



BALKAN CIVIL SOCIETY
DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Balkan Civil Society Development Network

Advocacy Platform towards the EU

May 2020

- I A Comprehensive EU Framework for Civil Society Development in the Enlargement Countries
- II IPA III Support for a Strong and Sustainable Civil Society
- III Advanced Policy Dialogue between the EU and Civil Society

A COMPREHENSIVE EU FRAMEWORK FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT IN THE ENLARGEMENT COUNTRIES

The European Union (EU) adopts an official policy and performance framework for civil society development focused on establishing long-term partnerships and support, recognizing civil society as a legitimate actor and partner in the democratic processes in Enlargement countries.

The EU does not have a common policy, Acquis, or agreed standards on what makes the operating environment for civil society enabling or disabling. With the publication of the Communication “The Roots of Democracy and Sustainable Development: Europe’s Engagement with Civil Society in External Relations” in 2012, the European Commission (EC) laid down the set of preconditions that have to be in place in any country for the functioning of the civil society. These conditions were in 2013 “translated” into a more detailed tool for monitoring of the civil society development for Enlargement countries – The Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in Enlargement Countries, 2014-2020 . As of 2014, civil society has been treated as a separate part of the Political criteria in EC Annual Country Reports.

The Guidelines, at the time of development, were considered the key document for ensuring an enabling environment for civil society actions and its development. However, after six years of implementation, they seem to have failed in living up to their potential. Lacking a strategic coherence, clear monitoring framework, ownership, and political commitment from the EU Delegations and the EU, they have neither been consistently reflected in EU’s monitoring of the enlargement countries’ reform progress, nor used sufficiently for the programming of the EU financial assistance to civil society. Combined with lack of promotion and understanding even within the key staff of the EU and EUDs, they have not provided the much-needed political support to CSOs, or clear guidance towards national governments.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- **There is an officially adopted EC document that provides a common understanding of enabling environment (EE) for CSO, with political weight and leverage to take appropriate action towards enlargement governments. Such a document on EE is incorporated in the existing EU policy frameworks and is tied to the provision of financial assistance.**

A COMPREHENSIVE EU FRAMEWORK FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT IN THE ENLARGEMENT COUNTRIES

With the planned review of the purpose and structure of the EU Guidelines, further efforts should be made for establishing a comprehensive framework for civil society development. The new Guidelines, or a similar document (e.g. Roadmap, EC Communication, etc.), should provide a common understanding on what constitutes an enabling environment, giving governments clear guidance on what needs to be done in the area of civil society if the country aspires to become a member of the EU. It will also set a clear path for EU and EUDs to coherently provide both political and financial support to civil society in the Enlargement Countries.

It should be incorporated in existing EU policy frameworks (such as the progress reports, negotiating frameworks, IPA programming, and action documents) providing a clear structure for monitoring government performance and a basis for taking political actions upon them. Finally, it would support CSOs' arguments and advocacy efforts for ensuring open civic space, and more genuine cooperation with the governments in the sustainable socio-economic development of the countries.

- **The new EU CS Guidelines have clear priorities of what the EU assistance aims to achieve, a clear results-oriented framework focused on the quality of practice, followed by a well-thought and consistent monitoring methodology, and a well-defined structure for monitoring and regular implementation reports.**
- **EU coherently provides both political and financial support to civil society in the Enlargement countries.**

IPA III SUPPORTS STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE CIVIL SOCIETY

The European Union commits to an effective programme and revised funding modalities to support the development and sustainability of civil society in Enlargement countries and its contribution to the accession and reform processes.

Since 2008, the EU has been supporting civil society in Western Balkans and Turkey through the Civil Society Facility (CSF), under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). While the new IPA III financial framework for the period 2021-2027 is currently in the process of planning, the initial documents show civil society remains one of the thematic priorities for intervention within the window for supporting the rule of law and democracy. The amount of funding, scope, priorities, and modalities of support to CSOs under the IPA III are yet to be determined to respond to several challenges.

In times of growing constraints to civil society operations in the enlargement countries (as well as in the EU), it will be crucial that the EU firmly supports a more enabling civil society environment, as a precondition for the existence of a strong civil society, embedded in official EU policy frameworks. The IPA III should be responsive to cases of shrinking of the civic space and democratic backsliding: not by solely decreasing country allocations (which ultimately will only punish the citizens) but by increasing the funding for CSOs, to make the civil society more resilient in countering back democratic relapse.

With this in mind, the EC should not consider assigning responsibility to governments for the management of EU funds for civil society yet. Most of the enlargement countries still lack sound, independent and transparent mechanisms for distributing public funds to CSOs, and have misused them for exerting influence over the civil society. Therefore, before the EU assigns the management of its funds for CSOs to national authorities, it should first condition national governments to significantly and consistently manage their funds for civil society clearly and transparently. This should be the minimum criteria for demonstrating readiness to manage EU funds for civil society and a true willingness to use these funds as an investment to the overall societal development, rather than a tool to undermine and control civil society.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- **The CSF continues under IPA III and supports actions aimed to promote all three aspects of the civil society enabling environment, continuous civil society capacity building, and direct grants for CSO actions and operations.**
- **Core/operational support is provided to CSOs nationally and regionally, with CSOs more efficiently pursuing their core missions instead of responding to calls for project proposals with predetermined priorities.**

IPA III SUPPORTS STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE CIVIL SOCIETY

To contribute to the stronger financial viability of the civil society in enlargement countries, the new IPA III would have to address the heavy donor dependence of the CSOs and the lack of alternative funding sources on one hand, and on the other, the insufficiency of philanthropic culture, favorable tax framework, and absence of transparent public funding. Building on positive experiences with operational grants and long-term framework partnership agreements during IPAII, the EU should further utilize similar instruments and aim for increased core and long-term support rather than short-term project support. This would be even more important having in mind the harmful effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the already weak financial viability of the civil society in the region.

An additional challenge would be the need EU to balance between supporting well-established and successful organizations whose existence and mission depend on the EU funding, and encouraging the development of a more vibrant civil society by supporting new CSOs or civic movements. New models for support to civil society should recognize CSOs as equally legitimate and relevant partners in the socio-economic development of the countries, ensuring different modalities are in place to respond to the diversity of CSOs and their capacities. Sub-granting modalities, which are aimed at reaching small and grassroots organizations, need to be revised and simplified, taking into account the principle of proportionality and the experience of implementing CSOs. A better definition of targeted CSOs, longer periods of implementation, more flexibility, and more coherent implementation throughout the EU and the EUDs will also be needed.

- **Locally driven and/or existing CSO networks of strategic importance with a track record of performance are strengthened and supported.**
- **Different modalities of support are in place within the IPA III that are appropriate to the diversity of the sector, recognizing the civil society as a legitimate partner for achieving socio-economic development.**
- **Sub-granting rules are coherently implemented and are revised and simplified taking into account the experience of CSOs that have been implementing sub-granting schemes.**



ADVANCED POLICY DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE EU AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The EU has a clear political commitment for the effective involvement of civil society in the European Integration process, translated into adequate mechanisms and processes for dialogue.

Civil society participation in policy-making is a wide topic, and its contribution to strengthening democracy has been broadly recognized. Involvement in policy process means an opportunity for citizens, CSOs, and other interested parties to influence the laws and policies that affect them and to contribute to their implementation. For this purpose, it is crucial to identify and implement effective communication and engagement mechanisms to make CSOs real stakeholders in the EU integration process and develop a sense of ownership.

Civil society and other non-state actors should be systematically involved in all the planning, programming, implementation and monitoring processes related to accession reforms, and the EU should be an example to all for inclusive civil society dialogue. To maximize the potential of civil society to contribute to the policy-making processes, participation mechanisms should be accessible and based on trust, transparency, and accountability, with clear procedures, predictability, long-term support, and dedicated resources.

As the announced changes of the EU integration process coincide with the forthcoming preparation of the new funding instruments for the post-2020 period, this is a pivotal moment for the future of EU support to civil society, through establishing support mechanisms that go beyond statements and funding. Such an approach will ensure engagement from the local level upwards and support for more meaningful involvement of the civil society as a key partner for achieving sustainable socio-economic development. The role of civil society in the relief of the COVID-19 crisis should also be facilitated and supported. Finally, the EU should demonstrate its regard for the independent civil society that safeguards the core EU values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, by supporting it financially and politically in times when more governments are shifting towards authoritarian governance.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- **The policy dialogue between the EU and the civil society in Enlargement countries is a structured process with clear rules and procedures for regular and inclusive consultations with CSOs, for which there is proper preparation and representation, as well as timely feedback and exchange of inputs.**
- **Mechanisms through which CSOs can influence the governments regarding the accession processes are established, and progress is measured against the level and quality of involvement, as well as how governments treat CSOs in the process.**
- **CSOs have the needed capacities for analysis, monitoring, and advocacy, as well as opportunities for networking, partnership, and active involvement, making their contribution more useful, effective, and impactful.**