



ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Skopje
January 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| VISION & MISSION | 3 |
| METHODS OF WORK | 3 |
| NETWORK MEMBERS & ORGANS | 3 |
| 1. PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK | 5 |
| 1.1. Strategic Objectives | 5 |
| 1.2. Target Group & Area | 5 |
| 1.3. Planned Activities & Results | 5 |
| 2. IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES | 6 |
| 2.1. To facilitate a common understanding of the enabling environment for civil society development among key actors and recognition of a common framework and tools | 6 |
| 2.2. To promote and recognize civil society as a competent, democratic actor (partner/player) in the EU accession process | 10 |
| 2.3. To support the development of models and sources for CS access to and effective use of (financial) resources; | 12 |
| 2.4. To strengthen CSO capacities and their role in functioning democracies; | 12 |
| 2.5. To increase the communication and collaboration within the network and its recognition among core stakeholders. | 14 |
| 3. ORGANISATION | 15 |
| 4. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND NETWORKING | 15 |
| 5. INTERNAL RULES AND PROCEDURES | 16 |
| 6. FINANCIAL REPORT (in EUR) | 18 |

VISION & MISSION

The Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) is a regional network of local civil society development organizations (CSOs) from the Balkan region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey).

Its **VISION** is sustainable peace, harmony, and prosperity of societies in the Balkan region.

Its **MISSION** is to empower civil society and influence European and national policies towards a more enabling environment for civil society development in order to ensure sustainable and functioning democracies in the Balkans.

BCSDN **GOALS** and **OBJECTIVES** are:

1. Increased role of civil society by strengthening its voice in policy- and decision-making process on national, regional and EU level;
2. Promoted civil dialogue between civil society actors, state institutions and the European Union in order to influence public policy;
3. Developed advocacy knowledge and skills of civil society actors as a base for achieving greater impact; and
4. Strengthened communication, coordination, and cooperation between civil society actors in the Balkan region.

METHODS OF WORK

BCSDN realizes its goals mainly through advocacy and lobbying activities, by:

- Developing joint positions and statements on initiatives and areas of interest common to all member organizations and taking necessary action;
- Coordinating and cooperating with other organizations, networks and other actors on joint positions and initiatives;
- Coordinating cooperation between its members and developing joint projects and initiatives;
- Facilitating the exchange of information and experience between its members and national and local state institutions and the EU;
- Coordinating and compiling research and relevant information;
- Coordinating capacity-building and other events.

| |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BCSDN is a registered foundation under the Macedonian Law on Citizens Associations and Foundations (Official Gazette of RM No. dated 31/98 and 29/2007) as of 30 th September 2009 with the Decision no. 3012009172866 of the Central Register of the Republic of North Macedonia (CRNM). BCSDN's identification number is 6524710 and the tax identification number is 4057009503419. |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

NETWORK MEMBERS & ORGANS

BCSDN consists of partner organizations, which are equal in their rights and duties as members of the network. Principles of cooperation, partnership, tolerance, dialogue and respect for others are the main working principles in the network. The network organs consist of the Council, the Board, the Executive Office, and the Executive Director.

Members

1. Center for Development of NGOs (CRNVO), Montenegro;
2. Centre for Information Services, Cooperation and Development of NGOs (CNVOS), Slovenia;
3. Center for Promotion of Civil Society (CPCS), Bosnia and Herzegovina;
4. Cenzura Plus, Croatia;
5. Civic Initiatives, Serbia;
6. Diakonia Agapes, Albania;
7. Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO), Serbia;
8. Civil Society Development Foundation (FDCS), Romania
9. Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), Albania;
10. Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF), Kosovo;
11. Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC), Macedonia;
12. Opportunity Associates Romania (OAR), Romania;
13. Partners Albania for Change and Development, Albania;
14. Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV), Turkey.

The Council is the highest organ of BCSDN and is composed of one authorized representative per each organization with a member status. The Council is chaired by the Chairperson of the Council, who are selected on an annual, rotating basis.

The Board is the governing and supervisory organ body of BCSDN. It is composed with up to 7 members: Chairperson of the Board, Deputy Chairperson of the Board and up to 5 Board members. The mandate of the Board members is 3 years. The current Board mandate has started on 19th June 2018.

Board members (mandate until 2020)

1. Tina Divjak, Slovenia, Chair of the Board;
2. Aleksandar Krzalovski, Macedonia, Deputy Chairperson of the Board;
3. Ana Novakovic, Montenegro;
4. Bojana Selakovic, Serbia;
5. Slavisa Prorok, Bosnia and Herzegovina,
6. Klotilda Kosta, Albania.

The Executive Office in Skopje, North Macedonia, manages the daily functioning and coordination of the network.

The Executive Director is the major administrative and financial official and represents BCSDN with other institutions, networks, and donors. The Executive Director is appointed by the Board and participates in Council and Board sessions without the right to vote.

1. PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK

1.1. Strategic Objectives

In the period 2017-2020, BCSDN is contributing to the implementation of its mid-term strategic objectives:

- To facilitate a common understanding of the enabling environment for civil society development among key actors and recognition of a common framework and tools
- To promote and recognize civil society as a competent, democratic actor (partner/player) in the EU accession process;
- To support the development of models and sources for CS access to and effective use of (financial) resources;
- To strengthen CSO capacities and their role in functioning democracies;
- To increase communication and collaboration within the network and its recognition among core stakeholders.

1.2. Target Group & Area

BCSDN target group are CSOs working on civil society development (CSDev) in the Balkan region. The direct beneficiaries are local civil society development and resource organizations. With its activities, the network targets stakeholders such as national institutions and international governmental organizations (IGOs). Among national institutions, the focus is on national public bodies and/or offices for cooperation with CSOs in member countries. Among IGOs, in focus are the EU institutions, Council of Europe (CoE), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Western Balkan Fund and related inter-governmental initiatives in the Balkan region. BCSDN promotes the principle of inclusiveness of marginalized and vulnerable groups in the society (incl. Roma community, inhabitants of rural areas). BCSDN works in countries of the Balkan region, Europe and internationally, according to its mission, vision, and goals.

1.3. Planned Activities & Results

In 2019, the network continued with the implementation of its new Mid-term Strategy, which has been co-created by BCSDN members and governing bodies through a strategic and consultative process in 2016. The Mid-term Strategy is based on and continues the network's efforts from the previous strategic period 2012-2016. In 2019, the network remained devoted to the refined strategic priorities in an attempt to consolidate its efforts in the enabling environment for CSDev in Balkan countries and the role of civil society in the EU integration process, while further strengthening information-sharing and coordination of civil society in creating synergies for cooperation and advocacy measures of its members. Greater focus has been put on the new strategic partnership with the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the launch of the Regional Civil Society Development Hub.

2. IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES

2.1. To facilitate a common understanding of the enabling environment for civil society development among key actors and recognition of a common framework and tools

RATIONALE: *For civil society to operate in an enabling environment, a common understanding of the enabling environment for civil society development among key actors – CSOs and institutions, needs to be established, and thereafter integrated in the key national instruments in the respective countries. More so, key enabling environment measures that are identified, as regional minimum standards for consultations, public funding reforms, measures vis-à-vis basic rights backsliding, economic value of CSOs, need to be implemented by 2020. The strategic approach is to utilize the Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development as the framework onto which a consensus shall be established and which has the tools for identifying key measures that need institutional consolidation.*

Initiating Monitoring Matrix 2.0 with a Revised Methodology

Immediate results and impact include:

Reviewed Monitoring Matrix methodology and defined way forward towards a unified approach of the MM research.

Building on the 2018 Monitoring Matrix (MM) workshops in Pristina and Skopje, where BCSDN members discussed the networks' strategic position towards the MM and the future steps of the MM implementation, during 2019 BCSDN worked on developing a **revised, unified methodology for the Monitoring Matrix**. The revisions focused on establishing a unified approach in data gathering, as well as reviewing and developing common research instruments. Aiming to guide the approach for the next phase of the MM research, an external expert developed a methodology plan,

followed by a general methodological note, a revised online questionnaire together with a sampling note, and unified FoI requests and Topic guides interviews. BCSDN members involved in the MM research were consulted over three months in the reviewing and polishing of the methodological documents and instruments. The revisions of the methodology and related instruments aim to enhance the proficiency of the analysis and the standardization of the whole MM exercise.

On [28-29 October in Skopje](#), Macedonia, BCSDN organized a two-day **Monitoring Matrix workshop**, where participants reflected on the previous experience of implementing the Monitoring Matrix and discussed the next phase of implementation, reaching an agreement regarding the new methodology plan and revised instruments. The action plan for the next phase of the implementation of the full MM methodology envisages the redesign of the MM products and the development of a new Monitoring Matrix platform. With the final documents being adopted and ready in December 2019, national preparations and monitoring started by the end of the year. The national Monitoring Matrix reports for 2019 will be published by May 2020, and the regional is planned to be available by June 2020. The Monitoring Matrix is considered one of the core and most valuable activities of the network in the area of enabling environment for civil society development.



Monitoring and Promoting an Enabling Environment for CSDev

While the full MM methodology was not implemented during 2019 in all countries due to lack of joint funding, BCSDN members have still worked closely on monitoring the enabling environment, and have reported on major developments in both the legal framework and practice. Members that have published MM country reports for 2019 are: Partners Albania for Albania, MCIC for North Macedonia, TUSEV for Turkey, and Civic Initiatives for Serbia. BCSDN's Policy and Advocacy Officer Biljana Spasovska took part in the public [presentation](#) event for the Macedonian report, discussing the regional state of affairs.

With the provided updates from the rest of the members, in November 2019, BCSDN published the **Regional Report on the trends in the enabling environment for civil society development in enlargement countries 2017/2018** titled "[Growing pressure on civil society and what to do about it?](#)".

The report, based on the framework of the Monitoring Matrix, aimed to fill the information gap regarding the developments in the civil society environment in the Western Balkan countries and Turkey during 2017 and 2018. This was conducted as part of BCSDN's planned activities within the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE), under the: a) European Region Work Plan 2018 and b) "Grounding Effective Development Cooperation and Development Partnerships in People's Realities and Realisation of Their Rights" Programme, which is financially supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

Immediate results and impact include:

BCSDN continued to be a relevant actor that is recognized both regionally and globally for its work on CSO's enabling environment (EE).

In the Western Balkans, BCSDN has made notable efforts to promote EE for CSOs also in line with the EU accession initiatives.

In October 2019, after participating in an open call for proposals, BCSDN was selected to be engaged in the Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organizations in Western Balkans and Turkey (EU TACSO 3) project framework and conduct a **Needs Assessment on the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society of the Western Balkan and Turkey (Needs Assessment)**. Based on the developed methodology, the first

phase of the Needs Assessment took place in June and July 2019, and included initial desktop report on the state of civil society against the EU Civil Society Guidelines, prepared by TACSO3. The second phase was implemented during October and November 2019, whereby BCSDN's members (Partners Albania, CPCD, KCSF, MCIC, CRNVO and Civic Initiatives) conducted the in-country data-gathering and analysis. The overall purpose of the [Needs Assessment](#) is to inform the EU TACSO 3 Capacity Development and the People to People (P2P) Core programme design, which is to be implemented during 2020 and 2021, and to inform the new Guidelines for EU support to civil society in Enlargement countries, 2014-2020, including the monitoring process and its review.

BCSDN at the International Civil Society Week 2019

When it comes to promoting an enabling environment and raising awareness on the damaging trend of violations to civic space across the Balkan region, a very important event in 2019 was the **International Civil Society Week 2019 (ICSW)** in Belgrade, organized by CIVICUS in partnership with Civic Initiatives, as a local host, and BCSDN as a regional partner. The ICSW was organized for the first time in this region in almost 25 years of international convening, putting the Western Balkans in the center of attention of global civil society. From 8 to 12 April 2019, more than 850 civil society leaders, human rights activists and citizens from all over the



world were brought together in the Serbian capital, in order to debate solutions to some of today's most pressing challenges of civil society around the world. Guided by the theme "[The Power of Togetherness](#)", ICSW set out to explore how people and CSOs from everywhere around the globe can work together to defend spaces for civic actions. Discussions and interactive sessions opened debates on the shrinking space for civil society, the closing down of press freedom, the growing architecture around IT and data surveillance, human rights defenders and the rise of national populism. Policy and Advocacy Officer Anja Bosilkova Antovska was a panellist in the main morning plenary session, and spoke about the state of civic space in the Western Balkans.

As part of the ICSW programme, BCSDN organized a [workshop](#) titled "**Protecting Civic Freedoms – Our Stories of Resilience**" together with FOND Romania (organizer of the Black Sea NGO Forum) and the European Civic Forum. The activities around the workshop were supported by the Balkan Trust for Democracy and SIDA, through the CSO Partnership for Development effectiveness. Moderated by BCSDN's Biljana Spasovska, with the participation of Dren Puka (KCSF), Ion Manole (Promo-LEX),

Juraj Rizman (Via Iuris), Ana Novakovic (CRNVO), Serlinda Vigara (Novact) and Vera Turcanu Spatari (Ce-Re) as speakers, the workshop shared stories of CSOs actions in times of shrinking civic space in the Balkans and the wider Europe. Ways in which CSOs could counteract to current negative trends, deliberations on actions of resilience and joint paths for exploring the future were offered and covered



during the workshop. Approximately 90 people took part at the workshop, including civil society leaders from around the world as well as representatives of donor organizations and multilateral initiatives (e.g. OGP). After the workshop, a series of [videos](#) were published and an elaborate social media campaign was implemented in order to share the key messages from all the speakers and the discussions with a larger audience.

In the lead up to the International Civil Society Week, ICSW/local partners held community events in different sub-national, regional and international locations between January and March 2019. The aim of these events was to engage with the people living in under-represented or marginalized regions who, due to financial and logistical constraints, were not able to host and attend events in the capital Belgrade, Serbia. BCSDN took the lead in supporting the implementation of **ICSW/local events in the Western Balkans**, through publishing an open call for ICSW/local partners, selecting relevant initiatives, supporting their organizations and monitoring the implementation. With the support of the Balkan Trust for Democracy, nine CSOs from the region took part in the ICSW/local activities, and more than 30 people from the region were actively involved throughout the whole event. In total, over 30 ICSW/local partners together with BCSDN's members CRNVO, CPCD and Partners Albania, organized local events in their respective countries. Furthermore, in Belgrade they had the chance to present their organizations' work along with a short video that outlined the key messages from each local event.

As a follow up to the ICSW, a new [online edition](#) of the **Balkan Civil Practices: Promoting Civic Space** was developed and published to further spread the ideas, key messages and discussions raised at the ICSW in Belgrade. Hosted on the main website of BCSDN, this edition brings together eight professionals, academics and activists from BCSDN and its partners in the region, to debate what can be done to promote civic space in the Western Balkan countries and further. Through contributions in the form of articles, essays or reflections, members and partners who took an active part at the ICSW shared their impressions of the ICSW and conclusions from the debates centered around promoting and protecting the civic space, as well as bringing about positive social change and a sustainable civil society. This BCP edition again provides a valuable tool for awareness-raising, consisting of [8 papers](#) that give valuable practical examples of successful actions towards promoting civic space and preventing its further shrinking, while also discussing innovative organizational development approaches centered around resilience, accountability and powerful narratives to empower civil society in this struggle.

Immediate results and impact include:

BCSDN facilitated the organization of International Civil Society Week 2019 (ICSW) and brought focus on the civic space in the Western Balkan region to wide global audiences

Contribution to Global Monitoring and Advocacy Trends

BCSDN continued the research collaboration with CIVICUS for the **CIVICUS Monitor: Tracking Civic Space project**, which started in May 2016. The project allows for global comparisons and trends in real time regarding freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression around the world. BCSDN, as one of the 20 regional partner networks, is responsible for bi-monthly research updates for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. In 2019, BCSDN was supported by KCSF and Civic Initiatives in providing updates for Kosovo and Serbia, gathering relevant information on the civic freedoms in both countries. As CIVICUS downgraded Serbia's rating in the Monitor, Civic Initiatives organized a [press conference](#) where Anja Bosilkova-Antovska, BCSDN's Policy and Advocacy Officer, discussed the regional context, among panellists coming from CI, CIVICUS and local CSOs and activists. By tracking civic space in a

continuous manner, BCSDN is also providing alerts and early warning notification when worrying signals are observed, some of which result in supporting further action by CIVICUS for organizing in-depth interviews with civil society activists regarding worrisome developments.

The annual [CIVICUS Monitor Research Partners Workshop](#) was organized from 31 July to 2 August in Accra, Ghana, and BCSDN's Policy and Advocacy Officer, Anja Bosilkova-Antovska, participated. The event gathered CSO representatives from 20 research partners all around the world to reflect on how the CSOs can strengthen the research collaboration through the CIVICUS Monitor and further. Through 11 different sessions and in a highly-participative atmosphere, the workshop aimed to reflect on progress made to date and identify remaining areas for development and growth and to discuss ideas and opportunities for further boosting awareness of the Monitor, as well as connecting the research with advocacy on civic space.



In 2019, BCSDN stepped up in its engagement with the **CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE)**. In February, BCSDN participated at the Policy Conference in Beirut, Lebanon, themed "Upholding accountability, building solidarity for effective people-centred development". BCSDN Policy and Advocacy Officer Biljana Spasovska spoke on the session on shrinking civic space sharing the trends from Europe and the Balkans. The Policy Conference was an opportunity for CSOs under the CPDE platform to thoroughly discuss the issues and responses to shrinking civic spaces and corporate capture of development, that define our current context.

CPDE is in the Steering Committee of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) and, among other activities, it mobilises CSOs to engage the GPEDC monitoring process to ensure accountability of all development actors in their EDC commitments. BCSDN was the regional focal point for the 3rd GPEDC Monitoring Round, and four of BCSDN's members are involved in the country level monitoring. BCSDN was present at the First Senior Level Meeting (SLM) of the GPEDC that this year took place in July at the UN Headquarters in New York, represented by Simona Ognenovska from MCIC, as the representative for the Balkan region within CPDE.



BCSDN took an active role in co-organizing the [Civil Society Summit](#) on 8 April in Belgrade as part of the International Civil Society Week 2019, together with CPDE, CIVICUS and Action for Sustainable Development. The Summit brought together around 150 civil society leaders and representatives to unite in the fight for democratic participation and civic freedoms. The event opened with a keynote address by Fabrizio Hochschild, United Nations Assistant Secretary General for Strategic Coordination and an introduction by CPDE Co-Chair Justin Kilcullen, CIVICUS Chair Anabel Cruz, Civic Initiatives Programme Director

Bojana Selakovic and Biljana Spasovska, BCSDN Policy and Advocacy Officer. The summit convoked global civil society leaders and organizations to launch the [Belgrade Call to Action](#), a declaration that asks United Nations Member States to act to reverse the closing and shrinking space for civil society, to stop the attacks on human rights defenders and the undermining of democratic participation, and to renew prospects for an inclusive Agenda 2030.

BCSDN partnered with USAID and FHI 360 to produce the **2018 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) for Macedonia**, as part of USAID's 22nd edition of the CSOSI for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. The report examines the overall sustainability of the CSO sector in 24 countries in the region, by looking at seven specific dimensions of sustainability: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability,

Immediate results and impact include:

As a part of several global initiatives, BCSDN continued to be a recognized relevant regional partner concerning enabling environment and civic space in the region

advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image. The report for Macedonia, available in [Macedonian](#) and [English](#) language, was presented in more details at a [public presentation](#) organized by BCSDN on 29 November in Skopje.

On 30-31 May, BCSDN [participated](#) at the **Consultation meeting with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association (FoAA)**, organized jointly by CIVICUS, ICNL and OHCHR in Johannesburg, South Africa. The consultation brought together representatives of CSOs, social movements, trade unions and academics from the global South, who are working on a diverse range of issues, to explore the relationship between freedom of assembly and association and socioeconomic development, to exchange experiences on the intersection between development and human rights, and to discuss how civic space restrictions impact on sustainable development. BCSDN's Policy and Advocacy Officer, Anja Bosilkova-Antovska, participated to discuss the state of civic space in the Western Balkans and the impact of FoAA restrictions on sustainable development based on the experiences from the region. The BCSDN members: Civic Initiatives (Serbia) and FDSC (Romania), had also participated.

2.2. To promote and recognize civil society as a competent, democratic actor (partner/player) in the EU accession process

RATIONALE: *With the 2012 Communication “The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe’s engagement with Civil Society in external relations”, the EU gave value to a dynamic, pluralistic and competent civil society and recognized the importance of constructive relations between states and CSOs. An emphasis of the EU policy was also put on CSOs’ engagement to build stronger democratic processes. The EU has put forward priorities for EU support in order to promote a meaningful and structured participation of CSOs in domestic policies of partner countries, in the EU programming cycle and in international processes. BCSDN will continue the monitoring of the EU support in this context, providing best practices of CSOs’ involvement in the enlargement and promote the role of CSOs in implementing, supporting and monitoring EU accession reforms. BCSDN will also look to reflect on global processes by promoting partnership with civil society, in order to deliver greater impact and better outcomes in global governance.*

Contribution to understanding the relation between EU policies and CSOs

Immediate results and impact include:

BCSDN leads new ways of understanding EU foreign and development policies in the region among regional CSOs

For the 10th consecutive year, [BCSDN has analysed](#) how the European Commission has treated the issue of civil society development and assessed the progress made in the Enlargement countries within the Commission [Enlargement Package 2019](#) published recently, setting the analysis against BCSDN's Monitoring Matrix. Along with the Progress Reports, the EC published a Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, noting profound reforms in the area of rule of law in North Macedonia and in Albania, but stagnating efforts in the other countries, highlighting that these shortcomings “often correlate with a lack of

political will, institutional resistance and an increasingly hostile environment for civil society”. Increasing threats to basic freedom were reported in almost all of the countries, with most serious deteriorations continuing in Turkey. For the first time, the statement that was common in all previous reports was modified to emphasize that “empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system and is recognized as such by state institutions”.

On the invitation of the European Economic and Social Committee, BCSDN [participated](#) at the **7th edition of the Western Balkans Civil Society Forum** in Tirana on 16-17 April, that gathered over 180 representatives of Western Balkans' trade unions, employers and civil society organizations, EESC members, representatives of the governments of the Western Balkans, and EU and international institutions. Anja Bosilkova-Antovska represented BCSDN at the panel on assessment and perspectives of the relations between the EU and the Western Balkans, together with Colin Wolfe, Head of Unit for Western Balkans Regional Co-operation and Programmes – DG NEAR, and Polish Ambassador Wieslaw Tarka. BCSDN members led the panel on achieving an enabling civic space on the second day of the event, where Bojana Selakovic from Civic Initiatives (Serbia), Zorana Markovic from CRNVO (Montenegro) and Juliana Hoxha from Partners Albania (Albania) raised important issues regarding the state of civil society in their countries.



On the invitation of the Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program at Carnegie Europe, BCSDN's Policy and Advocacy Officer Biljana Spasovska **participated on a retreat on Reforming EU Civil Society Assistance in July 2019 in Brussels**. The aim of the retreat was to get together relevant representatives of CSOs, EU institutions, diplomats, and analysts to exchange ideas on revising the EU civil society funding in countries covered by the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) and the eastern part of the European Neighbourhood Policy. As a follow up to the retreat, **Carnegie Europe** organized a series of policy meetings and briefings from 10 to 13 December 2019, where BCSDN's Executive Director (ED) Iлина Neshikj participated. Briefing meetings were organized in the European Parliament, the European External Action Service and the European Endowment for Democracy. BCSDN participated in the discussion on future EU funding instruments organized by Carnegie Europe, actively contributing to the discussions with EU elected representatives and officials on the future of enlargement, and on the role and the support civil society needs to have in the enlargement processes. BCSDN's ED also participated on the **High-Level debate on the Western Balkans EU perspective** and the way forward, organized by the European Economic and Social Committee in the Bulgarian National Assemblies in Sofia on the 13th of December, 2019.

Following the meetings organized by Carnegie, BCSDN was encouraged to offer suggestions regarding the revision and the future of the EU Guidelines for support to Civil Society in Enlargement Countries 2014-2020 by the DG NEAR, as well as regarding the participation of the Western Balkan countries' civil society at the Conference to the European Parliament policy staff and several MPs. BCSDN launched a consultation process with its members with the aim to collect their feedback on the Guidelines and prepare a consolidated position, which is to be finalized in the beginning of 2020. At the end of 2019, BCSDN also prepared an [input](#) on the announced **Conference on the Future of Europe**, which is to be initiated in 2020. In relation to it, BCSDN has prepared a draft opinion and a proposal for engagement of the citizens and civil society of the Western Balkan countries in the forthcoming discussions.

On 4 June 2019, BCSDN participated at the '**International Civil Society Forum 2019**', in Bucharest, Romania. The Forum gathered more than 200 participants from 28 European countries, with concerns that democracy, human rights or the rule of law are increasingly threatened throughout Europe. The event was organised by BCSDN's members: Civil Society Development Foundation (FDSC) in Romania and the Slovenian Center for Information, Cooperation and Development of NGOs (CNVOS) in cooperation with the European Civic Forum and in the framework of the Romanian EU Presidency. The forum set forth to coagulate and enable the contribution of civil society to the strengthening of the European Union values. Following the 2019 European Parliament elections, it is crucial that the new European Parliament and European Commission actively support civil society to maintain its prominent role in protecting and implementing EU values, as well as in defending and enabling access to fundamental rights for all.

2.3. To support the development of models and sources for CS access to and effective use of (financial) resources;

RATIONALE: Financial sustainability is one of the top priorities for organizations dealing with budget cuts and the shifting priorities of the donor community. Competition for resources and visibility is seen as a key barrier to CSO effectiveness. While the availability of funds is a continuous struggle for civil society the CSOs, on the other hand, are demonstrating their value as facilitators, conveners, and innovators as well as service providers and advocates. BCSDN sees the effective role in tackling societal challenges of civil society as essential and therefore will focus its research and advocacy on presenting successful and innovative funding models in the region and beyond that enable CSO's work. It will also monitor the donor's presence in the region and their funding in order to promote support that is accountable, coordinated, effective and based on experience.

EU support to civil society in the enlargement countries: 10 Years of EU's Civil Society Facility

BCSDN published its [Opinion on the EU support to civil society in the enlargement countries](#): “10 Years of EU's Civil Society Facility: How to further strengthen and empower the civil society in the enlargement countries?”

Having in mind that the EU will soon enter a new cycle of planning its pre-accession support, the Opinion presents the past and the present challenges of EU's support to civil society in the enlargement countries, highlighting the need to improve the EU's efforts towards supporting a more enabling environment for civil society development. The Opinion states that despite the EU efforts for improved space for CSO activism in recent years and EU financial support, there is still a necessity for greater EU effectiveness and efficiency, stronger financial as well as political support that would contribute to a strong civil society that holds governments accountable, and is a relevant actor in the sustainable socio-economic development of the countries. The publication also discusses the successes and challenges during the 10 years of implementation of IPA CSF. Eventually, the publication offers recommendations on how (through financial and political support) the EU should: protect the civic space; support civil society financial viability; and support meaningful CSO involvement in the political decision-making process.

Immediate results and impact:

BCSDN recognized by donors as relevant source of knowledge and experience in future ways of supporting CSOs in the Western Balkans

2.4. To strengthen CSO capacities and their role in functioning democracies;

RATIONALE: In times of changing role of civil society and active pressure and shrinking civic space, civil society actors need to ensure they retain their core missions, integrity, purposefulness and high levels of trust. Independent organizations are needed to act as watchdogs, ethical guardians and advocates of the marginalized or under-represented. Civil society in all its forms has an important role in holding all stakeholders, including itself, to the highest levels of accountability. BCSDN will work in strengthening its own internal capacities and practices and sharing those accountability standards with wider civil society.

The Global Standard Promoted Widely in the Region and Europe

Immediate results and impact:

The Global Standard successfully promoted in Europe and the region.

BCSDN global efforts on accountability furthered on national level in the Western Balkan countries, especially in North Macedonia and Albania.

During 2019, BCSDN continued the activities in the scope of the Global Standard for CSO Accountability, developed together with eight other accountability initiatives from around the globe in 2016. The Global Standard is a reference standard that captures a globally shared dynamic understanding of CSO accountability. After the end of the second phase in 2019, BCSDN has been selected as one of the members to **continue with the implementation of the Global Standard activities**, related to testing and implementing the Standard and received further funding for this purpose until 2020.

Building on the translation of the Global Standard for CSO Accountability in [Macedonian](#) and [Albanian](#) language in 2018, BCSDN accommodated the Rendir App – a self-assessment tool designed to improve CSO accountability – in Macedonian language. In addition, BCSDN drafted a Communications plan linked to the Global Standards' strategy, which contains all of the activities and objectives for BCSDN to complete during the second transition phase, until 2020.

With an aim to further promote dynamic accountability on national level by promoting the Global standard and testing its applicability with national networks and organizations, BCSDN continued the execution of the EU-funded program “**Sustainable Civil Society – State Financing of CSOs**”, implemented by the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) in partnership with BCSDN and CNVOS between January 2018 and April 2021. In July 2019, MCIC published a report which was prepared by BCSDN, [Mapping of Networks: Practices of Accountability](#), which had the aim to serve as a background for the grants to be allocated to CSO networks in North Macedonia. In October 2019, also in the scope of the abovementioned programme, BCSDN published a public call for grants for CSO networks in North Macedonia. The objective is to enable the capacity building of CSO networks for transparent and accountable work. The total amount of funds available is 22,000 EUR, with a maximum of 4,400 EUR per individual grant. At least 5 networks of CSOs will receive a grant, after the end of the selection process of grantees in January, 2020.

In addition to the activities in North Macedonia, BCSDN has also been promoting CSO accountability on national level in Albania. BCSDN's Executive Director Ilina Neshikj participated at the #People2People [event](#) “Strengthening accountability, transparency, and sustainability of civil society organizations – Code of Standards for CSOs”, which was organized on 26 September 2019 in Tirana, by Partners Albania for Change and Development and the National Resource Centre for Civil Society in Albania. Neshikj presented BCSDN's accountability efforts for and its Code of Conduct (which will be the basis for the consultations for a National Code of Conduct in Albania) and discussed the importance of CSO accountability for greater trust between CSOs and their constituencies. Guest speakers from organizations in the Western Balkans, as well as representatives of international organizations, shared their experience at the regional and global level on practices and mechanisms which improve civil society functioning standards.



As part of the Global Standard for CSO Accountability project and the AGNA activities, BCSDN celebrated the Global Accountability Week from 1 to 4 October 2019, to promote civil society accountability by showcasing CSO accountability initiatives from the region and around the world and to advance the understanding of the dynamic accountability. Through online engagement, thousands of people worldwide were reached, making great uptake and momentum around accountability issues. In the frame of the Global Accountability Week 2019, BCSDN's member MCIC prepared a [video](#), promoting the program “Sustainable Civil Society – State funding for CSOs” and the #BeAccountable initiative. The program seeks to put transparency, accountability and efficiency of CSOs high on the

agenda of the civil society sector. Through the online campaign, we testified how accountable we are, and we shared our experiences and practices on accountability. Through different activities on promoting civic space, such as the involvement in the ICSW and with the [“Balkan Civic Practices” second edition](#). BCSDN promoted accountability as a means to increase trust in civil society with the hope to inspire other CSOs, formal or informal civic initiatives in the country, the region or globally, to invest in CSOs’ own accountability.

2.5. To increase the communication and collaboration within the network and its recognition among core stakeholders.

RATIONALE: In order to ensure effective and sustainable functioning of the network, BCSDN will keep on strengthening the network’s three ‘C’s: communication, coordination and cooperation, but also increasing opportunities for collaboration. BCSDN’s Executive Office is the organ in charge to initiate and coordinate joint projects and actions, maintain communication with all relevant stakeholders, promote the work of the network and strengthen its brand visibility on national and regional level. The EO will continue to timely share relevant information to its members and other civil society actors through its regular communication tools (Email alerts, newsletters, social media and websites). In terms of outreach to the wider public, the focus is on communicating the enabling environment standards through innovative communication tools and methods with tailored-content, translated into the local languages for stronger effects of the network’s advocacy efforts.

Outreach and Communication

The main BCSDN **website** continued to be perceived a relevant source of information, news and resources on civil society in the Balkans, based on the continuous web visits throughout the year, similar in dynamics with previous years. The website is regularly updated and maintained, and has attracted many returning visitors, mostly from the Western Balkan countries, but also a significant number from the USA, France and Germany. Due to persistent technical problems with the Monitoring Matrix platform, the website continued to be inaccessible during 2019, and Monitoring Matrix reports and related news were published on the main BCSDN website. However, BCSDN started the process of developing a new Monitoring Matrix platform that will officially be launched in 2020.

In 2019, BCSDN has continued to use different **social networking channels**, namely Facebook, Twitter and, sporadically, LinkedIn and YouTube. BCSDN’s Facebook and Twitter page had an increase in following, reaching 4.842 “likes” and 5.095 followers in total. An increase in audience engagement with the page was also noted, especially on Twitter, with BCSDN being more involved in the global conversations on civil society, reaching a total of 825 followers. 7 new videos were published on the YouTube channel as part of the International Civil Society Week (ICSW) activities, which were further shared on other channels in an elaborate social media campaign. BCSDN also launched a blog page attached to its webpage, comprising three types of content: Op-Eds, Event Testimonies, and Academic contributions, where the authors can express their opinion on topics such as: CSO accountability, capacity building, civic space, enabling environment on CSO development, etc. In 2019, BCSDN succeeded to establish relations with academia, in particular with the University of Bologna, where MIREES (Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe) students are provided the opportunity to contribute to the BCSDN Blog. The students are invited to express their opinion on topics connected with BCSDN’s work and fields of interest. The Call for Contributions was published on MIREES Facebook page.

Immediate results and impact:

BCSDN’s Email Alerts, as well as its webpage and social networking channels, recognized as a relevant source of information on civil society in the Western Balkans region.

BCSDN’s publications made valuable contribution towards promoting civic space and creating synergies among the CSOs.

The **Email Alerts** (EMAs) have remained BCSDN's most important tool for reaching expert audience and relevant stakeholders, and has been perceived as a valuable source of information and exchange among the key actors of civil society development in the region. In 2019, BCSDN published 24 editions of the EMA and 3 newsletter edition, covering the main achievements and activities of the network for 2019, as well as relevant news from the members. The audience for both EMAs and our **Newsletter** is more than 1.800 Subscribers.

In 2019, BCSDN published several **publications**. In May, the [second Balkan Civic Practices edition: Balkan Civic Practices: Resilience through Togetherness](#) was published, aiming to reflect on the International Civil Society Week 2019. The publication shares stories of CSOs actions in times of shrinking civic space in the Balkans and the wider Europe, gives valuable practical examples of successful actions towards promoting civic space and creating synergies among the CSOs. The [Comparative Review Study on the Civil Society Involvement in the Process of Revision of the UNCAC Convention](#) (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Montenegro) was published, assessing the role of CSOs from the region in this process and to bring insight into the best practices and lessons learned. In June, BCSDN published the [Background Analysis of the Enlargement Package 2019: A Star Is Born, but the Region Is Not Shining](#).

Later, in September, BCSDN published its [Opinion](#) on the EU support to civil society in the enlargement countries: "10 Years of EU's Civil Society Facility: How to further strengthen and empower the civil society in the enlargement countries?". The publication offers recommendations how (through financial and political support) the EU should: protect the civic space; support civil society financial viability; and support meaningful CSO involvement in the political decision-making process. Finally, in November, BCSDN published a [Regional Report on the trends in the enabling environment for civil society development in enlargement countries 2017/2018](#): "Growing Pressure on Civil Society and What to do About it?" with the aim to fill in the information gap regarding developments in the civil society environment in the Western Balkan countries and Turkey during 2017 and 2018, based on the Monitoring Matrix framework.

3. ORGANISATION

BCSDN's internal organization went through important changes in 2019. With Anja Bosilkova-Antovska moving to the position of Policy and Advocacy Officer, in January 2019 a new Communications Officer was employed. After the short engagement of Arta Rexhepi for that position, Marija Vishinova was employed as a Communications Officer in July 2019. With the need to further expand the team due to the current and planned activities, mostly related to the Sida-supported Regional Civil Society Development Hub, the BCSDN office was moved to a new location in Skopje in October 2019, and three more employees were hired - Kristina Naunova for the position of Junior Researcher, Besa Mustafa as Project Assistant and Biljana Stojanovska for the position of Grant Manager for the Regional CSDev HUB project.

4. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND NETWORKING

In terms of governmental actors, BCSDN has continued its work with a diversity of European institutions, especially with the European Commission, European Parliament and EESC via participating in debates and meetings. It has also continued its cooperation with the Center of Thematic Expertise on Civil

Society (COTE) in DG NEAR, which is tasked to support monitoring of civil society issues in the Enlargement countries. BCSDN also joined the Council of Europe INGO Conference in 2019.

BCSDN expanded its communication and cooperation with **key global civil society networks** and institutions in key areas of its work. Cooperation with *CIVICUS - World Alliance for Citizen Participation* continued through the CIVICUS Monitor platform, with BCSDN being a regional research partner for the Western Balkans and Turkey, as well as in other programmes of work such as the Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA network and the Vuka! Coalition). As members of AGNA, in February, BCSDN took part at the Transformative Scenario Planning [Training](#) on CSO Resourcing in Johannesburg, South Africa, with the aim to incorporate the TSP thinking into BCSDN's strategic planning processes, while in June, BCSDN's representative took part in the AGNA [Annual General Meeting](#) in Amman, Jordan. BCSDN had an important role as a regional partner of CIVICUS in the organization of the 2019 International Civil Society Week, hosted by Civic Initiatives in Belgrade in April 2019. Regular coordination meetings, which started in October 2018, continued in the first quarter of 2019, with BCSDN becoming the lead coordinator of the ICSW/local events in the WBT region, organized in the lead up to the ICSW 2019, and its team briefly relocating to Belgrade to support the preparations and logistics of the event.

BCSDN has stepped up its contribution to the global development movement, serving as a secretariat for the *CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE)* for the Europe region as of 2019. CPDE is an open platform that unites civil society voices from around the world to contribute towards improved development cooperation and effectiveness. As part of this engagement, BCSDN has participated in the All Secretariat's Meeting in March 2019 in Beirut, Lebanon and has been involved with the preparations of the annual Work plan, coordination and outreach of CPDE related activities in the region. Part of this has been coordination in regards the 3rd GPEDC Monitoring round, and hosting of Global CPDE Summit on Enabling Environment back to back with the International Civil Society Week in 2019 in Belgrade.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) has granted significant financial support to BCSDN for implementation of the project “**Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub**” which was initiated in September, 2019. The Project aims to establish a Regional Civil Society Development Hub that will serve as a regional center with global impact that creates and shares knowledge and innovation on the role of CSOs in promoting democracy and supporting the development of civil society in the Western Balkans in the long term. The Hub will support effective, transparent and accountable CSOs that will contribute in protecting civic space by enabling the use of new and established funding mechanism, working methods, and means of cooperation. In this respect, in 2020, the Hub will provide regional multi-country grants that will be awarded through a competitive procedure to regional networks and initiatives submitting the most promising proposals, against agreed quality criteria, on how to advance the civic space in their region. Also, the Hub will provide funds for the organizations in case of an emergency situation or innovation involved. The funds can be awarded for expert's missions in other Western Balkan organizations that have requested peer advice and exchange of experience on a specific civic space topic and for organizing regional conferences, workshops, single or multi-country events on mainstreaming human rights, gender equality, environment and a healthy planet.

5. INTERNAL RULES AND PROCEDURES

BCSDN held the Annual Council Meeting in April 2019, in Belgrade, and had three Board sessions throughout the year. The network also implemented the regular management actions such as the external institutional audit and registration updates according to national legislation.

In 2019, BCSDN's executive office has commenced an update to some of the policies of the organization, in particular the Financial Policy and the Procurement Policy. After the update and the development of the new policies had been done, the Code of Conduct Committee revised them and

assisted in the adaptation of the policies to the current structure of BCSDN. Near the end of 2019, the policies have been finalised and are to be approved by the members. Parallel to this update, BCSDN started with an update to other policies, such as the HR management policy, anti-corruption and money-laundering policy.

With the support from CIVICUS (that has selected BCSDN as one of the pilot partners for their Diversity and Inclusion Programme), BCSDN has further concluded the Diversity and Inclusion Audit, which is implemented by Europe & Southeast Consultancy. The findings are serving as a basis for the HR policy upgrades and for inputs for the development of BCSDN's new strategy.

Finally, as it was agreed on the 2019 Annual Council Meeting that BCSDN should put the Statute under review, this process was commenced in December 2019.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT (IN EUR)

| | Budgetlines | Financial report till 31st Dec | Financial report till 31st Dec | Financial report till 31st Dec | Financial report till 31st Dec |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
| 1 | Members | 3.213 | 3.256 | 2.750 | 4.708 |
| 2 | BTD | / | 22.137 | 15.380 | 36.923 |
| 3 | EC IPA CSF FPA 2012-2014-2016 | 185.018 | 12.518 | / | / |
| 4 | Mirror to the State Report on Ac. Reforms (IPA CFCD Macedonia MCIC) | / | / | 9.160 | 4.124 |
| 5 | Going the distance: building shared commitment for CSO's sustainability (IPA Macedonia MCIC | / | / | 8.480 | 25.933 |
| 6 | SIDA/Global Standard for CSO Accountability | 26.996 | 31.426 | 20.197 | 24.999 |
| 7 | CSO Sustainability index / FHI360 / USAID | 8.170 | 3.529 | 11.258 | 7.180 |
| 8 | Horizont3000 | 6.878 | 6.580 | 52 | / |
| 9 | CIVICUS CSM | 4.477 | 6.700 | 12.286 | 13.366 |
| 10 | Protecting Civic Space: Duties and participants (Civica Mobilitas – SDC, NIRAS, SIPU, MCIC) | / | 16.242 | 8.887 | / |
| 11 | FOND Romania | / | / | / | 10.735 |
| 12 | Rockefeller Brothers Fund | / | / | / | 44.208 |
| 13 | GDSI Limited (TACSO3 Needs Assesment) | / | / | / | 6.590 |
| 14 | SIDA CS Development Hub | / | / | / | 652.300 |
| 15 | Other revenues (Tax ret., exch. rates, reimbursements) | 3.118 | 12.192 | 3.993 | 4 |
| | CARRIED OVER | 17.990 | 50.162 | 15.030 | 31.939 |
| | TOTAL REVENUES | 237.875 | 164.742 | 104.723 | 863.009 |

*Status update - 31 December 2019

| | Budgetlines | Financial report till 31st Dec | Financial Report till 31 Dec | Financial Report till 31Dec | Budget (approved) | Financial Report till 31 Dec |
|----------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| | | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2019 |
| 1 | OFFICE COSTS (incl. overhead) | 13.390 | 14.698 | 12.545 | 15.854 | 15.217 |
| 2 | TRAVEL & MEETINGS (incl. network organs) | 971 | 12.103 | 7.909 | 12.000 | 9.359 |
| 3 | COMMUNICATIONS | 2.282 | 2.303 | 1.554 | 1.800 | 1.596 |
| 4 | STAFF SALARIES | 61.275 | 48.484 | 56.032 | 82.910 | 81.818 |
| 5 | INFORMATION SERVICES (web, alerts etc.) | 5.110 | 5.384 | 2.021 | 10.200 | 2.068 |
| 6 | FINANCIAL SERVICES (incl. audit) | 6.384 | 6.605 | 6.232 | 6.540 | 6.941 |
| 7 | EXCHANGE RATE DIFFERENCES | 991 | 5.399 | 34 | 600 | 597 |
| 8 | DIRECT COSTS | 165.462 | 69.766 | 18.396 | 148.000 | 139.304 |
| | CARRIED FORWARD | / | / | / | 570.973 | 606.109 |
| | TOTAL EXPENDITURES | 255.865 | 164.742 | 104.723 | 848.877 | 863.009 |

*Status update – 31 December 2019