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*The Successes and Failures of EU Pre-accession Policy in the Balkans:  
Support to Civil Society*

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## **Executive Summary**

Support to civil society as part of the EU enlargement process and policy is not a novelty. In fact, it has been viewed as part of the EU enlargement process since the 1990s, when the European Union provided support to the Central and Eastern (CEE) countries for the establishment and development of civil society under the auspices of the PHARE instrument. In the Balkans, however, civil society development took on a new role, as the European Commission made it one of the key reform priorities of the EU enlargement policy. This phenomenon has not occurred overnight. Instead, it has been a more gradual process, with measures being introduced in response to the benefits received along the way. Beginning with Croatia and Turkey in 2005, and extending it to the whole of the Western Balkans in 2006, the EU began to not only support increased communication and cooperation between EU Member States and candidate countries (s.c. civil (society) dialogue), but it also began focusing on strengthening the role of civil society in the democratization and reconciliation process taking place within these countries. These new priorities were spelled out in the Enlargement Strategy in 2007, in which the European Commission made the development of civil society and civil dialogue one of the priority areas within the framework of the EU enlargement policy. This was evidenced by the creation of the Civil Society Facility (CSF) in the framework of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) in the same year. The CSF was to triple the financial support to civil society for the period 2008-2010 compared to the 2005-2007 period. As the IPA, the CSF too, was expected to be designed on the lessons-learned from the PHARE and CARDS support to civil society development.

Seeing the EU integration process is one of the main driving forces for reforms and as financial assistance announced under the CSF makes the Commission the main financial supporter of civil society in the Balkan countries, this paper will explore whether the design of the IPA and especially the new CSF will contribute to a strengthened civil society in the Western Balkans, and in doing so push the accession process in the region further by providing an impetus for further reform. It investigates whether civil society can then be expected to provide the missing link to addressing both the growing enlargement anxiety in the Member States (through civil society dialogue, people-to-people contacts etc.) and the internal problems of candidate countries (through increased pressure and inclusion in policy- and decision-making)? Has IPA, as the latest state-of-the-art pre-accession instrument really drawn on the lessons from the previous enlargements, as it is so often stated, especially in reference to the CSF? Since IPA and CSF are in early phase of implementation, this paper also reflects where possible on the implementation experience on both.

The paper finds that the design and implementation of the CSF thus far falls short both of the negative lessons-learned of the accession rather than demand support to civil society from PHARE and CARDS periods and the expectations of the local civil society actors in supporting their own indigenous efforts. The Commission has held to the commitment of tripling the financing of support to civil society development, but the ownership and sustainability, through involvement of local CSOs in the design and implementation and holding the Governments accountable to the civil society development and civil dialogue criteria for accession should be improved. The implementation of the IPA Partnership principle, which was expected to improve involvement of CSOs in the design and implementation of the CSF and IPA projects in general, has not yet been implemented to its full extent. The consultation process is mostly formal, late in decision-making process and creates vicious circle where both the local CSOs and the Commission (or the Governments) get frustrated and fail to transform this into a beneficial process of exchange on problems and solutions. The design of the CSF for 2010 is underway. Therefore, changes are still possible to improve the design and implementation of the CSF. The Commission is also currently undergoing a review of the Implementing Rules of the IPA Regulation, which allows for the further definition of the Partnership principle with the aim to detail the expectation and the framework for its implementation. This paper gives 10-point recommendations on how these can be made possible.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Support to civil society as part of the EU enlargement process and policy is not a novelty. Through support to the establishment of civil society foundations in 1990s in most Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, we have seen support to civil society development as part of the EU enlargement process. In the Balkans, support to civil society was already part of the stabilization and reconstruction process underpinned by the CARDS programme. However, in the Balkans, it was the first time that civil society development would become one of the key reform priorities of EU enlargement policy.

This development did not happen overnight. The approach was evolutionary in terms of geography and scope. It was first addressed in June 2005 and targeting Turkey and Croatia through a Communication<sup>1</sup> by the European Commission promoting strengthened civil society dialogue, which was then extended to the whole of the Western Balkans in January 2006. While support was first defined in terms of supporting better communication of enlargement processes and mutual understanding between EU Member States and candidate countries' societies, it was later extended to strengthening the role of civil society in the democratization and reconciliation process. These two goals culminated in the Enlargement Strategy in 2007, where the Commission made development of civil society and civil dialogue in the Western Balkans as one of the key reform priorities of EU enlargement policy. In line with the new Enlargement Strategy in 2007, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) was to provide additional resources for supporting concrete measures under this new strategic priority.

Later in the same year, a new Civil Society Facility (CSF) was announced. The CSF presented the concretization of the prioritized support to civil society development and civil dialogue on the part of the EU. According to the European Commission, the financial support available under the CSF was due to triple during the period 2008-2010 in comparison to the period 2005-2007, when the Commission support to civil society amounted to 27 million Euros. Additionally and for the first time, the Partnership principle was enshrined in the IPA instrument, which envisaged the inclusion of civil society actors in the programming, implementation and evaluation within its policies and programmes. Both the financial support and the establishment of a formal obligation to consult civil society raised expectations among the local actors in the Balkans high regarding the importance and value of the new IPA instrument and the support it would provide to their ongoing work on the democratization and reform process in their countries.

In the EU Member States, the new prioritization of support to civil society was affected by growing scepticism surrounding further enlargement as a consequence of the EU internal institutional debate and the global economic crisis, as well as a result of slow progress in key accession areas such as functioning of democratic institutions, judiciary reform and rule of law etc. in the Western Balkan countries. Seeing the EU integration process is one of the main driving forces for reforms and as financial assistance announced under the CSF will make the Commission the main financial supporter of civil society in the Balkan countries, this paper will explore whether the design of the IPA and especially the new CSF will contribute to a strengthened civil society in the Western Balkans, and in doing so push the accession process in the region further by providing an impetus for further reform. It will investigate whether civil society can then be expected to provide the missing link to addressing both the growing enlargement anxiety in the Member States (through civil society dialogue, people-to-people contacts etc.) and the internal problems of candidate countries (through increased pressure and inclusion in policy- and decision-making)? Has IPA, as the latest state-of-the-art pre-accession instrument really drawn on the lessons from the previous enlargements, as it is so often stated, especially in reference to the CSF? Since IPA and CSF are in early phase of implementation, this paper will also reflect where possible on the implementation experience on both.

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<sup>1</sup> COM (2005) 290, 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2005.

## II. ARE LESSONS BEING LEARNED FROM PREVIOUS ENLARGEMENT(S)?

Support for civil society is not a novelty for EC policy in general or for enlargement policy in particular. The first experience with such support dates back to the enlargement policies directed towards former Communist countries in CEE, which were addressed under the PHARE<sup>2</sup> instrument. This support of civil society was a novelty because in previous enlargement rounds, no such need had existed. Eventually though, the need for involvement of civil society arose in order for countries to more effectively fulfil the Copenhagen criteria for membership in the EU, rather than for the sake of developing a civil society, which did not exist under the Communist regime. Thus, the approach applied within the PHARE instrument was essentially *accession* rather than *demand* driven.

The PHARE accession approach mainly consisted of establishing and supporting national foundations for civil society development<sup>3</sup>, which catered to the needs of civil society development in each country and re-granted funds for civil society activities. Such support, while not exclusive<sup>4</sup>, was managed by the European Human Rights Foundation<sup>5</sup> from 1993 onwards and devoted 70% of the budget to civil society development under PHARE. Thus, the accession approach was also predominately a *foundation approach*. There were two main weaknesses or lesson-learned identified in this approach.

First, the volume of financial support was “rather small in relation to the desirability of affecting a fundamental shift in relationships between the public sector, the private sector and citizens.”<sup>6</sup> This meant that the strengthened civil society sector was not able to play an equal role in comparison to the public and private sector in each country. For example, the total PHARE assistance between 2000-2002 to civil society programmes is estimated to have been about 55 million Euros. This is on average roughly 1-2 million Euros annually per country or 2% of the total PHARE budget<sup>7</sup>. Secondly, a linkage was lacking between different priorities, programmes and budget lines for support to civil society sector to develop the capacity and the ability to play a more vital role in the EU accession process. This resulted in the governments lacking the ability to take over financial support following enlargement and set up a legal and financial environment conducive to the sustainability of the sector. In short, the approach was oriented towards the short- to mid-term needs of the accession process only, with little thought for long-term sustainability of the intervention and investment on the part of the EU.

### PHARE Support in CEE countries

After the first years since 1989, PHARE did not include projects with a special focus on democracy and civil society. In 1991 it was simply stated that the PHARE assistance contained a general commitment to recognize the value of non-governmental organizations while implementing PHARE projects. In 1992, a special PHARE Democracy Program was launched on the initiative of the European Parliament in order to “counter the fact that Western attention and assistance has been focused largely on the creation of market economies in the CEEC”<sup>8</sup>. The program aimed to support the establishment of political and civil institutions crucial for the achievement of political consensus and stability. Between 1992 and 1997 the program financed democratic initiatives worth 56 Million ECU. Although the Democracy Program was not exclusively designed as a civil society program, in practice its major objective was the support of

<sup>2</sup> Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies (PHARE) Programme.

<sup>3</sup> For example, such foundations were established in Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

<sup>4</sup> The other types being ad-hoc project (10%) and micro-projects (20% of the PHARE civil society assistance, respectively). Abele, Christina: “Civil Society Assistance in Central and Eastern Europe: The Cases of Poland and Slovakia” (2006), p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> Little information today exists on this Foundation, but the Foundation was supported by the European Commission and managed funds related to EU human rights and civil society development programmes.

<sup>66</sup> “Supporting Enlargement-What Does Evaluation Show? Ex Post Evaluation of PHARE Support Allocated between 1999-2001 with Brief Review of post-2001 Allocations, Consolidated Summary” (2007), p.24.

<sup>7</sup> Abele, Christine, 2006, p.155.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission: Final Report: Evaluation of the PHARE and TACIS Democracy Programme 1992-1997. Prepared by ISA Consult, European Institute, Sussex University, GJW Europe, Brighton, Hamburg, November 1997, p. 2.

actors of civil society, namely NGOs. Moreover, the evaluation of the PHARE Democracy program conducted in 1997 revealed that the major share of the realized projects fell into the “development of NGOs” category (46%). Other multi-country programs, namely the PHARE NGO and LIEN program, which started in 1992 and 1993 respectively and the PHARE Partnership Program, which started in 1992 provided support for civil society development. Moreover, civil society assistance was frequently a part of the national PHARE programs negotiated between the recipient governments and the Commission (as was the case for example in Bulgaria in 1996; the Civil Dialogue Program has fulfilled the same function in Poland since 1992 already). The objectives of PHARE’s civil society programs were “to strengthen the capacity of leading institutions and to assist them in expanding the range of their activities, increasing their self-reliance and enhancing their participation in society and their support of NGOs”<sup>9</sup>. In brief, the programmes focused on some leading NGOs, who aimed to advance civil society development. The funds were mainly distributed by specially founded quasi-independent funds such as the Cooperation Fund in Poland, and the Civil Society Development Foundations in Slovakia, Bulgaria or Romania.<sup>10</sup>

Simultaneously, in the conflict-ridden Balkans at the end of the 1990s the CARDS<sup>11</sup> instrument was being designed, the PHARE foundation approach was used as a starting point to address the support and development of civil society. However, this was neither a systematic nor an approach that local civil society organizations (CSOs) accepted. It was also not (yet) an accession but rather a *stabilization and reconstruction approach*. At this time, a civil society foundation was set up in Kosovo, while in Macedonia such a plan was rejected by the local civil society leaders. Just how strange and foreign this approach seemed to some local actors was testified by an European Agency for Reconstruction<sup>12</sup> civil society programme manager from Macedonia who explained that reading such an approach in the Country Strategy paper seemed to her like “it was written by someone who hasn’t set foot in the country.”<sup>13</sup>

CARDS Democratic stabilization component in million Euros (allocations)					
Country	2002	2003	2004	2005-2006	TOTAL
Albania	1	1	2.5	4	8.5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	25	20.5	7.5	5	58
Croatia	3	3.7	3.8	N.N.	10.5
Kosovo	9.8	5	4	6	24.8
Montenegro	0.5	1.5	2.5	6	10.5
Macedonia	3	3	3	2	11
Serbia	9.5	24	21	28.5	83
Regional	7.6	5	0	1.95	14.55
<b>Total allocation</b>	<b>59.4</b>	<b>63.7</b>	<b>44.3</b>	<b>53.45</b>	<b>176.35</b>

Source: DG Enlargement, CARDS Financial Statistics, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/cards/statistics2000-2006\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/cards/statistics2000-2006_en.htm) (Last accessed on 25th August, 2009).

With the approach, the main two weaknesses were introduced from the PHARE to the CARDS civil society approach. First, in terms of the volume, CARDS assistance to civil society was similar or slightly

<sup>9</sup> European Commission: The PHARE Programme: An interim evaluation, 1997, p 53.

<sup>10</sup> The short analysis was made based on the dissertation by Abele, Christina: Civil Society Assistance in Central and Eastern Europe: The Cases of Poland and Slovakia (2006), p. 152-167.

<sup>11</sup> Community Assistance for Reconstruction and Development (CARDS) Programme.

<sup>12</sup> EAR was in charge of managing CARDS projects in Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo between 2003 and 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Interview 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2008.

higher to that in PHARE countries. However, support to civil society activities in many cases addressed the consequences of wars and not solely support to the democratization and accession process. The overall support to the Democratic stabilization component (which included support to civil society, but also media, interethnic relations, refugees and internally-displaced persons) in 2002-2006 was 176.35 million Euros or 8% of the overall CARDS assistance between 2002-2006. However, if one strictly analyses support to civil society development in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia only 29.5 million Euros or 2% of assistance has been contracted.<sup>14</sup> As in the CEE countries under PHARE, here also 1-2 million Euros were allocated to civil society development activities on average annually per country. The situation persisted under the IPA, but only in 2007 before the CSF was introduced.

<b>CARDS Civil society sector support 2002-2006 in million Euros (contracted, EAR 31.12.2008)</b>	
<b>Country</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Kosovo	<b>5.3</b>
Macedonia	<b>8.2</b>
Montenegro	<b>1.9</b>
Serbia	<b>14.1</b>
<b>Total allocation</b>	<b>29.5</b>

Source: EAR, Contracts Awarded,  
<http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/ear/home/default.htm>  
 (Last accessed on 25th August, 2009).

Secondly, as identified with the EC evaluation of assistance to civil society in CEE countries, the evaluation on the CARDS approach to civil society was found short-term oriented, lacking sustainability measures for when the Commission assistance would end. The evaluation of the funding managed by the European Agency for Reconstruction has shown that “short-term one-off grants, with total programme duration of 3 years may have been appropriate for reconstruction projects, but they were not well-suited to developing the longer term capacity of civil society development, or the promotion of ethnic tolerance. Both require continuing investment because changes are slow, long-term, tentative and often unpredictable.”<sup>15</sup> While some success stories are noted under the CARDS ad-hoc evaluation of regional programmes from December 2008, these project were successful and showed prospects of sustainability due to fact that these was “an indigenous phenomenon; driven by the problems, needs *and* priorities of its membership and not necessarily by those of external stakeholders, such as the EC.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The calculation only includes Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia. Here the exact numbers of contracted grants and services were available.

<sup>15</sup> Lessons-learned to Lessons-applied: Dissemination of Results from Evaluations Conducted by the European Agency for Reconstruction within Main Areas of EC Support to Beneficiary Countries under the CARDS programme 2000 – 2008, 2008, p. 28.

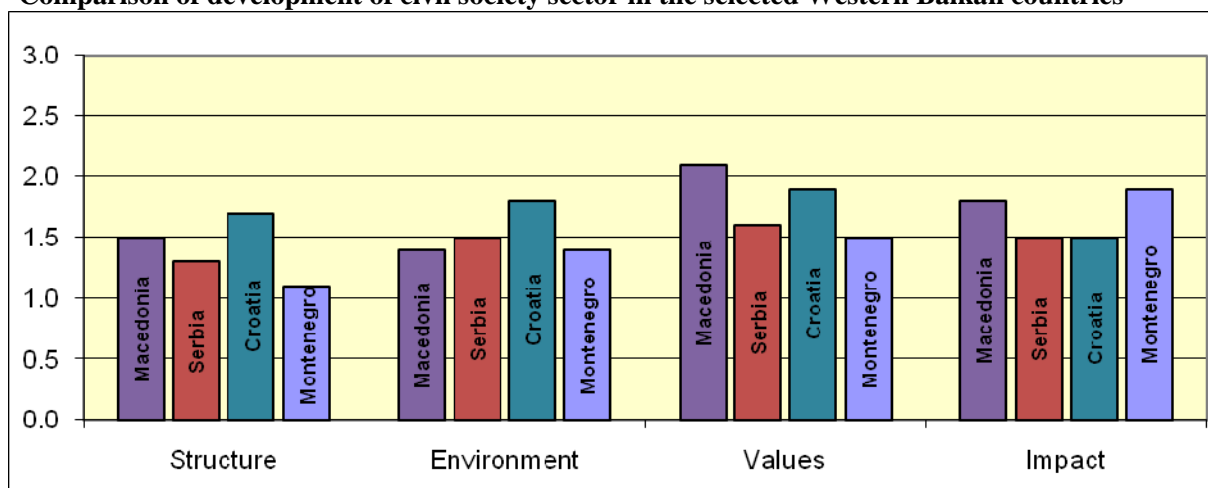
<sup>16</sup> Ad-hoc evaluation of the CARDS regional programmes in the Western Balkans Final Report – December 2008, p.24. The project was titled “Partnership in Action - Strengthening Balkan Civil Society Development Network” and it was the first CARDS regional project lead and implemented by local CSOs from the region.

### III. CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS - BETWEEN DONOR DEPENDENCY AND LOCAL OWNERSHIP

Historically, civil society in the Western Balkans<sup>17</sup> after World War II developed in a similar way in the individual countries. Apart from sports and cultural associations, existing CSOs were put under the control of the Communist Party. After the break-up of Yugoslavia and fall of the Communist regime in Albania, transition brought a boom in the number of CSOs based on the need to develop a democratic and participatory system and respond to the consequences of war, economic underdevelopment and poverty.

If compared *structurally* based on the Civil Society Index (CSI) Research<sup>18</sup>, the sector throughout the region is characterized by a low level of participation of the citizens, e.g. highest in Croatia and Serbia, where 35% and 47% of the citizens are members of CSOs respectively. The majority of the organizations are situated in developed urban regions and some marginalized groups such as ethnic, religious and poor people are underrepresented, especially in the leadership of the organizations. The organizations usually get their financial resources from donors, whereas support from the business or public sector is minimal.

**Comparison of development of civil society sector in the selected Western Balkan countries**



Source: CIVICUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society: Volume 1, V. Finn Heinrich (ed.), 2007.

The civil society sector is also exposed to a rapidly changing *environment*; from wars and ethnic conflict to reconstruction and reconciliation towards Euro-Atlantic integration. The funding situation has changed dramatically, from an abundance of external donors in the post-conflict decade following the mid-1990s to donor withdrawal since 2005. While this is a signal of positive recovery in the region, local sources of funding (either public or private) are not yet available and a culture of giving and activism has not been well enough established for the sector to have strong roots, support and a positive image in the society. Here, the situation is quite similar to that in the CEE countries and thus, the potential weaknesses of the EC support to civil society to repeat itself too.

In terms of their *impact* on the processes of policy-making and implementation, this is focused on various social services. When it comes to monitoring the work of the government and responsibility over various issues the CSOs possess a low capacity to carry out these functions. At the same time, many organizations

<sup>17</sup> Comprising Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia.

<sup>18</sup> In 2006, CSI studies on civil society have been published in Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Currently, CIVICUS research is under way in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. The Index measured 4 dimensions (characteristics) of the civil society: structure, environment, values and impact for every country on the scale from 0 (least) to 3 (most) – see table on page 7.

lack the needed resources, mostly the research capacities for the monitoring of the budget process. The research in most of the countries shows a limited social influence, which is based on strengthening the citizens and satisfying their social needs, especially the needs of marginalized groups.

While the dependency on external funding was a precondition for sustaining the work on development of the sector so far, the need for an increased push for reforms and their effective implementation in the context of Euro-Atlantic integration has increased expectations on the sector by *external* actors to contribute to these processes. *Domestically*, the lack of a culture of giving and philanthropy coupled with poverty, current social-economic underdevelopment and the latest effects of the global economic crisis, which has yet to see its peak in some of the countries in the region, translates into an ever-shrinking pool of financial support from which CSOs can draw in order to fund their activities. Finally, the basic *enabling environment* in terms of legal and financial provisions for a strong and independent civil society sector to develop has only been set up in some countries (e.g. Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia) where the challenge is now on full implementation, in others political will is still lacking to develop basic functioning laws (e.g. Serbia, Albania, Kosovo). Thus, the CSF financial support and the IPA Partnership principle establishing a formal obligation to consult with civil society raised high expectations among the local actors in the Balkans on the importance and value the new IPA instrument would have to support their ongoing work on the democratization and reform process in their countries.

Each sector has its own pioneers and leader CSOs, which have worked on developing and supporting the sector with a focus on building internal capacities and professionalism, networking on sectoral level and developing relations with the government withstanding the weaknesses identified in the CSI Research. In Serbia, where CSOs operate under legislation from 1982 and 1990<sup>19</sup>, Civic Initiatives have led the initiative for the development of a modern law on CSOs and are co-founders of the Federation of NGOs in Serbia (FENS) with 550 members. In Montenegro, Center for Development of NGOs (CRNVO) led the establishment of a Coalition “Cooperation for a Common Goal” in May 2006 which initiated the development of a Government Strategy for Cooperation with CSOs, adopted in January 2009 and a Code of Conduct for CSOs. CRNVO has also supported capacity building of the Government’s Unit for Cooperation with CSOs and has proposed a Model Law on Transparency of Drafting and Implementing National legal Acts in March 2007. In Macedonia, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) has built the capacity of CSOs in different sectors (e.g. disabilities, women, children) and is the founder of the Civic Platform for Macedonia, the leading national network, bringing together 30 main CSOs in the country. Similarly, MCIC has led an initiative which resulted in the development of a Government Strategy for Cooperation with CSOs in 2007 in consultation with civil society actors. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Center for Promotion of Civil Society also spearheaded the development of a national coalition “To Work and Succeed Together” of over 300 CSOs which led to the development of the Agreement on Cooperation between the Council of Ministers and the Civil Society Sector.

Only a few mentioned exemplary initiatives on the part of civil society demonstrate that the leader CSOs have recognized the need to develop basic institutional frameworks and capacities not just within the sector, but primarily in regard to state institutions that are based on the principles of good governance (e.g. openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence). It is only with strong state institutions that a strong civil society and democracy can thrive. Taking into consideration the initiatives above, the available resources and capacities, the groundwork laid by the civil society sector so far is commendable. It provides for a long-term sustainable approach under the initiative and ownership by local actors. However, this work has been carried out only recently (in the last 5 to 8 years). In order for it to have long-term value, to be fully implemented in countries where it exists and developed where it is still to be developed, further strategic support is needed in terms of political will and funding in order for

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<sup>19</sup> The new law was passed on 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 2009 and will come into force in three months. It took CSOs 8 years to push through the law and 4 draft proposals.

the groundwork and progress made not to be lost. Apart from Croatia, where the institutional system is functional, in other countries this is mainly developed under the pressure from civil society while in funding terms this mostly depends on external donors.

Although civil society development has been and still is a non-priority issue for the governments concerned, the EC introduced this as a priority issue under the political criteria for accession with its Enlargement Strategy 2007. With the withdrawal of most other donors and the financial support under the CSF being earmarked for civil society development since 2007 in the accession agenda, the EC is becoming the main determinant of the *pace* and *modalities* of the further development of civil society sectors in countries of the Western Balkans and its relation vis-à-vis the government through the introduction of civil society development as an accession (although vague) criteria. While the civil society sector in the current form is a fairly new phenomenon developed so far mainly under extensive external (donor) influence, the track-record so far has shown the viability of strategic civil society development organizations contributing to strengthened democratic institutions and providing models and solutions to the problems and concerns of ordinary citizens. However, the grounding of strong civil society as a guarantor of democracy is yet to take place as the involvement through voluntary activities and financial support from citizens is still rather low. The civil society sector has grown to realize this, but questions remain about whether the government, as the enabling factor, and the Commission, as the main driving force for reform under the accession conditionality, have also realized it? Will the prioritization of civil society development under the Enlargement Strategy 2007 and the CSF enable the civil society sector in the Western Balkans to address these crucial issues for the sustainability and viability of the sector and build on the groundwork laid so far, or this is not possible in an area such as civil society development since it is not identified as part of the *Acquis communautaire*?

#### **IV. IPA AND LESSONS-LEARNED FROM PREVIOUS ENLARGEMENTS**

The IPA instrument is the newest pre-accession financial instrument covering potential and candidate countries in the Western Balkans and Turkey for the period 2007-2013. It underpins the EU enlargement policy in supporting the countries towards alignment and accession to the EU. The instrument is based on previous enlargement experiences and a tool-kit of pre-accession instruments used in previous enlargement cycles, especially in the CEE countries and Romania and Bulgaria, including PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD. IPA is also based on the lessons learned from the CARDS instrument covering the Western Balkans and the pre-accession support for Turkey. The specificities of the problems in the region, such as the state-building and consolidation process through the need for institution building and support to the reconciliation process as a consequence of conflicts were also taken into consideration in its design. IPA is composed of 5 Components<sup>20</sup> each (except I) covering an area crucial for accession to the EU and corresponding to the EU internal policy mechanisms in which Western Balkan countries will be fully participating once they have joined the EU.

There are two main lessons learned from previous enlargements. The first is the need to deal with cumbersome areas such as reform in the justice and home affairs and rule of law as early as possible in the enlargement process. Regardless whether the country is a potential candidate country or a candidate country, great focus is given to the functioning of areas such as the police and judiciary and issues of transparency and functioning regulatory and monitoring mechanisms. Additionally, the progress measured in the accession process in the Western Balkans goes beyond monitoring the legislation that is passed and focuses primarily on the effective and sustainable implementation of that legislation. The

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<sup>20</sup> Component I is Transitional Assistance and Institution Building, Component II is Cross-Border Cooperation corresponding to EU regional policy, Component III is Regional Development corresponding to EU structural policy, Component IV is Human Resource Development corresponding to EU Social Fund policy and Component V is Rural Development and is corresponding to EU agricultural policy.

second lesson is that reforms need to be based on ownership by the government but also other actors, including civil society in both the management and implementation phases. These are addressed through the inclusion of the partnership and comitology principles, which are typical instruments of EU internal policy mechanisms such as the Cohesion and Structural policy. The specificities of the state-building context of the Western Balkans have been included through strong support and monitoring of public administration reform and regulatory mechanisms. The peace and reconciliation issues are addressed with a specific focus on minority rights issues. Thus, IPA is considered by the EU institutions as the latest state-of-the-art pre-accession mechanism and a tailor-made instrument for the accession of the Western Balkans and Turkey to the EU.

The 27 EU Member States direct the enlargement policy, while it is the European Commission who is commissioned to monitor the progress, propose the strategy and lead the negotiations towards membership of the EU. The Commission is also responsible for the management of the concrete project and financial aspects of enlargement through the management of the IPA instrument. The Council of Ministers, which consists of the representatives of all 27 Member States, adopted the IPA Regulation<sup>21</sup> on 17 July 2006. The Member States, through the Council, are involved in the main decisions over the Instrument. As well as the adoption of the IPA Regulation, the Council has the right to suspend, review and amend the IPA Regulation, including changing the state of a potential candidate into a candidate country. Moreover, the Member States are also involved in the management and implementation of IPA through their engagement in the IPA Management Committee (Component 1 and 2) under the principle of comitology<sup>22</sup>.

#### **Comitology**

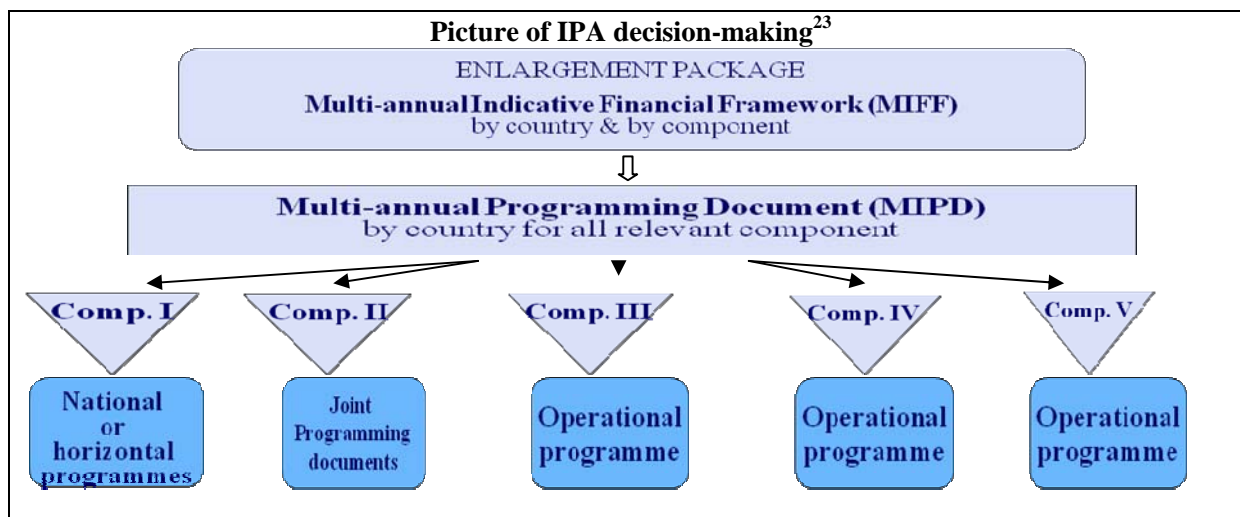
In accordance with Article 202 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (ECT), it is the task of the Commission to implement legislation at Community level. In this context, the Treaty provides for the Commission to be assisted by a committee, in line with the procedure known as "comitology". The committees are forums for discussion, consist of representatives from MS and are chaired by the Commission. They enable the Commission to establish dialogue with national administrations before adopting implementing measures. There are several categories of committees such as advisory, regulatory, regulatory committee with scrutiny and management committees. Under the IPA instrument, the management committee applies. The positive effect of comitology is the improvement of donor coordination and coherence as Member States are involved in programming concrete EU assistance to pre-accession countries as well as their bilateral aid. Comitology, which is the basic tool for the programming and implementation of Structural and Cohesion Funds, also enables early involvement of representatives of beneficiary countries (government and other relevant actors) which means that for the first time, accession countries have the ability to manage the assistance de-facto as a Member State country with the aim that this will help the effectiveness and absorption of assistance once the beneficiary country becomes officially a Member State. While for Component I (Institution Building and Transitional Assistance) and II (Cross-border Cooperation) special IPA Management Committees have been established, the existing committees under the Structural and Agricultural policy funds have responsibility over the management co-decision for Component III (Regional Development), IV (Human Resource Development) and V (Rural Development). However, these positive effects can be offset by the fact that the involvement of Member States allows for them to potentially prioritize assistance according to their bilateral objectives, rather than the objectives set under the Accession or European Partnership.

While comitology allows for Member State involvement in IPA management, this does not seriously hamper the leadership of the Commission in directing the priorities and focus of financial assistance. In reality, the representatives of Member States in the Management Committees can adopt a positive or no

<sup>21</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 1085/2006.

<sup>22</sup> Council Regulation 28/12/1999 No. 468.

opinion. There is no possibility for a negative opinion and even if this were the case, the Commission would have the right to adopt it. Also, the management on mezzo (through three-year strategic document called the Multi-Indicative Financial Framework (MIFF) and micro-level (through annual Work Programmes of project fiches) is not dealt with by the IPA Committee as it is solely the Commission, in cooperation with beneficiary country, that is in charge of its drafting. The Parliament's role is quite minimal. It is not directly involved in either enlargement policy or IPA management. Its power lies mainly in the decision on the budget.



In relation to the beneficiary country, the management of IPA is designed to allow for taking over the responsibility by the beneficiary country under the Decentralized Implementation System (DIS) with advancement in the accession process, i.e. once the Commission accredits national institutions and confers them the power to manage the IPA assistance on their own. In this respect, the Commission acts as a donor in relation to the beneficiary country. However, only candidate countries have the possibility to manage assistance under DIS and Component III, IV and V can only be implemented once DIS is in place. Currently, Croatia and Turkey are managing assistance under the DIS, while Macedonia is awaiting accreditation. Regardless of DIS, beneficiary countries are responsible to act as partners in development of their 3-year strategic priority document MIPD based on national development plans, and are expected to take the lead in developing annual plans for the programming of IPA assistance.

Both DIS and active partnerships in programming by the beneficiary country are aimed at increasing the country's ownership of the project through which IPA assistance is implemented. While the design of IPA is certainly proving to be the latest-state of the art in taking on board increased institutional capacities not just by way of project but as a principle in the management of assistance itself. While not to be mixed with comitology, Partnership principle, which will be discussed in Chapter VI enables not only the Government but other stakeholders such as CSOs to be involved in design, management and implementation of IPA assistance and as such, they present a strategy approach to developing a general system and practice of open, accountable and transparent policy- and decision-making process. While having this perspective in mind, the first two programming cycles from 2007 and the first project being implemented on the ground based on the experience of local CSOs with the CSF provide for some scepticism of the functioning of the Partnership principle and begs the question whether the current implementation of the IPA incorporates the lessons learned during previous enlargement cycles and thus, their effects in practice?

<sup>23</sup> See footnote 19 for explanation for each Component.

## **V. IPA CIVIL SOCIETY FACILITY – THE WASHING POWDER OR EFFECTIVE SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

As with previous enlargement policies, the development of civil society was placed under the political criteria for accession with the Enlargement Strategy of 2007. It seems that the strategy unfolded under two factors. First was the pressure to find a “quick-fix” to the Dutch and French “No” referenda in opposition to the EU Constitutional Treaty. The second factor was the negative lessons-learned from previous enlargement cycles (especially in Romania and Bulgaria), whereas for example, many Bulgarian CSOs were faced with a total change of operating conditions overnight.

The Commission approach also developed in terms of geography and scope. In scope, the development of civil society was combined with the development of civil dialogue, which in the Commission documents are often intertwined and sometimes hard to distinguish. In geography, it was first addressed in Turkey and Croatia in 2005 and then extended to the whole of the Western Balkans. While support was first defined in terms of supporting better communication of enlargement and mutual understanding between MS and candidate countries’ societies, it was later extended to strengthening the role of civil society in the democratization and reconciliation process. These both culminated in the 2007 Enlargement Package, where the Commission set civil society development and civil dialogue in the Western Balkans as one of the key reform priorities under the enlargement strategy. The IPA instrument was to provide additional resources for supporting concrete measures under this new strategic priority.

Later in the same year, the Civil Society Facility was announced. Within the framework of the CSF, the financial support to civil society in the Western Balkans and Turkey in the period 2008-2010 was to approximately triple when compared to 2005-2007, when the Commission support to civil society amounted to 27 million Euros. The aim of the CSF is three-fold: to support capacity-building and the role of civil society; to expose civil society representatives to EU institutions and procedures; and to support partnership between civil society and other sectors as well as with counterparts in other countries of the region and the Member States. Combined with this and for the first time, was a responsibility on the part of the Commission and the beneficiary country to consult civil society actors in the management, implementation and evaluation of IPA assistance (i.e. the Partnership principle). Thus, IPA promised to bring both political, financial and partnership support to the role of the civil society sector in the Western Balkans.

If one looks at available figures on the CSF 2008, it seems that the tripling of assistance under the CSF versus the support under CARDS has been realized under the allocations from 2008. However, it remains unclear whether these are additional allocations, as was announced in the Enlargement Strategy 2007 or regular allocations (as a Commission official informed in an interview<sup>24</sup>). Overall support to civil society in the Western Balkans under national and regional programmes totalled 27 million Euros in the period 2005-2007. The tripling of support would mean 81 million Euros for period 2008-2010. If one compares PHARE and CARDS to IPA CSF 2008 allocations per country on annual level, the proportion of support to civil society will remain the same. Or, out of 1.389 billion Euros of the IPA assistance to the region (including Turkey) for 2008, 28.9 million Euro or 2% will be allocated to the CSF. However, as we have seen with PHARE and CARDS support, the main lessons-learned were that the support lacked linkage, ownership and sustainability. How has the CSF design and so far implementation addressed this issues and incorporated the lessons-learned? Does the CSF provide for more support to local civil society actors, and will it provide for better ownership and sustainability, or are the lessons from PHARE and CARDS to be lost again?

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<sup>24</sup> Interview on 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.

IPA assistance 2007-2008 (allocations)			
Country (in mil EUR)	2007	2008	Total
Albania	61	70.7	131.7
Bosnia & Herzegovina	62.1	74.8	136.9
Croatia	141.2	146	287.2
Kosovo	68.3	124.7	193
Macedonia	58.5	70.2	128.7
Montenegro	31.4	32.6	64
Serbia	189.7	190.9	380.6
Turkey	497.2	538.7	1035.9
Multi-Beneficiary Programme	109	140.7	249.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1218.4</b>	<b>1389.3</b>	<b>2607.7</b>

Source: DG Enlargement, Planning of the IPA, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/planning-ipa\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/planning-ipa_en.htm) (Last accessed on 25th August, 2009).

First, the CSF has been designed to realize the prioritized civil society development as criteria for progress in the EU integration process since the Enlargement package of 2007. However, it seems that the approach from the previous enlargement is being repeated where the main aim of the strategic focus and support to civil society is *accession* rather than *demand* driven. The introduction of the focus came about under the need to find solutions to enlargement fatigue experienced in the Member States (under the pressure of French and Dutch no referendum on Lisbon Treaty) and the need to further push for the effective implementation of reform and consolidation of democratic institutions in the candidate and potential candidate countries, which seemed to be more problematic than in any previous enlargement.

Secondly, the operationalization of the policy through the CSF was done in total absence of consultation or partnership on the side of local civil society actors in the Western Balkans. In fact, most CSOs only learned of the Facility at the civil society conference organized on 16-17<sup>th</sup> April, 2008 by DG Enlargement, and once the Facility had already been programmed and was awaiting a formal Commission decision. This contrasts with a later Commission initiative under the European Neighbourhood Policy<sup>25</sup>, the Eastern Partnership, which had a Civil Society Forum as a component foreseen from the beginning of the process. Although CSOs are not completely satisfied by all aspects of the forum, there is no denying that a space was made for civil society involvement from the start, indicating an acknowledgement within the Commission of the vital role such organisations play.

<sup>25</sup> The European Neighbourhood Policy applies to the EU's immediate neighbours by land or sea – Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine. Although Russia is also a neighbour of the EU, our relations are instead developed through a Strategic Partnership covering four “common spaces”.

IPA Civil Society Facility in million Euros (allocations)			
Country	2007	2008	Total
Croatia	N.N.	3	3
Macedonia	0.4	1.2	1.6
Turkey	3.2	N.N.	3.2
Albania	0	0	0
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3	3.5	6.5
Montenegro	1	N.N.	1
Serbia	2	2.5	4.5
Kosovo	N.N.	1.7	1.7
Multi-Beneficiary Programme	N.N.	17	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>28.9</b>	<b>38.5</b>

Source: DG Enlargement, Planning of the IPA, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/planning-ipa\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/planning-ipa_en.htm) (Last accessed on 25th August, 2009).

Thirdly, there is lack of a clear definition of both what civil society development and civil society dialogue are. The basic idea that can be discerned from Commission's documents and interviews with its officials is that it wants to develop a civil society that is professional, is able to take over the responsibility to hold governments accountable and has secured resources to support CSOs through training, helpdesks, databases etc. Civil dialogue, on the other hand, is defined as having two elements: it is organized within civil society and civil society vs. EU. It is also about developing a culture of dialogue. The lack of clear definition renders the effectiveness of planned interventions questionable and allows room for free interpretation when its results and impact is to be measured. Without clear definition, indicators of achievement and thus result, the sustainable and long-term oriented approach needed for effective development of the civil society sector is put at risk, i.e. one of the main lessons-learned from efforts under both the PHARE and CARDS to support civil society.

Fourthly, the envisaged mode of implementation is given preference to services *for* but not *by* the civil society sector. Around 2/3 of allocated assistance under the planned CSF 2008 is to be implemented through technical assistance support, while around 1/3 is envisaged for grants and targeted study visits. The technical assistance launched through a tender aims at implementing a concrete set of activities strictly designed by the Commission or management authority (e.g. beneficiary country). In the PHARE foundation approach, the assistance was channelled through local organizations for re-granting, thus allowing for support to local CSOs that had direct knowledge of the concrete needs of civil society in that country. It allowed at the same time the strengthening of local capacities and CSOs to address these. In contrast, the Facility envisages setting up a support structure through national offices to be implemented by external consultants in providing services such as databases, analysis of the sector and training services that have in most countries already been established by local CSOs with no requirement for such local capacities and mechanisms to be taken into consideration or to be built upon. This allows for a possibility for a *tabula rasa* approach which bypasses the established local capacities in favour of external consultants. The support available through the other two mechanisms (i.e. grants and study visits) do not for now envisage civil society development activities but rather focus on strengthening civil society in *acquis* areas such as environment, rule of law, public health, energy efficiency etc.

Furthermore, the CSF project for 2009 and beyond announcement of introduction of new issues and themes (e.g. culture, children, women) and methods of implementation (e.g. direct agreement with international governmental organizations). This will bring diversification of areas to be covered with the

assistance and make it easier for the Commission to distribute and implement the assistance. However, focusing assistance on several, but key areas of intervention on regional level could thus avoid the weaknesses in missing linkage and sustainability identified in the PHARE and CARDS support. For example, in almost every country, the Commission is supporting establishment and reinforcement of national mechanisms for coordination and cooperation of the Government with the civil society sector. Regional support for the exchange of best practices, networking and transfer of knowledge between such institutions and staff engaged in developing and functioning of these mechanisms would provide for reinforcement of individual national measures already supported by the Commission under the CSF.

In sum, the prioritization of the development of civil society and civil society dialogue in the enlargement policy is an important policy development not just for the accession policy but for the civil society sector, which is being recognized for having a positive role and can further contribute to strengthening the pace and quality of the reform process in the EU accession countries. Furthermore, this gives important incentive to local civil society and sometimes also leverage to it for pressure on the Government to perform. However, the design and implementation of the CSF thus far falls short both of the negative lessons-learned of the accession rather than demand support to civil society from PHARE and CARDS periods and the expectations of the local civil society actors in supporting their own indigenous efforts. The Commission has held to the commitment of tripling the financing of support to civil society development, but the ownership and sustainability, through involvement of local CSOs in the design and implementation and holding the Governments accountable to the civil society development and civil dialogue criteria for accession should be improved. Since the design of the CSF for 2010 is underway and we only have begun to learn from the implementation of the first projects from CSF 2008, can there be changes still be made to improve its design and implementation for 2010 and beyond support?

## **VI. THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE - A POSSIBILITY FOR EFFECTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY**

The Commission Regulation No. 718/2007 of 12 June 2007 details the IPA implementation rules, and for the first time provides the legal basis for inclusion of civil society actors in the programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes of EU assistance. While the Partnership principle is already imbedded in EU Structural and Cohesion Funds, it is now for the first time a formal principle also enshrined in the pre-accession instrument. As such, it constitutes an expression of democratic values and is designed to be a tool for improving the efficiency of EU assistance and implementation of a bottom-up approach to management. In this respect, IPA makes clear reference to civil society actors not only as potential beneficiaries of EU funding but also as players in the strategic planning and programming of EU external assistance. However, based on the track-record of civil society consultations on IPA programming, especially the CSF, from 2007 till today, the shortcomings of the regulation are becoming obvious mostly due to the lack of clear mechanisms and concrete measures to be undertaken in order to make civil society engagement tangible and achievable.

### **The Partnership principle Excerpts from the Regulation and Implementing Rules**

Council regulation (EC) No 1085/2006 of 17 July 2006 establishing IPA

Article 6 on "Planning assistance"

6.1 "Assistance under this Regulation shall be provided on the basis of multi-annual indicative planning documents established by country in close consultation with national authorities, so as to support national strategies and ensure the engagement and involvement of the country concerned. *Civil society* and other stakeholders shall be associated *where appropriate*..."

Commission regulation No 2499/2007 of 12 June 2007 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 1085/2006 establishing an instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA)

Article 5 on “Multi-annual indicative planning documents”

5.2. In accordance with the provisions of Article 20(3) of the IPA Regulation and in the context of the consultation laid down in Article 6(1) of that Regulation, the Commission shall endeavor *to allow sufficient time for the relevant stakeholders, including Member States, to provide their comments on the document.*

During the first cycle of programming on national and regional level in 2007 and 2008, physical consultations between civil society, on the one hand, and Commission and national authorities, on the other, took place regularly at least in written form before each strategic document (i.e. Multi-Indicative Programming Document or Operational/Annual Programme) was finalized. These allowed little time to give feedback (between 4 and 144 days), were late in the decision-making process and thus allowed for a limited possibility to establish substantive and constructive dialogue as a basis of a functioning partnership principle as envisaged in Article 5 of the IPA Regulation.

The situation is not particular to the EU integration process, but reflects the general lack of inclusion of civil society in national policy- and decision-making when it comes to strategic priorities of a country and society. In the best case scenario, civil society is left to be “ticked-off” by Commission officials at the end of the planning and programming process as a formal requirement. This is supported by experiences in other countries, such as those under the European Neighbourhood Policy, where consultations have also been criticised for not reaching out to the main players, being disorganised and late in the process and being considered a technical exercise rather than a potentially beneficial process for all stakeholders. The national governments, on the other hand, understand the Partnership principle mainly as partnering with their ministry colleagues, and not as way of developing long-term partnerships and ownership of the reform and transformation process within their country.

So far, the consultation process shares a similar fate. Most CSOs only learned of the Facility at the civil society conference organized in April 2008, and only once the Facility had already been programmed and was awaiting a formal Commission decision. While in individual countries, the Commission Delegations held consultations on national activities planned under the CSF, in 2007 and 2008 these were in the last phase of decision-making process, i.e. before approval of the IPA Management Committee. The documents were rarely shared in advance and even so, these were quite short time frames to digest and prepare for the physical consultations. On the regional level, the consultation would similarly take place in the final phase of approval, would be in written and addressed to EU-level networks<sup>26</sup> only.

On the other hand, civil society does not have developed enough capacities and understanding of the IPA programming and planning process, save of handful of organizations. In CSF consultations, usually a representative number of CSOs would attend the meeting, ask questions and maybe give suggestions. It would be only a few that would take the time, have the resources and capacity to submit more substantive written comments. Since there is not feedback on the comments to the CSOs, even these would lose interest after several rounds of consultations. The vicious circle is thus created and can keep on reinforcing itself if both parties in the process continuously engage in only sporadic, formal exchange of information.

The programming process is increasingly being handed over from the Commission and the EAR officials to national governments. This is a positive development as the national governments are the long-term partner of civil society, but it is also problematic, as the culture of inclusion, transparency and access of

<sup>26</sup> The only exception being the consultation on the CSF 2008 in May 2008. The first the BCSDN received a direct request for consultation was for the CSF 2010 on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2009.

the general public, including civil society, to policy- and decision-making bodies is lacking (although, the mechanisms<sup>27</sup> in many cases are already there). In a situation where the substantive and constructive dialogue is lacking when the process is “owned” by the Commission officials on the ground, it is highly probable that the implementation of the Partnership principle once the consultations are taken over by the national authorities will be further eroded.

Civil society is a key priority of EU enlargement strategy and is part of the political criteria but since “there is no EU *acquis* on civil society”, the Commission approach has not been systematic and . Each year, the Progress Reports make reference to the civil society “benchmarks” but these only address the limited capacities of civil society and not the need on the side of the governments to step-up their priority list and develop a long-term approach towards the development of enabling legal and especially financial framework. Again, the ownership argument is lost if no pressure is put on the government to develop a framework for an independent and autonomous sector to be able to be the care-taker of the developed and matured democracy, people-oriented policies formulated through citizens’ initiatives, philanthropy and culture of dialogue.

The consultations in a policy- or decision-making process usually produce a vicious circle. Even if the policy- makers invite civil society actors to a consultation on a legislative proposal or planning of strategic priorities for IPA, the civil society, save of a handful of organization, is lacking the knowledge, the skills and the resources to actively participate to the consultation process. Based on such experience, the busy policy-makers lack the understanding that this is probably a mid- to long-term building of relations and will give up partly or entirely the consultation process. On the other side, civil society, lacking the understanding of the terminology, context and having only a short period of time at its disposal to react and to prepare (not to mention the language issue when it comes to documents in English) will also not see the value of such technical exercises and will give up partly or entirely in participating in such events. With this, the vicious circle is created and reinforced, and the two parties lacking the knowledge, the expectations and most importantly, the value of such an exchange of information and arguments is lost and with it the prospect for Partnership. The Commission is currently undergoing a review of the Implementing Rules of the IPA Regulation, which allows for the further definition of the Partnership principle with the aim to detail the expectation and the framework for its implementation. However, the key question remains whether the improved implementation of the Partnership principle is enough for a strengthened role of local CSOs in the design and implementation of the CSF?

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<sup>27</sup> Through Government/National strategy or Agreement for cooperation with civil society.

## **VII. 10 POINT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

- The Commission sets civil society development and civil dialogue in the Western Balkans as one of the key reform priorities under the enlargement strategy as part of the 2007 Enlargement Package. **Two years on, it is time for the Commission to remind the Governments to show concrete progress regarding the development of civil society and civil society dialogue benchmarks in the Progress Reports for 2008;**
- **The Commission, in partnership with local actors, should agree on definition of civil society development and civil society dialogue within the Enlargement policy.** This will clarify expectation to the local CSOs and other actors and will allow for a clear setting of indicators for achievement and measuring of results;
- **The Commission should insure the Civil Society Facility is based on local-demand and not accession-driven needs.** This should be assured through inclusion of local networks and CSOs in its design, implementation and evaluation both on regional and national level. It should also be assured through increased implementation of the Civil Society Facility through grants rather than service mechanism;
- **The Commission should not diversity methods of the Civil Society Facility implementation.** Principles of implementation, rather than the method of implementation, are crucial in assuring sustainably and ownership of the activities. Service methods should be used, only when necessary, but measures should be introduced to secure local actors, capacities, knowledge and skills are involved in both design and implementation of the activities. For example, implementation of assistance through other international-governmental organizations is less favourable as it provides for moving away from focusing EU assistance on key accession priorities, e.g. building democratic institutions;
- **The Commission should avoid further diversification of areas of intervention under the Civil Society Facility.** Especially on the regional level, focus should be put on areas where synergy, added-value, ownership and sustainability based on already existing activities on national and regional level can be achieved. Example of such area would be regional networking between NGO offices and civil society development organizations is needed to provide for exchange of best practices and peer support;
- In 2007, the Commission announced triple support for development of civil society and civil society dialogue in the Western Balkans in the period 2008-2010 to that of 2005-2007. The CSF 2008 does realize the commitments and the **Commission should continue to living up to this commitment;**
- **The Commission should further define the Partnership principle with the aim of providing details regarding expectations and the framework for its implementation.** One of most concrete measures can be request for management authorities (i.e. Government, Delegation) to prepare consultation plans and to provide feedback on inputs received to stakeholders;
- **The Commission and CSOs should ensure that local actors are timely and substantively involved,** if needed through organized representative bodies or mechanisms such as networks, Council, or umbrella bodies in all phases of the programming and that this is done in early phase;
- **The Commission, the Government and CSOs should invest their skills, knowledge, time and money to develop consultation into a continues exchange of information beneficial to all parties involved;**
- **Local CSOs, networks and other actors** should actively seek cooperation with the Commission and their government and show a readiness to exchange information, coordinate, and cooperate on mutually beneficial areas of engagement.