largely by the rise and consolidation of power of (repressive) right-wing, conservative governments that have a tendency to view the civil society as its enemy. Enacting limiting legislation, or directing funds to pro-government NGOs that are not likely to act as watchdogs of democracy, but rather as supportive patronage networks, these governments have actively sought to constrict the space for activism for liberal, pro-democracy civil society organizations. Next to this, the region has witnessed a resurfacing of historical revisionism and deepening polarization between left and right ideologies, which has affected the civil society sector as well through parallel polarization processes. After the hopeful decade of post-conflict peace-building and reconstruction that followed the bloody 1990s, the past decade has on the other hand felt like a progressive downfall and rolling back of democratization processes in the region. Finally, coupled with various crises emerging elsewhere in the world, the Balkans has stopped being 'attractive' to many donor agencies, and the amount of funding available for civil society activities has shrunk over the years.

Since this audit has engaged with organizations that are acting as 'umbrella' or central resource organizations for civil society sector in their respective countries, we witnessed a certain dose of self-bias when it comes to D&I issues. Civil society sector runs the risk of flirting with exceptionalism – the notion that the very nature of the civil society is liberal, progressive, democratic and that due to this civil society organizations do not need to subject themselves to various accountability, transparency, integrity checks or diversity and inclusion objectives. There is the risk of perceiving oneself as the embodiment of various democratic values that may cause resistance to codification and operationalization of D&I and other similar norms within the civil society sector. We believe that this audit report, as well as its recommendations point to the BCSDN as the natural advocate and promoter of D&I in a way that will contribute to the Balkans' civil society both talking the talk, and walking the walk of integrity-strengthening norms and practices.

Finally, one civil society trend that merits mention is the increasing number of 'illiberal' civil society organizations and activity in the public domain. Be it (extreme) right wing organizations protesting against various minorities, often under the guise of being pro-family, or pro-Christian values, anti-vaccination movement representatives or far-right, nationalist movements, these organizations share in common the goal

of curtailing or altogether removing human rights currently enjoyed by certain groups (LGBTQ, Roma, migrants or refugees, women, etc.). When discussing D&I – the question arose whether we should actively seek to engage with (representatives of) such anti-Western or socially conservative civil society organizations in our diversity and inclusion efforts. Would it be desirable to include them, as a means of seeking to stop preaching to the choir? We believe that is an open debate that might enhance the overall D&I narrative/paradigm in the Balkans.

| Conclusion |

The D&I audit process of the BCSDN and its member organizations revealed no 'red flags' in terms of blatant disregard of D&I principles, violations of anti-discrimination policies and laws, or sexual harrassment (or other) complaints within the Network. It was refreshing to engage in discussion with a group of people whose attitudes and general mindset when it comes to D&I values was congruent with the overall CIVICUS commitment to safeguarding against discrimination and sustaining an organizational culture that recognizes, respects and values diversity of its members, partners, staff and volunteers. However, this absence of red flags in the BCSDN Network seems more a result of alignment of people with similar personal values, rather than a case of policies, mechanisms and practices that strongly safeguard D&I principles. Therefore, the majority of this audit's recommendations are geared towards operationalization and institutionalization of several D&I safeguarding mechanisms and practices at both the BCSDN-level, as well as at the level of its member organizations. And our recommendations are tailored to correlate or build on already existing processes or mechanisms within BCSDN.

The BCSDN Secretariat has exhibited a genuine interest, commitment and a high level of receptivity to improving the network's D&I practices, both in further developing specific measures (e.g. the complaints mechanism), as well as in taking an active role in mainstreaming D&I principles and implementation across regulations and processes within the BCSDN office as well as in its work with the member organizations. We believe that what is needed now is to build on this goodwill with intentionality and strategic approach to further institutionalize D&I practices within the BCSDN work. In this sense, the CIVICUS D&I audit has come at a particularly good time when BCSDN is embarking on an evolution of its work (through a recently approved SIDA-grant that will allow for the establishment of a regional civil society development hub), whereby this constitutes both an opportunity as well as an opening for the BCSDN to become the champion of D&I promotion and safeguarding principles and practices in the civil society sector throughout the Balkans.

We hope that the recommendations shared herewith will help BCSDN translate its respect for diversity and inclusion into effective policies that safeguard against discrimination, exclusion and marginalization.