

External Evaluation
of the
Balkans Civil Society Development Network

A report for the Network Secretariat
at the
Macedonian Centre for International Co-operation

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1. Introduction

This report presents the findings and recommendations of INTRAC and the Pokrov Foundation regarding the performance of the Balkan Civil Development Network (BCSDN) between 2004 and 2007. The purpose of the evaluation was to identify the network's most significant outcomes and impact as well as to assess its future relevance and sustainability.

The period under evaluation has been one of rapid external change and intensive development by the network. It has participated in no less than three major capacity building projects, two of which its Secretariat implemented directly.

The authors have taken pains to distinguish and reflect on the historical roots of the network. These lie in more than 10 years of development programming in the wider region, inspired by the ecumenical commitments of various faith based donor agencies acting in consortium.

The evaluation follows on from and builds upon the findings of the May 2003 external evaluation of the network's pilot programme, which ran from 2001-2003 under the name of the World Council of Churches Capacity Building Hub programme of the South East Europe Ecumenical Partnership (WCC SEEPP)¹.

The report presents a summary of the key findings of the evaluation before exploring in more detail the context, the methodology of the study and the network's operations from the perspectives of planning and implementation, internal structures and systems, programmes and finally network relationships. Further recommendations can be found in the body of the text and also in Annexes 3 and 4 which present detailed outputs, outcomes and recommendations, using the logical frameworks prepared for the two programmes implemented during the period under evaluation. The logframes are particularly useful for capturing the intense activity generated by the network.

We would like to thank the Secretariat for arranging the field visit to Serbia, Macedonia and Albania and all those who made themselves available for interview or who replied to questionnaires, whether in the broader region or in Brussels and beyond.

2. Summary of Key Findings

This section sets out the main findings in respect of context, structure, operations, programme outcomes and impact. It acknowledges the complexity of the Balkan context and the real difficulties that it presents for the sustainability of civil society organisations. It also takes into account the possibilities that the network has recognised and fostered in terms of new relationships with the state and with the enlarging European Union.

2.1 Context

- i. The accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate status of Croatia and Macedonia and the partnership (or similar) arrangements between the EU and Albania, Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro, have radically altered the political context within which the network operates. On behalf of the membership, the Secretariat and Steering Group have ensured that the network adapts to the new realities and its potential.
- ii. Apart from uncertainties around the status of Kosovo/a, political developments in the region have greatly reduced the potential for violence between countries or territories. Developmental agendas are replacing, or have replaced the earlier focus on conflict resolution. The Network has made significant contributions to cross-border cooperation and is well positioned to build on further cooperation between members in the future.

¹ For a fuller treatment of the origins of the network please refer to Annex vi.

- iii. Accession to the EU, or the prospect of accession, has greatly reduced the overall support to civil society organisations without presenting immediate alternatives to the “traditional” donors. As a result the civic sectors in many countries are rapidly shrinking. Some attrition may be beneficial in terms of quality, as it will tend to select organisations with clear missions and supportive constituencies for survival. However there is a genuine risk of much good work disappearing in the lean years ahead. The Network is alive to this context and is actively seeking new opportunities both for members and for the civic sector as a whole. This has led the Network towards *advocacy* for a more enabling environment for civil society.
- iv. Strengthening *relational* capacities has thus become more important for the Network than the Hub’s earlier focus on *organisational* capacities. The Network has responded to the changing context by strengthening its connections with relevant actors in Brussels and making room for member organisations to establish their own links with institutions of the EU. There is an increasing need for developing *cross-sector capacities*, given the emerging profile of government (at various levels) as donors of civil society and, in some cases, the private sector.

2.2 Structure and Systems

- i. In keeping with its growing maturity, the network has formalised its systems. An active Working Group has renewed vision, mission, values and objectives on behalf of the members. The Steering Group has provided sound leadership and the coordinating role of the Secretariat has been very effective. However the network remains dependent upon the Secretariat and would not hold together without it.
- ii. The network has retained its loose structure and is open to broad participation. It has opted to change its initial approach of staying small and has increased and altered its membership. In terms of civil society representation, there is now a better balance between secular and faith-based organisations (FBOs) and between policy-orientated resource centres and service providers.
- iii. This has enriched the network while it has challenged the FBOs to adapt and to extend beyond the “comfort zone” of the WCC SEEP Capacity Building Hub, the more church-related BCSDN predecessor, which was also more exclusive in terms of mission. There is however a challenge to the future of the BCSDN in the diversity of its membership. There is evidence that some secular resource centres feel uncomfortable sharing a network with the more conservative FBOs. At the same time some FBOs no longer feel they belong in what they like to see as their own “club”. The network therefore needs to forge a new identity.
- iv. From the beginning of the Hub there was insufficient attention to the criterion of viability in the selection of members during the Hub pilot. Although the process of joining BCSDN has now changed to partnership based upon established criteria, some members have become inactive despite substantial investment by the network and too few members are willing or able to take initiatives. With notable exceptions, the level of participation by members is generally too low. The network cannot carry unsustainable members that survive from project to project and are unable to make a meaningful contribution. The new system of peer selection for membership is appropriate as long as capacity, commitment and contribution to the network’s mission and objectives are the main criteria.
- v. Despite important progress in renewing vision, mission, values and objectives, the governance structure is not entirely clear. At present the function of the maximum authority of the network appears to be largely formal, serving as chair at the annual meeting. As is normal with networks, the secretariat takes on the lion’s share of leadership, facilitation and trust-building functions. There is reluctance on the part of

members to take on more responsibility for governance alongside occasional resentment at coordination. One issue is whether to rotate the coordination or establish a permanent base for it. Once this is decided a more robust governance structure can be put in place.

2.3 Programme and Activities

- i. The network has developed a clear set of objectives which it has successfully adapted to two projects in the evaluation period. Two objectives, resource mobilisation and partnership working were common to both projects and were implemented effectively. The third objective, promoting quality standards for training and consultancy, became a casualty of the long approval process of EU funding – 15 months between submission implementation.
- ii. A majority of the activities planned at the Steering Group meeting of May 2004 were implemented, especially those that were the responsibility of the Secretariat, or decentralised to specific members. Information sharing was the most popular activity, with the Weekly email alerts the most appreciated instrument. Thematic areas selected by the members were carried out less energetically. Only half of the Working Groups set up to pursue the themes came together. One of these produced an action plan, but it was not implemented.
- iii. As in the pilot programme most attention was given to the training instrument. The events were generally welcomed in advance and the participants were generally satisfied afterwards. The quality or methodology of the training was sometimes questioned afterwards, especially by the more advanced participants. Expectations of the external trainers were high but not always satisfied. Participation in training was also an issue, with non-members more in evidence than members. While this has the effect of broadening the impact of the network, it does not necessarily strengthen it internally. With hindsight, an important opportunity for using trainers from the member organisations was lost, possibly affecting their motivation. There is an underlying issue of training focus – how to satisfy such a broad membership range.
- iv. Study visits to Brussels proved very popular. They were most effective where participants had a clear idea how their organisation could benefit by association with specific European institutions.
- v. There was an intense programme of exchange visits which proved very useful in many cases, less so in a few. Specificity was the key to a successful exchange – where the partners genuinely had specialist information and experience to exchange, for example the legal and managerial aspects of volunteering. General exchanges between similar types of organisation (e.g. FBOs) were less successful, with participants unable to recall any particular outcome.
- vi. Surprisingly, Working Groups on thematic areas selected by the members proved to be the least implemented of the planned activities. This led to the Steering Group's identification of a lack of "horizontal" communication as the major bottleneck of the network.
- vii. The network is served by an excellent web site, however there has been some over-reliance on internet-based activities for promoting cooperation and for the generation and exchange of knowledge. Much effort has gone into developing forums for debate that remain largely unused – probably for lack of familiarity and training. Data bases of partner projects and trainers have also been set up but have attracted no hits.

2.4 Outcomes

The application of a comprehensive capacity building methodology to the priority needs of the membership through a variety of instruments has achieved the following main outcomes:

- i. Practical demonstration of civil society communication and cooperation at the regional level, as a result of joint network ownership through its Steering Group.
- ii. Better understanding of the strategic implications for civil society of closer ties with the institutions of the European Union and with national governments.
- iii. Development by the Network of a sound CB methodology which addresses the priority capacity needs of its members through a combination of complementary capacity building tools,
- iv. Improved skills for mobilising new resources as a result of training, study visits and timely information.
- v. Enhanced confidence and capacities amongst a group of key FBOs and resource centres for designing and implementing CARDS programmes.
- vi. Anecdotal evidence of enhanced bilateral cooperation between members.

2.5 Impact

- i. The network is still in development and has not yet formulated common advocacy positions with a possibility of achieving broad impact. However there is some evidence of bilateral network activities influencing legislation on issues of concern such as volunteer management.
- ii. The network has acquired and demonstrated the capacity to compete successfully for regional EU resources under the CARDS programme. This has greatly encouraged members who have (so far unsuccessfully) made similar applications at the national level.

3. Summary of Recommendations

As BCSDN has developed a promising methodology for strengthening civil society capacity at the regional level the following is recommended for the future sustainability of the network:

- i. Clarify and confirm the identity and purpose of the network as an instrument for empowering civil society around the common values agreed in the mission statement.
- ii. Strengthen the membership criteria so that the network consists of organisations with the genuine capacity and commitment to contribute to and benefit from cooperation in more equal measure.
- iii. Consider the range of options available for strengthening participation in the network, including such measures as rotation of the Secretariat, once candidate organisations are ready for the challenge.
- iv. Revisit and simplify the structure, eliminating any bodies that have proved unnecessary. Consider holding the annual Steering Group meeting before (or after) a large public event or conference.
- v. More closely define the network's capacity building strategy for each mid-term planning period and identify the appropriate levels for action by the network, by individual members and by members working in groups.

- vi. Be realistic about what the network can achieve, acknowledging that the primary motivation of members is to influence the way the EU and governments listen to civil society and allocate resources to its activities. Use research, information sharing, TOT and advocacy as the primary instruments to promote these priorities.
- vii. Increase the motivation of member organisations by involving their trainers more closely in the design and implementation of training. For example, fill the gap in demand for imaginative and interactive modules on the EU at various levels (beginner, mid-level managers and advanced (for trainers and policy analysts).
- viii.. Build a new *culture* that is forward looking and acknowledges and respects the origins of the network without being bound by its history. Make special efforts to ensure inclusiveness and diversity while developing the capacity to speak with a common voice on issues of paramount importance to Civil Society in the region.
- ix. Continue to encourage new ways of interaction between individuals in participating organisations but be more focused and less ambitious. For example, integrate training on web-based debates or communities of practice with training and exchanges and invite senior members of the network to moderate subsequent web-based discussion forums. Also analyse and communicate lesson learned from exchanges.
- x. Establish collaborative and mutually advantageous relations with other networks arising in the region. This means developing complementary as well as common objectives.
- xi. Generate funds for the network through own contributions and work towards a new funding proposal, preferably in cooperation with the Balkan Forum² on matters of common concern.
- xii. Continue the popular weekly e mail alert and encourage users to share more information about their activities through such participatory mechanisms as an editorial board.

4. Background and Context

In the rapidly evolving socio-political context of the Western Balkans, civil society networks have proved their worth in bridging divides created by conflict, new frontiers, ethnicity, religion, wealth differentials, access to services and many other conditions endured by the region's societies in transition. The BCSDN vision is firmly embedded in the realities of the region. The vision is of "sustainable peace, harmony and prosperity of societies in the Balkan region".

The BCSDN is however a specific response to a new and particularly challenging transition that Balkan civil society faces as a result of the departure of the last of their most loyal private donors. The network focuses primarily on the well-being of the civic sector itself. It exists, according to the mission statement first formulated in 2003 and approved by members in 2006, to "empower civil society through sharing and developing local practices, concepts and strengthening civil society actors".

Through a range of capacity building approaches, the network has increasingly focused on creating new opportunities for its member organisations with the European Union and the national governments that the Commission partners with. The difficulty of the task cannot be over-estimated. For every civil society organisation in the region the search for sustainability

² This new network with broadly similar objectives is based in Sarajevo has attracted the interest of support organisations and resource centres in Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro as well as Bosnia. Some BCSDN members also participate in Balkan Forum meetings.

is a test of capacity, legitimacy and determination. Each one is literally in a struggle for survival.

The focus on influencing the EU and national governments constitutes an evolution from the capacity building origins of the network. Between 2001-2003, as a contribution to the goals of the Stability Pact, the World Council of Churches Southeast Europe Ecumenical Partnership (WCC SEEPP) had supported MCIC to set up a Hub with the aim of providing coordinated capacity building services throughout the region. Although the justification of the Hub was strengthening civil society through information sharing, training, exchange visits, and consultancies, it was primarily engaged in organising regional training events for its 13 founding members.

In 2004 the Hub transformed itself into the BCSDN, gradually developing a new identity and membership, participating through APRODEV in major EU-related familiarisation programmes and developing the skills necessary for an effective network. 2006 was the final year of support from the private donors, ICCO and DanChurchAid, but a successful proposal to the EU Regional CARDS Programme permitted two further years of intensive activity, between 2005-2007.

An established network with a functioning Secretariat, BCSDN now enters a new period of development in which consolidation, membership renewal, self-sustainability, participation and focus are the priority challenges. The accession process ensures the continued relevance of the network – indeed the emergence of a similar network in Bosnia during 2005 shows that there is a strong felt need for this type of networking.

5. Methodology

The overall objective of the evaluation is to contribute to developing an enabling environment for the long term sustainability and effectiveness of CSOs in the region. Specifically it is intended to assess BCSDN strengths, weaknesses and achievements while suggesting how to further develop relevant activities.

The field visit took place between June 5-13th and provided an opportunity to meet partners at the Civil Dialogue Training events in Serbia and Albania. It included a visit to the Secretariat of the network in Skopje and also to partner networks and organisations in Brussels.

Questionnaires were distributed to other BCSDN partners, to donors and to BCSDN partners who are also affiliated to the Balkan Forum (see Annex vi). The partner questionnaires sought information on the opportunity for members to contribute to the network as well as on their level of satisfaction with its services. A simple contributions assessment like this is intended to see where the resources in a network lie. It moves away from the deficit model, needs-led approach, placing emphasis instead on where the passion and drive to make a difference is located.

The evaluating team was designed to provide both external and internal perspectives on the network. The external evaluator was from INTRAC and the internal evaluator was both a former WCC SEEPP Coordinator and representative of a founding member of the network – the Pokrov Foundation of Bulgaria.

Relevance. The BCSDN has built upon the achievements of the pilot phase and remained relevant to the needs of many (but not all) of the original Capacity Building Hub members. Early in the programme letters of commitment were submitted by all the original 13 members, with the exception of Philanthropy of Serbia. Following accession, the participation of the Bulgarian and Romanian members decreased and they were not included in the EU Cards proposal. The instruments remained basically similar to the original Hub design, but their level of popularity and take-up changed. Information exchange took over from training as the most widely used instrument. Study visits to Brussels were very popular. Exchange visits were most useful when they went beyond the familiar to build new

partnerships. As in the pilot phase, consultancy and back-stopping were not, or have not yet been extensively used; and there was more enthusiasm for setting up Working Groups than making them operational.

Efficiency. Thanks to the professionally-run Secretariat at MCIC, a majority of the outputs planned in both projects have been achieved in a timely manner. All networks have to balance efficiency (which is usually associated with central coordination) against active participation, which is a feature of commitment and can be promoted by decentralised activities. Participation was a cause of concern to the Steering Group all through the project, suggesting that the network should now plan for greater decentralisation. The project has demonstrated that participation does not necessarily have to sacrifice efficiency. There was noticeably more enthusiasm for the training events that were fully delegated to the partners to organise.

Effectiveness. There was a very high degree of activity in both of the projects implemented in 2003-2007. Only the most committed and stable organisations were able to follow through and use the information, skills, knowledge and access provided through the programmes. Even these could not fulfil their main expectations and convert their new knowledge to successful applications to new donors. Effectiveness depends crucially on the absorption capacity of the members, which suggests that the network needs to improve its member selection procedures. At the same time a focus on fewer networking activities would improve their results. Information sharing on calls for proposals and other opportunities has reached a much wider audience than the formal membership, at relatively low cost. The effectiveness of training has suffered through some weaknesses of methodology.

Sustainability. The network has developed in a relatively short period to an established institution with the capacity to develop and implement projects on behalf of its members. Crucially it is visible to governments and the EU and addresses issues that are of crucial importance the civic sector. These factors suggest that further projects developed by the Secretariat or by groups of its members, will have a good chance of further funding. It is very important that a number of key member organisations have agreed to make cash contributions to the network to ensure continuity of the Secretariat function. This is the clearest demonstration of the usefulness of the network to these organisations.

Impact is not yet clearly discernible in respect of the very ambitious indicators set out for the projects. But there are some early indications that the network has made a difference to the strengthening of civil society at a regional level. Some organisations are more confident as a result of their participation in the network, but this is not universal and other organisations have grown weaker. However BCSDN is still attracting new members and its imitation by the Balkan Forum shows that the strongest CSOs of the region believe that it is worth investing time and effort in this type of networking. The Network to Network CARDS programme is also an example that its contribution is appreciated by the EU. In order to make good on its potential for impact, BCSDN needs to consolidate institutionally and also strengthen its capacity to advocate for the sector.

6. Planning, Implementation and Sustainability

6.1 Structure

With origins in a loose network for furthering the objectives of the WCC SEEPP in the region, BCSDN remains informal and unregistered. It has moved on from the more church-related aspects of the WCC SEEPP programme to embrace a holistic approach to civil society strengthening, seeking and maintaining alliances with, in particular, resource centres. This inclusive approach is currently both a strength and a weakness of the network. On the one hand it brings together two strong components of Balkans civil society. On the other hand it can result in an increasingly weak sense of common identity, unless the network takes specific action to improve mutual understanding between the two dominant types of CSO: the FBOs and the secular resource centres.

Membership is currently in a state of both consolidation and expansion. Three broad categories of association with the network have emerged depending on their relationship with APRODEV, the Brussels-based association of the Protestant development organisations which represents the donors of SEEEP. APRODEV is a leading proponent of ecumenical cooperation between churches of different denomination and is active in Central and Eastern Europe and in Central Asia as well as in the Western Balkans. APRODEV's capacity building and advocacy work has also made a major contribution to the success of the BCSDN programme.

BCSDN members closely related with APRODEV. This group consists of organisations with a long history of partnership with ecumenical donors such as CAFOD, Christian Aid, DanChurchAid, ICCO, Norwegian Church Aid. With the exception of MCIC (a secular resource centre that is familiar with and sensitive to the issues of faith-based development agencies) the other organisations in this category are closely related to different churches: Pokrov Foundation, linked to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church; Diaconia Agapes, to the Orthodox Church of Albania; and EHO to the Protestant Churches of Vojvodina, Serbia. Finally AidRom, is the ecumenical association of the major churches in Romania.

The major strength of this group is that it has originated the network and led it to its current prominence. Its weaknesses include: an image problem that it creates for the network, especially where civic actors do not regard churches fully part of civil society; a tendency of some church related organisations to confuse the religious matters of their churches with their humanitarian and social development agenda; a feeling amongst some of these original members that they are losing ownership of the network; and the failure to attract some of the most active and respected developmental FBOs of the region (eg Centre for Peace, Osijek, Croatia). Set against these weaknesses is the great strength that FBOs have large, and committed constituencies with a strong value base.

BCSDN Resource Centres. The largest group currently consists of the following 8 secular organisations, all of them members: the Albanian Civil Society Foundation, EOS (training) and NIT/CENSURA (training, media) of Croatia; Opportunity Associates (OAR) of Romania (Resource centre); Women and Development of Bulgaria and WAWY - We Are With You of Kosovo/a (Resource centre). Two recent additions, both respected resource centres with a regional influence, are CNVOS of Slovenia and CRNVO of Montenegro.

The strengths of this group lie in its geographical diversity (it includes NMS, candidate countries and countries/territories with EU aspirations). It also has the capacity to renew itself with strong and influential resource centres. It has legitimacy vis a vis governments as well as with a constituency of CSOs. The participation of CNVOS is especially advantageous in that it has direct and recent experience of the accession process and for Slovenia the Western Balkan countries are priorities for aid cooperation. The weaknesses of this group include the following: networking "fatigue" amongst older members; lack of organisational sustainability for some resource centres; absence of national level members in the largest territories – Bosnia and Serbia.

BCSDN Participants. This large and growing group benefits from the activities of BCSDN without taking up formal membership. It includes NGOs with a close relationship to APRODEV, such as Philanthropy, the aid organisation of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the gender-focused organisations Safe House (Montenegro), Useful to Albanian Women (Albania), ESE (Macedonia). More recent organisations in the "participant" category include the Citizen's Pact (a regional organisation based in Serbia), the Reference Group of Bosnia (a network of more than 60 grassroots NGOs of Tuzla Canton); and TALDI (an NGOSO of Bosnia) and the Kosovo/a Civil Society Development Centre.

This category strengthens the network by keeping the membership base broad and diverse. It has a particular thematic strength in women's and gender issues. It also serves to attract potential members with a regional dimension. However the group enjoys benefits without responsibility and the commitment of at least some of the organisations' continued

participation would be in doubt were the benefits to reduce (in terms of free training and so on).

Other Networks in the Region. The first BCSDN Steering Group meeting in Skopje, May 2004, presented an analysis of networking interventions in the Balkans. From its perspective most of the initiatives revolved around APRODEV partners. By 2007 the situation was very different, with a range of donor and civil society networks operating across the region³. The most similar of these to BCSDN is the Balkan Forum which is in the process of establishing itself in Sarajevo around the Civil Society Promotion Centre.

Not only is there overlap in subject matter (influencing the EU and national governments) but there is also some duplication of membership. For although there is no membership structure at the Forum, BCSDN's newest members CRNVO and CNVOS, also participate in Forum, as does the MCIC. The Forum has also succeeded in attracting Civic Initiatives, Serbia's most prominent resource centre – which has only been represented so far in BCSDN by Team Tri, a group of highly trained facilitators.

The existence of a second, similar forum should be seen as a positive development in the Western Balkans, especially if it facilitates the regional networking of important stakeholders such as Civic Initiatives. There is also likely to be some added value to be gained by the network's different geographical focus, with BCSDN's good links with Kosovo/a and Albania and its members in Bulgaria and Romania. A priority will now be for the Bosnian and Macedonian Secretariats to reach agreements on cooperation between the two networks.

Links to Brussels Networks. BCSDN is most closely associated with APRODEV, which plays an important advocacy role on behalf of partners in Central Europe and Central Asia as well as in the Western Balkans. APRODEV is very active in the European development NGO's confederation in Brussels, CONCORD, for which it convenes a Working Group on enlargement, pre-accession and neighbourhood (EPAN). APRODEV's primary strength as regards BCSDN is its legitimacy as an EC development policy lobbyist with acknowledged expertise on the issues, backed up by a broad constituency as well as a wide partnership base. The recent EU CARDS programme has also brought BCSDN into a newer partnership with ECAS - the European Citizens Advice Services, a well-networked Brussels-based NGO with origins in consumer protection which is specialised in lobbying and fundraising at the EU.

Findings.

The benefits of the unique structure of the BCSDN are not as obvious to members as they were when the ecumenical donors were important in the region. There is a risk that the commitment of the FBOs to joint action around civil society strengthening will reduce as the donors complete their phase out. At the same time the resource centres do not fully understand nor appreciate the contribution that the FBOs can make. Unless this issue is addressed, the network will face a growing crisis of identity, leading eventually to a split.

The evaluation finds that the structural integrity of the network is important for reasons of historical identity and also for effectiveness in future lobbying and advocacy work. In order to influence policies effectively, civil society networks need to demonstrate that they have solid constituencies. In some, but not necessarily all respects, the combination of faith based and secular constituencies can be very powerful. However this is not proven, or obvious to the majority of existing members and should be the subject of further investigation by the network⁴. It may be time for special interest groups, such as the very closely church-related

³ See for example One World Platform for SEE Foundation (an information exchange network) founded in Sarajevo, 2003; the Balkan Human Rights Network, also in Sarajevo, in 2000. Donor networks include the Balkans Trust for Democracy (Euro-Atlantic focus) and an alternative (European focus) European Fund for the Balkans in preparation.

⁴ A topical example is the Bye Bye Baby VAT campaign which recently succeeded in abolishing an unpopular tax on baby care consumer items in Serbia. Civic organisations were ignored by the government when they presented a petition of 40,000 signatures but President Kostunica yielded to a separate appeal from the Patriarch. Although the outcome was favourable, the civic organisations that

organisations, to set up their own independent network rather than try to force a fit with the broader civic objectives of the BCSDN.

New developments in the region suggest that there is room for more networks in the future. Already the existence of the Balkan Forum provides BCSDN with the opportunity to achieve common goals through networks that overlap to some degree. This will require skilful negotiations between the different Secretariats in order to identify areas of “Network to Network” cooperation. The experience gained by BCSDN during the EU CARDS programme will be useful here.

If the 2001-2003 pilot phase was about “relationship building” or “sharing”, the current period was about expansion and implementation. The next period needs to be about consolidation and influencing. An open and diverse structure is appropriate at the start of a network, but as it clarifies its objectives and focuses increasingly on results, too much diversity can become a handicap. The present structure allows for too many non-contributing participants. It needs to consolidate around a new core of committed and effective organisations with proven capacity to make a positive contribution to the network.

There was insufficient attention to the criterion of viability in the selection of members during the Hub pilot. Some of these members have become inactive despite substantial investment by the network and too few members are willing or able to take initiatives. With notable exceptions, the level of participation by members is generally too low. In the view of one member, the network cannot carry unsustainable members that survive from project to project and are unable to make a meaningful contribution. The new system of peer selection for membership is appropriate as long as capacity, commitment to agreed mission and values and contribution are the main criteria.

Recommendations

Strengthen the identity of the network by breaking down the barriers between the existing categories of members. This will involve acknowledging the network’s origins and history while focusing on common ground rather than on differences.

Reassess the structure of the network so that it is based more on contributions than benefits. This will involve identifying a committed membership willing to make specified contributions and may result in a larger numbers in the member category and fewer in the participants category as the network develops more focused activities.

Undertake action research on relations between secular and faith-based CSOs in the region, to identify common ground, good practice and methods for improving cooperation.

Actively promote cooperation between similar regional networks as a means of enlarging influence without increasing and diversifying membership too much.

6.2 Systems and Procedures

The network has actively followed up the recommendations of the 2003 evaluation by developing network systems and putting them in place. These have proved generally fit for purpose, once they had been pared down to the minimum. The processes employed in developing these were very participatory and effective, especially the Working Group for developing vision and mission - the conceptual basis for the planning systems.

had put in all the work felt belittled – as indeed may have been the intention. Such rivalries are all too common in the region.

<http://see.oneworldsee.org/> accessed 21/07/07

Vision, Mission, Values. Renewal of the mission during the 2004-2007 period constitutes an important outcome for the network. A particularly productive Steering Group meeting of the Capacity Building Hub in Feketic, Vojvodina established the basic framework in December 2003, which was finally ratified by the Steering Group meeting of 2006. Work on the values was significant, and the participation of all categories of the membership in defining the ethical foundations of the network would suggest general agreement. Unfortunately this is not the case and the evaluator responsible for “taking the temperature” of the FBOs found that some church related organisations were still not happy and wished to return to the discussion.

Although the ethical underpinning of all networks needs to be continually updated, they cannot expect to function efficiently when basic principles are the subject of constant re-questioning. As mentioned above, the time may have come when those who cannot accept the common middle ground need to re-consider whether they belong to the network. This will doubtless include both secular and church related organisations which find it impossible to compromise.

Objectives. The same Steering Group proposed a set of 4 objectives which provide the network with focus around the common theme of effective cooperation. They cover communication, resource mobilisation, enhancement of the quality of work, inter-cultural exchange and resource sharing. These long term objectives provided the strategic direction for programme implementation (see section 7 below). They remain generally valid for future development, although greater weight should be given in future to the network’s advocacy functions in relation to the EU and in support of members in their influencing work with national governments.

Governance & Coordination. The Steering Group (SG) has met annually and has provided sound and focused leadership during the formative periods of both the Capacity Building Hub and the BCSDN. As mentioned above, it has also been well served by its Working Group on vision and mission. The SG has, however, not yet addressed the broader and more difficult issues of structure and governance, such as location of the Secretariat, decentralised authority for raising and distributing resources, renovation of membership.

During evaluation interviews there was general agreement amongst all partners that MCIC had made a major contribution to the success of the network so far. The questionnaire survey confirmed this without exception. Indeed at the most recent, 7th Steering Group meeting, members asked it to continue with the coordination of the Secretariat for a further period.

In general the network has had to adjust to a much more rigorous project management regime since implementing the EU regional grant. Inevitably the EU procedures do not always set the scene for good partner relations and the need to specify a single named partner as sub-contractor for training provision, was the cause of a serious dispute between the two Albanian members.

MCIC’s responsibilities vis a vis donors are generally accepted but not all members understand why grants have to be approved by the MCIC Board. The explanation is that the network is not a legal entity and for governance reasons the Secretariat has to be accountable to the organisation that hosts it. This has also meant defining the “independent and professional” role of Coordinator, for which a contract was developed and agreed in 2006.

The coordinator has made particular efforts to separate her loyalties and role to the network from her position with MCIC, although to many members these are still not clearly distinguishable. There is still an expectation of strong coordination but there is also increasing recognition that centralised decision-making is not good for fostering collective ownership.

This presents the network with a real dilemma in which efficiency and effectiveness need to be balanced. Efficiency is achievable through strong, stable coordination and leadership; effectiveness, especially when considering advocacy, is a result of shared governance. At this stage of the network's development the priority is to enhance the participation of members. There are two basic ways of achieving this: functional and operational measures. The present situation is that coordination and leadership are effectively combined in MCIC. This is highly efficient in operational terms but may discourage participation.

Further clarification of roles and responsibilities within the Steering Group may be a functional way of enhancing participation, at the risk however of bureaucratising the network unnecessarily. The role of the Chair is crucial here and there is scope for extending its responsibilities beyond the current (limited) practice of hosting the annual meeting. One suggestion is that the chair should not only rotate but also carry executive functions, as in the rotating Presidency of the European Commission.

Another suggestion is that the operational responsibility for running the Secretariat should rotate periodically. A combination of separately rotating chair and Secretariat would offer every capable member a stake in the ownership of the network and also hands on operational experience. It is however important to recognise the reality that the evaluators know of few networks that rotate in either of these ways and none in the Balkans! Effective networks tend to stick where they were founded! ⁵

These functional issues need to be addressed over the coming three years. Meanwhile short term operational measures need to be agreed for enhancing participation. These are discussed in the section on programmes and activities below. Strategically however, the network should encourage members to take initiatives amongst themselves, not always waiting for the Secretariat to develop funded projects.

Recommendations

Consolidate the network around a firm membership of sustainable organisations with proven commitment to its mission, vision, values and objectives.

Strengthen democratic participation in the network by exploring such options as periodically electing a chairperson (and possibly other officers) to serve as governing board for the Secretariat.

Make separate arrangements for the periodic rotation of the Secretariat as a means of strengthening member ownership and participation.

As far as possible maintain a light legal structure for the network, making use of members' own registration for the implementation of funded projects.

Work towards a clear distinction in the project implementation roles of the Secretariat and the members based upon the principal of subsidiarity.

6.3 Programme and Activities

One of the great strengths of the network has been its capacity to implement two major projects over a 4 year period of sustained activity. The first of these was a very timely EU advocacy project in cooperation with APRODEV, which essentially served to alert BCSDN members and others to the importance of the emerging relationship between national governments, the EC and civil society in the region. MCIC was quick to recognise the need

⁵ SEECRAN, the SEE Child Rights Network, may be an exception. Founded in 2000 by the Yugoslav Child Rights Centre (YCRC) of Belgrade and partners from all over the Western Balkans, the Secretariat was transferred in 2002 to Ljubljana, but then stayed there.

for sustainability of this initiative and, together with its partners, transformed the Capacity Building Hub (for which it was responsible), into the BCSDN network as the vehicle for continuity.

The second project, "Partnering in Action – Strengthening BCSDN", was designed to activate and extend the network through a variety of capacity building instruments. These were organised under three general objectives: partnership working, resource mobilisation and enhancing quality standards for training and consultancy. Unfortunately the third objective had to be dropped because the EU grant to cover the work came in too long beyond schedule.

Training Instrument

There has been substantial investment in training throughout the four years. The APRODEV focus between 2004 and 2007 was primarily upon knowledge of European structures, policies and systems and the methodology was designed to support partners in developing a regional civil society voice. The approach was extremely effective in positioning civic actors as valid counterparts of government and EC Delegations.

The rolling process of training, workshops and conferences at different geographic levels actively engaged the participants and brought about a high level of learning by doing. This was a very ambitious and unique initiative by APRODEV that succeeded in introducing the complex subject matter of EU integration to a varied audience.

The 2004-2005 programme inevitably had weaknesses. Not all of the training was imaginative, especially that around the daunting subject of the various EU integration instruments. Not having a capacity building mandate, APRODEV was also not able to follow up the initiative in the Western Balkans. Several of the smaller partner organisations were unable to benefit fully from the training – only those with a national outlook and a policy/advocacy mandate could fully grasp the possibilities that it opened up for the civic sector.

In contrast to the content approach of 2004-5, training during the follow-up EU programme focused more precisely upon the mechanisms of EU partnerships, funding and civil dialogue. As with the earlier APRODEV programme, there were some shortcomings in the training. Not all the content was appropriate, as in the repetition of much rehearsed topics like project cycle management and logical frameworks, and the methodology often lacked a learner-centred approach. For their part the trainers often remarked on the difficulties of working with participants and organisations of very different levels, suggesting that the training strategy was insufficiently focused.

Familiarisation with EU processes and instruments is essential and there is plenty of scope in the next strategy period for network members to engage creatively in the process of needs assessment, research, curriculum development, field testing, TOT, publication of modules and rolling out of training by members across different countries of the Western Balkans.

There is a gap for basic, intermediary and advanced level courses for the personnel of NGOs, local authorities and ministries for this type of training. Resources should be sought for the development phase, allowing the best trainers and curriculum designers to research and prepare the materials. The role of the Brussels based NGOs and networks would be to provide input on content, issues and debates rather than to design and deliver the modules, which can be done better and more sustainably in the region.

Management of training worked best when it was decentralised to specific members rather than run from the Secretariat, suggesting that some members at least are more able than they believe to initiate, finance and manage regional training initiatives on behalf of the network. This successful example of de-centralised cooperation should be encouraged.

Study Visits

Altogether 17 persons from the region took part in study visits to Brussels, organised both by APRODEV and ECAS. Both were highly appreciated by the participants although the methodology was quite different. APRODEV's groups held a pre-arranged series of meetings and discussions with relevant experts from the Commission and other institutions that interact with the EU. These visits were planned to be of mutual benefit to the officials – who rarely have access to civil society informants – and to the visitors.

ECAS uses a different approach, described as on-the-job training by the project. The organisation has a long-standing intern scholarship scheme which enables selected individuals to spend a month in their offices, using its resources to self-organise a timetable of visits. The ECAS system works well where individuals are highly motivated and have sufficient time and contacts to develop a programme. So far 1 intern has attended, while 4 more are planned before the end of the 2007.

Both types of Study Visit are useful, however sponsorship should be limited in the future to the most able participants in the training programmes – those who graduate from the advanced training course mentioned above, with content pitched at the lobbying, advocacy development level. The opportunity for raising awareness of EC officials should be an important feature of all study visits.

Exchange visits

This instrument was the subject of a call for proposals and several members were funded to visit each other's programmes. The most useful were those with a specific rather than a general purpose and also those that linked dissimilar organisations, for example FBOs with resource centres (e.g. Philanthropy Serbia to CRNVO Montenegro) rather than FBO to FBO (e.g. Pokrov Bulgaria to Philanthropy).

If it is to continue, the instrument needs to be focused more closely on the business of the network, whether civil dialogue or thematic areas. It is important that the network is able to articulate the voice of regional constituencies in a manner that is understandable to policy makers.

A better use of this instrument would be to address the weaknesses that the network has demonstrated in developing web based discussion groups (see information exchange below). A combination of moderated workshops (where participants can meet face to face) and web based discussion groups may resolve this weakness and help develop common positions on the thematic areas selected periodically by the network membership.

Information Sharing

Of all the services offered by the Secretariat, the information sharing has been the most successful. However, the excellent web site is not yet used to the full. As commented above no discussion groups or debates on issues of common interest have started yet, suggesting that a more activist approach (training, support, moderation) is required at the outset.

Though set up by the Secretariat with some difficulty, the project data base has not been used at all by members, suggesting that most members are still not geared to the systematic development of EU fundable proposals. This is not particularly surprising, given the diversity of organisational type, however it is real weakness in the network that needs to be addressed in the next period.

There is some possible duplication between the weekly e mail alert and the monthly newsletter, which fell victim in June 2006 to the Coordinator's maternity leave. If a choice had to be made the common preference would be the more topical Weekly Alert. This is

because EU calls for proposals for consultation tend to be announced at very short notice, making every day of advance notice important.

The Balkan Civic Practices is an important publication that has produced a volume of analysis and case studies as well as two Guides (on partnership and EU Funding). Both of these are relevant, however it is important for the network to prioritise analysis, as it can showcase members' experiences and opinions, while developing policy and advocacy skills amongst the staff of member organisations. The proceedings of the annual BCSDN conference would be a good example of this and the editorial board suggested at the recent Steering Group meeting is a good way of encouraging more writing.

Consultancies and backstopping

This promising area of capacity building was never developed by the Hub and there is no discernible progress in either of the two programmes under evaluation. This represents another missed opportunity that future programmes need to address. There are very able local consultants that the network needs to mobilise and support in pursuit of BCSDN objectives.

EU funding structures admittedly present a challenge, as the requirement for including TA from member state networks means that local consultants are overlooked. It is essential to overcome this bottleneck and ensure that regional and external skills are matched in the most developmental way possible.

Another challenge is that the best regional consultants and facilitators are already heavily engaged in EU and other capacity building projects such as those sponsored by OSCE. Many of these projects are using civil society facilitators to strengthen the government and private sectors which are worthy objectives in themselves but do not necessarily serve to fortify the civic sector. This means that securing their active participation will require advance planning and sufficient resources to attract them. The network needs to find ways of involving the best facilitators of the region for the purposes of the network, ie strengthening civil society at national and regional levels.

It is not realistic to expect all member CSOs to achieve the capacity to implement EU programmes. However, with adequate support some of the strongest will be able to do so and can spread the benefits through the network by including other network members. This is the model that the Secretariat has used in the EU programme, in which it sub-contracted EHO and Diaconia Agapes to manage and deliver decentralised training. At least one of these organisations should be able to develop the capacity to implement such a project within the next 3 years.

Thematic Groups

The network identifies the following themes for development by Working Groups: gender and anti-trafficking, corporate social responsibility; decentralisation, and diaconal practices (development actions of churches and volunteers). Only the last two themes were developed even partially and it has to be said there is little ongoing activity on either. This constitutes a disturbing lack of enthusiasm by network members for working out common positions on areas in which they consider themselves experts. This attitude needs to change as it will encourage the perception in the EU and amongst governments that CSOs and their networks have little of real substance to say. And if they have nothing new to say on the most urgent civic and social issues of the day, why they should have a voice or – at the extreme – even exist?

Recommendations for Programme and Activities

Distinguish more clearly between the roles of the Secretariat and of the members in developing projects and activities for funding. The Secretariat should occupy the strategic heights and create space for more bi-lateral and multi-lateral partnerships to develop semi-autonomously.

Programme-related capacity building coordinated by the Secretariat should focus on enhancing organisational capacities to write and implement successful EU projects (consultancy, secondments, exchanges, workshops...)

Develop a clearer profile on advocacy, with the Secretariat focusing on the enabling environment for CS and energising sub-groups to develop thematic areas.

Organise an annual BCSDN conference to provide a platform for the network's advocacy and thematic work (coinciding with the annual Steering Group meeting)

Secretariat to maintain its focus on information gathering and dissemination, while experimenting with methods that encourage greater member feedback and engagement (editorial board; seed-funding for thematic debates, discussion groups, training in moderating such groups...)

Conclusion

This network set itself an overly ambitious programme for its first four years and has not achieved everything that it said it would. On the other hand it has not only survived but also increased its membership and inspired another, similar network in the region. These achievements are more accurate indicators of the continued need for such a network than those found in the logical frameworks (Annexes iv and v).

The network should continue its activities. The focus should be more firmly on finding a regional voice for civil society. The Secretariat, accordingly, should be less of a project manager and more of an information exchange and advocacy coordinator. Its main function is to help members develop common positions and build on its Brussels-based links as well as the strategic partnership with Slovenia.

To an external observer, the three most pressing issues for civil society in this region over the coming years are CS relationships with the EU, CS relationships with governments and CS accountability. BCSDN has an important role in strengthening Civil Society capacities in each of these areas.

To be effective in these roles, the network needs now to resolve its identity once and for all. This is its number one priority.

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BALKAN CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK (BCSDN-BNT) PROGRAMME EVALUATION MISSION

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. INTRODUCTION

1. 1. Background of the assessment mission

Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) is a (informal) network of 12 civil society and ecumenical organizations from 7 countries and territories in South East Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo). BCSDN is managed by the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) and is the seat of its Secretariat.

BCSDN vision is sustainable peace, harmony and prosperity of societies in the Balkan region. Its mission is empowering civil society through sharing and developing local practices, concepts and strengthening civil society actors. Its objectives are: to increase communication with civil society actors in the region as a basis for bi/multilateral cooperation; to increase mobilization of resources and support; to increase knowledge and skills as a base for higher quality of work; and to promote intercultural exchange and culture of resource-sharing as a base for efficient/effective network.

The network was launched in December 2003 as a result of successful cooperation in strengthening capacities of partner organizations during a pilot programme Capacity Building Hub (2001-3), a part of a larger WCC South-East Europe Ecumenical Partnership initiative. During the pilot programme (2001-3) and current one (2004-7), BCSDN organized a number of capacity-building activities (trainings, exchange and study visits) and information-sharing activities (website, databases, Balkan Civic Practices publication) based on partners/members needs. An evaluation of the 2001-3 programme found that the BCSDN is: "a unique network with considerable potential to develop and sustain itself in the long-term both through its capacity-building and partnership ideology."

1. 2. Background of the MCIC

The Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation (MCIC) is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation, founded in 1993, that is active in the field of development, rehabilitation and relief in Macedonia.

MCIC mission is promotion, support and development of local, national and international initiatives for sustainable development of human resources in Macedonia and abroad. MCIC's strategic goals are: peace promotion; further development of the civic society; assistance to groups in need.

2. FRAMEWORK OF THE MISSION

2. 1. Objective of the mission

The overall objective is to contribute to the development of enabling environment for long-term sustainability and effectiveness of civil society organizations.

The objective of the evaluation mission is to provide relevant view on the BCSDN

achievements, strengths and weaknesses, and to suggest possible further development of relevant activities.

The mission should study and describe the following main issues and points (in that priority order):

i) *programme efficiency and effectiveness* (in terms of use of information, skills, know-how and access provided through the programme, in both quantity and quality as perceived by the beneficiaries/partners and concrete follow-up activities);

ii) *impact of implemented activities* (to the extent possible);

iii) look at *the sustainability factor* in the prospect of possible continuation of activities (in terms of quality of relations, level of communication and cooperation between partners, network status (in legal, membership and other relevant actors - terms), and prospect for further cooperation/activities).

2. 2. Activities of the mission

The mission should make use of the following instruments:

- analysis of the context;
- analysis of documentation;
- interviews with beneficiaries (individuals, groups and organizations).

The mission will carry out its tasks consulting (representatives of):

- *BCSDN members*: Albanian Civil Society Foundation - ACSF, Diakonia Agapes (Tirana, Albania); Women Alliance for Development – WAD, Pokrov Foundation (Sofia, Bulgaria); Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation - EHO (Novi Sad, Vojvodina, Serbia), Centre for Development of NGOs – CRNVO (Podgorica, Montenegro); We Are With You - WAWY (Gjakova, Kosovo); NIT, EOS (Zagreb, Croatia); Opportunities Associates Romania – OAR, AIDRom (Bucharest, Romania).

- *EU partners*: European Citizens' Action Service – ECAS, Association of Protestant Development Organizations – APRODEV (Brussels, Belgium); Centre for Information, Cooperation and Development of NGOs (Ljubljana, Slovenia)

- *BCSDN Secretariat*: Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation - MCIC;

- *other partners*: Centre for Promotion of Civil Society - CPCS (Sarajevo, BiH);

- *network supporters/donors*: Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation - ICCO (Netherlands), DanChurchAid - DCA (Denmark), European Commission – EC (Brussels)

- *beneficiaries* (participants in activities organized during the mission).

List of relevant resource persons in each of these organisations is given in Appendix 1

2. 3. Reporting

The mission will inform MCIC's management and will discuss about all needs and problems.

The mission will prepare the following reports:

Description	When	With whom
Evaluation memo (main findings, conclusions and recommendations)	Before completing the field trip	MCIC's management All partners on the Steering Group meeting
Draft evaluation report	two weeks after the completion of the mission	MCIC's management
Final report	one week after remarks on the draft report have been submitted	-

The report will be prepared in five copies in English. It will also be prepared in an electronic format.

The report will contain 15 pages maximum, not including the annexes, but including two pages of excerpt from the main conclusions and recommendations, which will be placed at the beginning of the report.

The report will be structured according to MCIC's standard format that will be given to the mission. The main part of the report should be prepared according to the objectives and issues of special interest.

The recommendations should be detailed whenever possible, and when not, possibilities have to be identified and channels have to be indicated for further examination.

3. ORGANISATION

3. 1. Assessment team

The mission will be carried out by one external (expatriate), with experience in capacity building assessments and one internal evaluator (MCIC or network member staff).

3. 2. Time period (days)

Phase	Total
Preparation	1-2
Field trip	9
Reporting	4
Total (max.)	15

Realisation period for the mission is July 2007.

Field work is planned for the period between 5th and 13th July, 2007 (both dates included, planned for arrival and departure from the region. Dates are fixed, as the mission is linked to other network events:

- Regional training on Civic Dialogue, to be held in Novi Sad (Serbia), between 4th-6th July, 2007 and Tirana (Albania), between 11th-13th July, 2007, to be used for interviews with some of the partners/beneficiaries that will not be visited during the mission.

3. 3. Logistics provided by MCIC

MCIC will provide the following conditions and human resources:

Human resources

Executive director - (de)briefing(s) during the mission;

BCSDN Coordinator - available for consultations during the entire mission;

Senior project officer – available for consultations during the entire mission;

Logistic officer - available during the whole mission;

Logistics

Sessions and meetings will be organised by MCIC and/or partners;

Translation (to/from English) – available during field trips;

Office - office premises, computers (Word, Excel), printers, copy machines, DTP;

Transport – vehicle from MCIC/partners for field trips, available during the whole mission;

Accommodation and food – provided by MCIC/partners during the entire stay;

Payment: 50% within 15 days after the contract will be concluded, and 50% within 15 days after the evaluation report will be submitted.

6. 4. Bibliography and documentation

Following documents are available for the evaluation mission:

- Evaluation of SEEPP Capacity Building Hub Programme;
- Balkan Civil Society Development Network, Programme Document (incl. LF);
- BCSDN website: <http://www.balkancsd.net>;
- BCSDN Annual Reports 2004-2006;
- “Partnership in Action – Strengthening Balkan Civil Society Development Network”, project for the European Commission (incl. LF);
- Agreement for managing the BCSDN Secretariat, 2006.
- other documents based on request.

THf/THf,AKr
No. 12-231/1-2007
Skopje, 15.05.2007

Saso Klekovski
Executive Director

**Annex ii Balkan Civil Society Development Network
Evaluation Mission
Programme
5th – 13th July, 2007**

Thursday, 5th July

Arrival in Belgrade, Serbia (John 10:35 AM, Plamen car)
Meeting with partners/stakeholders (Dubravka Velat - Civic Initiatives)
Overnight in Novi Sad (joint dinner with participants)

Friday, 6th July

Bilateral meetings with stakeholders (Hedvig Morvai Horvath, CP for SEE)
Visit to Regional Training on Civic Dialogue
Focus group/bilateral meetings with participants and trainers (CNVOS)
Lunch with participants
Bilateral meetings with EHO staff/possib free afternoon
Overnight in Novi Sad

Saturday, 7th July

Bilateral meetings with EHO staff/Jelena Dinjaski (ex-Philanthropy staff)
Trip to Belgrade Pavlina Filipova – ex-Director WAD
Meeting with partners/stakeholders (possibility for those not covered on 5th July-
Jelena Pavlovic of Philanthropy
Overnight in Skopje

Sunday, 8th July

Trip and overnight in Skopje (car transport by Plamen)

Monday, 9th July

Visit to BCSDN Secretariat/MCIC
Morning meetings with Coordinator, MCIC staff/telephone interviews with
stakeholders
Overnight in Skopje

Tuesday, 10th July

Meetings with MCIC staff in the morning/ telephone interviews with stakeholders
Departure/arrival to Albania in the (after)noon (travel with Mac
participants)

Wednesday, 11th July

Visit to Regional Training on Civic Dialogue, Tirana
Focus group/Bilateral meetings with partners/participants and trainers (DA, ACSF,
CNVOS add, Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo participants)
Veneral Hajrullahu/Fatmir Curri – Kosovo Civil Society Foundation)

Thursday, 12th July

Morning meetings – continued from previous day
Afternoon departure (John 12:10) and arrival in Brussels – John 16:55 (ext. consult
only)
Meeting with Colombe de Mercey – APRODEV

Friday, 13th July

Meetings with Tony Venables – ECAS
Departure to UK – John 20:

Annex iii Balkan Civil Society Development Network - BCSDN Logical Framework 2004-2006

	Intervention Logic	Findings	Recommendations
Overall Objectives	Increased development of capacities and strengthened cooperation in civil society in the Balkans (BCSDN)	<p>On the evidence so far no participant in the network (other than the Secretariat) has reached the capacity to bid successfully for an EU project. Some however are close and CSOs with recognition and constituency have attained a degree of financial stability (at a level lower than previously).</p> <p>Dynamic civil society organisations are eager to network across the Western Balkans regardless of language, religion ethnicity or culture. This is a promising dynamic for the region's integration.</p> <p>Cooperation remains quite weak between participants in the network. (Some exchange visits were focused and had results but the planned joint forums or debates did not take place).</p> <p>Existing capacities of the network were not used to the full.</p> <p>No clear evidence of joint projects yet. However the Network clearly fulfils a felt need amongst similar organisations that are separated by (relatively) new Balkan borders.</p>	<p>The evaluators find that the indicators for this logframe are over-ambitious and (at the higher levels) too specific. As a result the logframe does not capture important qualitative changes within the network . This gives an overly negative assessment of outcomes. New logframes for BCSDN programmes should be more sensitive to process indicators. .</p> <p>Offer consultancy support for proposal writing</p> <p>Support exchanges only where there is a very clear purpose and organisations have solid track record in identifying and recording lessons learned in, for example, case studies.</p> <p>Ensure local skills are used to the full in network activities. E.g. Involve trainers in curriculum development.</p> <p>Persist with networking, not for the sake of it, but rather to achieve developmental objectives that cannot be reached alone.</p> <p>Joint advocacy is a particular strength of networks. Make sure there is a focused advocacy component.</p>
Programme Objective	Increased individual/staff and organizational capacity of relevant CSOs and their cooperation in the Balkans. (N2N)	<p>Staff members as individuals are the major recipient of CB and mostly report favourably on the impact of the training. Turnover of staff is a major constraint to sustained CB.</p> <p>Staff members do not yet use the web site or its participatory instruments for CB.</p> <p>Where the leadership of member organisations is directly involved there is much better cooperation and communication.</p> <p>New CSOs are more dynamic than original members who (in the words of one are "a little tired" and in need of fresh blood.</p>	<p>There should be at least one focal point in each organisation (in addition to a senior staff person) to share information internally & externally – also and to ensure continuity.</p> <p>Train CSO staff in use of interactive internet based platform Activate the forums but provide training in their use.</p> <p>Promote "focused" exchanges not just general exchanges</p> <p>Keep the network open and growing organically. Monitor the existing beneficiary "categories" : faith-based members, secular members and non-member participants. Ensure there is enough shared understanding to maintain effective cooperation.</p> <p>Orientate FBOs towards what they do best: constituency building/volunteer management and promotion.</p>

Results		
<p>1. Improved and mediated financial constraints of CSOs through improved skills and knowledge about mobilisation of resources and support</p> <p>Few participating organisations are in a stable position yet – some partners have radically changed (or merged) in order to survive.</p> <p>The network needs to assess candidates for viability as weak organisations will be a drain on network resources and reduce impact.</p> <p>Study visits to Brussels are difficult to organise and are resource-intensive. It is important to select candidates strategically and specify more clearly how they can add value to the network.</p> <p>Exchange visits were more about getting to know each other's programmes than about mobilising support – with the exception of the visits which focused upon volunteering. These delivered concrete results regarding the legal and technical aspects of volunteer management.</p>	<p>2. Improved cross-border and cross-sector cooperation</p> <p>CSOs are beginning to take the initiative to organise their own networks independent of donors. This is a major achievement. This is a long process, which is beginning to show some results.</p> <p>The web site is of good quality and is well-indexed by search engines. But it is under-utilised and maintaining the web is very time consuming. MCIC does not have in-house webmaster capacity. Specific training will be necessary for fuller use by members of the web site.</p> <p>There is no FORUM, discussion or debating activity at all suggesting that equipping partners with electronic space alone is insufficient for raising capacity to identify discussion subjects and moderate them effectively. There needs to be better linkages between the extensive exchange activities and their analysis and discussion through the web. It is not yet capturing the wealth of cooperation generated by cross-border exchanges.</p> <p>Future trainings need to take this into account and allocate time for web-based activities. It is clearly necessary to gradually build up confidence to engage in web-based discussions if they are to effectively complement other CB approaches.</p>	<p>3. Improved quality standards, skills and knowledge among CSOs</p> <p>The Secretariat took the initiative to form a consortium to raise additional funding for these activities.</p> <p>This resulted in an unsuccessful application by ECNL, Civic Initiatives and MCIC to the CARDS Regional Programme.</p> <p>This was the same call for proposals that MCIC led and won for the Network to Network Programme.</p> <p>No further action was taken and so there were no results.</p>

Activities		
<p>1.1 Training on EU funding, lobbying and advocacy</p>	<p>2.1. On-line webpage</p>	<p>3. Standards</p>
<p>2004 - Regional Training on EU Funding, lobbying and advocacy in Skopje for 17 staff from 5 BCSDN members and 3 organisations from outside the network. Followed by an exposure visit to the EC Delegation in Skopje.</p> <p>Two members later attended a similar workshop for the APRODEV network in Bratislava.</p> <p>Pokrov, WAD, AD Rom attended the CEE regional seminar in Budapest,</p> <p>1.2. Exposure visit to EU stakeholders</p> <p>2004 - 2 study visits to Brussels by EOS, MCIC in June and by WAD and OA in November via APRODEV.</p> <p>2006 – 11 people from Serbia Croatia, Albania & Macedonia go to Brussels for a visit jointly organised by Aprodev, ECAS and BCSDN. This was limited to Western Balkans partners because the issues for Bulgaria and Romania had changed with accession.</p> <p>2007 – 1 on the job training by ECAS in Brussels for Medgashi (children's NGO) of Macedonia. Planned 1 from each country before end of 2007: Albanian CS Foundation; Serbia: Citizen's Pact; BIH: VESTA; Croatia: NIT-CENZURA.</p> <p>1.3. Workshop with EU stakeholders (including one issue of Balkan Civic Practices)</p> <p>July 2004 - Role of CS in EU Integration, joint workshop APRODEV and BCSDN networks in Skopje</p> <p>October 2004 - MCIC publishes, for the network, the workshop proceedings (in Balkan Civil Practices #1).</p> <p>In December Pokrov, WAD and OAR attended the final regional APRODEV workshop on CS and accession in Budapest.</p>	<p>2004 – Comprehensive web site established</p> <p>2005 - Database on 107 funding sources set up by interns</p> <p>2006 – Secretariat translates the menu and some documents into Albanian, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian and Macedonian but not Bulgarian and Romanian</p> <p>2006 - New database of projects and project ideas: no take-up at all for this service, despite active promotion of organisations in the CSO database.</p> <p>2.2. Monthly newsletter</p> <p>Started in 2004 as a means of summarising relevant information and alerting partners to urgent matters such as calls for proposals. In 2005 12 published – by 2006 the focus shifts to the Weekly E mail Alert, which had established itself by putting out 43 alerts in 2005. It has positive feedback and impact.</p> <p>2.3. Mailing list</p> <p>2004 – 22 members signed up 2005 – 35 members 2006 - 2007 – 57 members</p> <p>2.4. Balkan Civil Practices</p> <p>Publication 1 October 2004 : “The role of civil society in the EU integration and democratisation process in the Balkans”.</p> <p>2.5. Working Groups on specific issues</p> <p>2004 topics established: Diaconia (EHO), anti-trafficking and gender</p>	<p>3.1 Training/TOT on ethics and standards in training and consultancy</p> <p>3.2 Exchange, exposure visit</p> <p>3.3 Workshop, including one issue of Balkan Civic Practices</p> <p>No activities undertaken owing to lack of resources</p>

<p>2005 – General Conference in Brussels on EU Integration attended by all Aprove partners who are also BCSDN partners: WAD & OAR, MCIC, Diakonia Agapes, Pokrov,</p> <p>Bulgarian Workshop on EU Integration Experience in cooperation with the EC Delegation and directly funded outside the network.</p> <p>1.4. Training on resource and support mobilisation (volunteers, community work, fundraising)</p> <p>2005 - OAR training in Romania about mobilising local fundraising and private sector support.</p> <p>1.5 Exchange/Exposure Visit on Resource and Support Mobilisation</p> <p>2004</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exchange between EHO and CRNVO on volunteering - Philanthropy and Diaconia Agapes also on volunteering - ECAS Training on EU Fundraising and PCM <p>2005</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pokrov-Philanthropy exchange on Diakonia - The Working Group on diaconal practices meeting was organized by EHO in Novi Sad, SCG between 11 and 13 May. Representatives from 4 BCSDN members and 4 local faith-based organizations came together at the meeting to share their past and future challenges. - The second Working Group meeting on decentralization took place in Skopje, Macedonia between 9 and 10 December under the title <i>Democratization & Development in Local Communities: Problems and Challenges in the Balkans</i>. The meeting was held in the framework of the 5th NGO Fair – Forum of Civil Society in Macedonia organized by MCIC in Skopje, Macedonia. Decentralization was the main topic of this year's Fair. In the two days, the workshop brought together around 20 participants from 7 countries from the region to share and exchange their experiences on the topic 	<p>(WAD), decentralisation (WAWY) – MCIC took over for the November 2005 Fair; Corporate Social Responsibility: CSR and anti-corruption (EOS)</p> <p>Only two Working Groups were active:</p> <p>2005 Vision and Mission group set up and developed criteria for membership; (if you are interested and active - not geographic). The group eventually finalised the network's vision, mission, values and procedures.</p> <p>2005 Diaconia meeting in Feketic, 4 FBO members led by EHO: action plan developed but not implemented. Working Group on decentralization also met.</p> <p>2.6. Promotion of network and general activities</p> <p>2004 Poster and Fair promotion by MCIC and EHO</p> <p>2005 general promotion to a list of 500 regional CSOs, responses from 40</p> <p>Steady increase in website visits, approx 2,000 in 2005</p> <p>Additions : in 2004 partners asked for a joint calendar of events but never provided the data for it.</p> <p>2005</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CRNVO becomes 12th member of the network. 2. BCSDN joins APRODEV's CEE, Caucasus, & Central Asia Network and is represented by the Secretariat. Strong, longstanding partnership of great value to BCSDN, even though the focus has shifted to the ENPI. 3. Partnership strengthened by alliance with ECAS and CNVOS leading to successful EU CARDS Network to Network project <p>2006 - a call for interns hosted by the Secretariat yields 30 applications worldwide. This positive experience could be written up as good practice for individual members in order help improve communication within the network.</p>	
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2006

- 6 exchange projects
- There were six (6) CSOs supported under this project (through small grants) as follows: ACSF and DA (Albania), EHO and CDS (Serbia), and DROM and Megjashi (Macedonia).
- ACSF project was “Sharing of successful experience on EU projects and actions related to Resource Mobilization” in cooperation with SEECRAN, Slovenia;
- DA’s project was “Learning from each other” in cooperation with Philanthropy, Serbia;
- EHO’s project was “Development of Volunteer Work in Montenegro and Serbia” in cooperation with FORUM SYD BALKANS, JAZAS, SOS telephone for women and children victims of violence Podgorica, ADP – Zid, OKC JUVENTAS, CRNVO, UMHCG, SVETIONIK, Montenegrin Association of Political Science Students - MAPSS, Center for Civic Education – Podgorica, ELSA;
- CDS’s project was “Exchange of practical knowledge and experiences among BCSDN member organizations and CDS branches in networking and increased project impact” in cooperation with Centre for Development Initiatives, Gacko BiH, Balkan Centre for Migrations, Belgrade, Khetane-Zajedno, Novi Sad and International Catholic Migration Commission, Serbia/Kosovo;
- DROM’s project was “Study visit” in cooperation with EOS-Croatia and Roma NGO; and
- Megjashi’s project was “Study visit to the Miramida Centre, Croatia” in cooperation with Miramida Centre, Croatia

1.6 Workshop on resource and support mobilisation (including one issue of Balkan Civic Practices)

This activity did not take place as, the implementation of CARDS N2N started in 2006 and activities on this (2nd) priority area were suspended until signing the contract on 31.12.2006.

CARDS N2N application concept did not include the workshop instrument as it would be impossible to have so many activities to those already planned and least added value was expected from them.

	Intervention logic	Objectively verifiable indicators of achievement	Findings	Recommendations
Overall objectives	To contribute to the development of enabling environment for long-term sustainability and effectiveness of civil society in CARDS countries in their work	BCSDN functioning with full services and membership; BCSDN registered; Communication network established and functioning.	Membership of BCSDN is still unstable and prospect of registering as a network is premature, as CSOs in the region are not used to networking or forming coalitions.	<i>Maintain an open network for the time being but with work on motivating participants to launch & participate in new & innovative network activities</i>
Specific objective	Strengthen the operational capacity of the Balkan Civil Society Development Network to effectively serve its member organizations	Five joint projects and cooperation among members and other CSOs agreed as result of project activities	No externally funded joint projects developed at this stage, although trust and mutual knowledge between members built during the current programme.	<i>The network needs to encourage the initiative of members without overly orchestrating it for the sake of efficiency.</i>
	Enhance the ability of civil society to influence public policies through developing skills and know-how of its members and partners on coalition-building and establishment of meaningful dialogue with government institutions	Actions plans and/or strategies for approach and development of relations with authorities and media developed	No action plans for engagement with media or government developed. There are plans to develop joint lobbying position with ECAS on EU policies for the region. Promising start with introduction of civic dialogue to the network . Several members have good experience on cross-sector relationships, especially with new government bodies responsible for civil society.	<i>Need to identify national and regional policy issues of relevance to member constituencies and focus on a manageable number at a time as capacities gradually develop for advocacy. At same time systematically share experience in civic dialogue between civil society, state and the EC.</i>

	Build capacities of member organizations for effective and sustainable delivery of services to their target groups through strengthening skills and know-how in partnership-building and fundraising	Five fundraising and other opportunities successfully pursued as a result of project activities	The indicator was not fully achieved but capacities of staff in partnership building were strengthened through the training events. There are still insufficient partners with a strong sense of shared responsibility.	<i>Take steps to internalise the new knowledge of the EU amongst members, with a view to extending it beyond the network in the future.</i>
Expected results	<p>1. Organizational capacity and networking</p> <p>Improved access to information that is vital for efficient functioning and sustainability of CSOs</p> <p>Established focal point for building new partnership and cooperation between regional CSOs</p> <p>Improved access to information on networking and cooperation with EU and regional partners</p> <p>Improved networking skills of CSOs in beneficiary countries</p> <p>Improved access to information on partnership opportunities to CSOs in beneficiary countries</p> <p>Improved cooperation climate among CSOs and enhanced ability to form partnerships and cooperation cross-sector and -border</p> <p>Sustainable structure and capacity of Balkan Civil Society Development Network</p>	<p>500 web-site users per month (including 10-20% increase in users per month)</p> <p>500 partner and projects included in the database</p> <p>90 weekly e-mail alerts distributed to approx. 50 staff</p> <p>8 regional trainings successfully implemented</p>	<p>Weekly e mail alert has been effective in disseminating relevant EU news, funding opportunities etc.</p> <p>Functioning secretariat established but members do not take full advantage of all the network's offerings.</p> <p>Number of visitors from the region to excellent web site lower than anticipated.</p> <p>Networking skills still basic with many members. Achievements visible only with those organisations with several years of previous experience.</p> <p>Governance structure of Network in place but no concrete steps yet taken to rotate the secretariat, which would be a good indicator of commitment.</p>	<p><i>Encourage organisations to raise their participation by, for example, appointing at least 1 stable focal point in their organisation to liaise with the network on a permanent basis and raise its profile in their organisation.</i></p> <p><i>Develop an acceptable mechanism for sharing secretariat duties that takes account of the many open and hidden obstacles to building trust and cooperation.</i></p>
	<p>2. Mobilization of resources</p> <p>Improved access to information on funding opportunities in EU and the region</p> <p>Established focal point for exchange of information and opportunities on funding</p> <p>Improved exchange of experience and best practices on funding and alternative strategies for financial sustainability</p> <p>Improved skills and knowledge on fundraising methods and techniques</p>	<p>50 staff trained in networking and partnership building skills and strategies</p> <p>50 staff trained in fundraising approaches, techniques and EU-based funding</p> <p>50 staff trained in civic dialogue and exposed to best practices</p>	<p>No. of trainees: networking and partnership training (34 participants), EU fundraising (28 participants), media (33 participants), civic dialogue (43 participants). Each organisation had to submit a case study as a requirement of the training. The response rate was approx. 50-70%.this were used in the training, and then not directly on the web, but rather in publications/guides.</p>	<p><i>The network needs to be more active in lobbying for initiatives by governments. for the transparent funding of CSOs..</i></p> <p><i>The network cannot assume that funding</i></p>

			<p>There is not a strong incentive for media and government to cooperate with NGOs as it is clear that most available resources from the EU are dedicated to government. CS in the region needs to resist becoming a mere implementer of government policy as its credibility with its constituency will suffer if it loses its autonomy as a sector .So far only Croatia has set up a functioning system of support to independent CSOs.</p>	<p><i>opportunities to create partnership and provide resource opportunities for CSOs will be available.</i></p> <p><i>The network is however ideally placed to advocate for these on behalf of its varied constituencies.</i></p>
	<p>3. Mobilization of support Improved access to information and expertise on civic dialogue and media relations Exchanged experience and best practices on civic dialogue and media relations Enhanced ability of CSOs to influence public policies and improve delivery of services to target groups Improve skills in public relations work and work with media Enhance ability of CSOs to build coalitions and develop partnership with media as an important stakeholder in each society Improved public image and credibility of CSOs Strengthened capacities for development of forum or institutional mechanism for dialogue with authorities</p>	<p>50 staff trained in media cooperation and strategies and skills 10 staff exposed to practical work on fundraising and advocacy to EU institutions 10 users helped in FAQ on civic dialogue and fundraising</p>	<p>Great improvement in access to training and information on civil dialogue through e mail Alerts, training materials and reports, publications etc.</p>	
Activities	<p>1. Information activities 1.1. Development of central web-site 1.2. Development of partner-project search database 1.3. Sending weekly e-mail alerts</p>	<p>Activities carried out competently. Take-up of information offerings is incomplete.</p>	<p>Maintain and improve the web site. Provide specific training (possibly through the focal points) for improved take-up of other web services.</p>	

	<p>2. Training and exchange activities</p> <p>2.1. Organizing regional seminars on networking and partnership building</p> <p>2.2. Organizing regional seminars on fundraising</p> <p>2.3. Organizing regional seminars on civic dialogue</p> <p>2.4. Organizing regional seminars on media</p> <p>2.5. Establishing a help-desk</p>	<p>Trainings were all achieved and reported upon. The publications can now provide the basis for further local research and curriculum development. The topics are relevant and deserve wider dissemination.</p>	<p>The help desk potentially fills a gap for support in proposal writing in the short term. For the long term the network should mobilise local consultants for this purpose.</p>	
	<p>2.6. Organizing on-the-job training in Brussels-based EU networking offices</p> <p>3. Publication activities</p> <p>3.1. Publication of guide on networking and partnership building</p> <p>3.2. Publication of guide on fundraising</p> <p>3.3. Publication of guide on media</p> <p>3.4. Publication of guide on civic dialogue</p>	<p>On the job training in Brussels organised through a partner's established training scheme. Good standard of publication maintained.</p>	<p>Use the study visit facility more strategically by making it available to potential consultants, trainers, policy analysts who will make a positive contribution to the network.</p>	

Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) and the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN)

Evaluation notes by Plamen Sivov

The origins of the BCSDN have been closely related to the SEEPP (South-East European Ecumenical Programme) of the World Council of Churches, and more specifically to the Capacity Building Hub of that programme. As one of the outcomes of the Stability Pact (1999), SEEPP has been launched by the WCC's Europe Desk in 2000 with the aim "to promote coordination and cooperation among churches, related organizations and other partners in the South-East Europe region, to facilitate a more effective ecumenical response to need, and to promote a lasting contribution to peace in this troubled region."¹

The original SEEPP network was built on the basis of existing WCC-related ecumenical cooperation and partners in the Balkans region. Within the projects that followed, several thematic areas (or "hubs") were enforced, among which the Capacity Building Hub has been the most successful and lasting. Upon the completion of the SEEPP project, the Hub has been transformed into a network of organizations with a new identity (BCSDN).

As of 2007, out of 12 full members of the network, CROs are 4, of which two are ecumenical by nature (AidRom, EHO) and two are confessionally bound to the Orthodox Church (Pokrov, Diakonia Agapes). Philanthropy (the official diakonial organization of the Serbian Orthodox Church) has been an active member of the SEEPP, but has not become a member of BCSDN.

Expectations and experiences

Members from the "secular" group, who have joined the network after the SEEPP period, have varied in their perception as to the "church" origins and image of the BCSDN. For some it has been a disadvantage (following a widespread perception of the churches and their structures as "uncivic", or at least somehow detached from the problems of civil society and its agenda in the region), for others it has been a challenge and an added value; others were even unaware of the original Christian origin of the network. In the early days of BCSDN there has generally been a stronger "church feeling" both within and outside of the network. It has been perceived by some new members as a "church thing", in spite of stated broader goals, and in some cases this perception has been decisive for the further involvement (or lack of such) of new members in some activities. With time, there has been a smooth process of integration of the new members.

The development of the BCSDN has seen a decrease of the participation level of the CROs, especially the ones with a stronger bond to the churches. Respondents have shared that their original perception of SEEPP has been that "it was originally created to serve the CROs, but eventually the network has become too secular". The stated goal of the network to build bridges between the "secular" civil society organizations and the faith-based ones has been continuously questioned by the latter. Some of the CROs have not succeeded in identifying themselves as having the capacity to offer added value to the organizations from the other group.

Some have pointed out the role of the MCIC as a focal point of activities. The organizational mandate of the MCIC, with its focus on development, rather than on ecumenical dialogue has contributed to this further detachment of the CROs from the network. “The marginalization of the CROs within the network is no more a tendency, but a fact”, one of the respondents have said.

At the same time, participation of two countries, Bulgaria and Romania in the network, largely depends on CROs.

Some CROs have expressed disappointment for the “lost roots” of the network. Participants from CROs have given preference to the “Christian values” underlying the network’s ethos over the broader civic values.

For CROs, services offered by the Secretariat, have been “relevant by 50%”.

Issues raised

Within the network there is a distinct group with specific interests, the church-related organizations. They have joined the network on the grounds of their conviction that it will be dealing primarily with issues of Christian diakonia and development from a Christian perspective. These organizations in different extent have felt reluctant to participate further in a network with a growing participation from the larger civil society. Their main desire is to have common ecumenical ground, their main challenge is to identify this ground within the existing network. CROs are faced with a reality of an expanded network, while at the same time some of them regard themselves as privileged in a special way, being among the founders of the Capacity Building Hub and the resulting network.

The “vicious circle” for the CROs: 1) they would give first priority to network among themselves (there is an explicit need for such networking; some attempts have been made to create a sub-network, a working group or similar way of inter-Christian activity within BCSDN); 2) they realize they do not have the necessary resources to do it on themselves and are willing to delegate the networking function outside of their group and 3) they feel marginalized as a result of an increased non-church agenda present in the network; 4) at the same time, they admit, that there would not be a network, if it had not been the MCIC and the active non-church-related members.

Sharing of resources should be somehow included in the organizational culture of the network; “monopolization” has been a term used by some to describe MCIC’s role.

Church policies

The ecumenical policies of the relevant churches have been reflected in the behavior of some of the members in the network. For example, there have been bishops with anti-ecumenical views who have stopped participants from their churches from training events.

Future & Recommendations

For a variety of reasons, the network has gradually shifted to a former Yugoslavia oriented activity. Further growth of the network depends also on its ability to offer to members from Bulgaria and Romania clear mutual benefit (such as cross-border projects, where BCSDN can act as a clearing house for projects and could identify prospective counterparts).

Participation in the ODA process can be another entry point for Bulgarian and Romanian organizations to re-evaluate and reinforce their involvement in the network. All

respondents have recommended extra efforts on behalf of the Secretariat and the Steering Group for re-inclusion of Bulgaria and Romania in the network.

Combination between 1 secular NGO and 1 CRO from one country has been a successful model for country representation in the network. In some cases, experience has been positive (Bulgaria: Pokrov and WAD, Romania: AidRom and OAR), in some other there have been tensions (Albania), caused by potential benefits from participation in the network. By and large, this model is recommended for further development, with a clearer and explicit outline in the mission/vision documents of the network. Some respondents have expressed expectations for a “clear Christian message”, which could be among the basic principles of the network, and which should be understandable, applicable and practical for all members.

A solid ideological basis of the network should take into account the differences in the attitudes of both the secular organizations vis-à-vis the CROs and the different levels of willingness among the CROs themselves to be fully integrated in a network entirely based on broader civil rather than on purely Christian values, language and culture.

To reintegrate the CROs more fully in its activities, the network can include specific church-related topics in its agenda, which can be of interest to the civil society actors and which can be successfully translated in a secular language. A broad spectrum of topics has been suggested by respondents, such as:

Religious education, church-state relationship, legislation on religious rights, etc. In most of the countries of the region there is an ongoing debate on the place of religion as a subject in state schools. Exploring the available EU models, bringing together civil society actors, churches and CROs and provoking certain public discussions can be among the activities of the network. Tailor made courses on advocacy and lobbying on these issues and relevant, topic-centred exchange visits will be of interest and potential benefit for the CROs from the network. In Albania, for example, there has been an initiative to form a coalition of church-related organizations. BCSDN could identify such processes and offer capacity building support.

A rotating Secretariat has been suggested as a preferred model by respondents, although the current role of MCIC is highly valued and appreciated.

Topic-specific interviews (in addition to the general interviews carried out):

Anna Bu (EHO)

Michael Brnzea (AidRom)

Nina Gramo (Diakonia Agapes)

Dervisha Hadzic-Rahic (MCIC)

Staff members of the Pokrov Foundation, involved in BCSDN activities.

¹ *WCC South-East Europe Ecumenical Partnership: Funding Proposal 2001*

A. For Partners

1. What has been your most important organizational contribution to the Network during this period?
2. What has been your most important organizational benefit from the network?
3. What should the network carry on doing in your opinion?
4. What should it stop doing?
5. How do you rate the secretariat function of the network in terms of being active, effective and responsive? HIGHLY, MEDIUM or POORLY.
Please comment on your choice and suggest improvements.

B. For Balkan Forum Members

1. How familiar are you with the activities of Balkan Civil Society Development Network - BCSDN?
2. What communications have you received from the Balkan Civil Society Development Network - BCSDN?
3. Which of these have been most useful to you and why?
4. In your view, do the BCSDN and the Balkan Forum complement or duplicate each other?
5. If they complement each other, how can they work together to achieve their objectives?
6. If they duplicate each, what correcting action, should the two networks take?
7. Any other comments regarding the strengths and weaknesses of BCSDN...

C, For Donors

1. What expectations do you have of the Balkan CS Development Network?
2. To what extent have these been met in the current project period?
3. What does the network do best? What should it continue and how?
4. What should it stop doing and why?