



Dear colleagues and partners,

Undoubtedly, 2020 has been a year filled with unprecedented challenges for all of us. Nonetheless, those challenges have pushed us to be more resilient, more effective, and committed to bringing the change we want to see. Despite the difficulties, we achieved a lot, and it is my great pleasure to celebrate our achievements by sharing them with you.

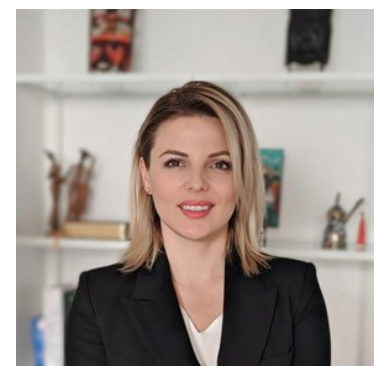
Although the borders in the Balkans were closed for most of 2020, and the civic space narrowed, we remained committed to working together to promote the civic space and civil society development in our region. We completed a full monitoring cycle and published comprehensive reports about the civil society operating environment in the Western Balkans and Turkey. We used the findings for evidence-based advocacy and for developing the intervention logic of our Regional Civil Society Hub. With the Hub, we launched a re-granting programme to support regional initiatives and bring in more CSOs in our efforts to advance the civic space in the region; we also now provide prompt support for CSOs to address immediate threats to their civic spaces. We have continued to advocate for a more enabling civil society environment towards the EU and devoted time to demonstrate accountable advocacy by publishing our Advocacy Strategy.

Our work in promoting CSO accountability continued despite the Covid-19 crisis, and so has our contribution to global actions and initiatives. Lastly, we contributed to improved civil society resilience by coordinating the exchange of information about the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on civil society and good CSO responses to it.

These achievements would not have been possible without the commitment, support, and cooperation of our team and members, our partners, and donors, for which we are very thankful! And we know that, no matter what 2021 brings, we will face it in the same spirit of cooperation and solidarity.

We wish You all a healthier, more cheerful, and more resilient year marked with open borders, open hearts, and open civic spaces!

Happy Holidays,



Biljana Spasovska
Executive Director

Looking back to our achievements in 2020...

BCSDN welcomed new leadership and a new member

We gladly announce our colleague [Biljana Spasovska, as the new Executive Director](#). Her mandate is three years from 1 September, onwards, and was appointed unanimously at the Board meeting in August 2020. Biljana assumes the role of BCSDN ED, after Ilina Neshikj ended her 10 years of working in BCSDN.

BCSDN Council elected a [new board composition](#). We look forward to the new leadership for the next three years! At the 2020 [Annual Council Meeting](#) BCSDN also welcomed the [Bulgarian Centre for Non-Profit Law \(BCNL\)](#) as a new member.

Promoting a more enabling environment for civil society development



In 2020 we have successfully completed a full cycle of our core work of monitoring the civil society enabling environment in the region. We have [revised the monitoring methodology](#). BCSDN WB members prepared the 2019 [country reports](#), and we prepared the [Regional report on Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development](#). We have also launched a new [website](#) that allows for easier presentation and comparison of the monitoring findings.

The findings and recommendations from our monitoring were compared with the EU's Assessment of the progress of the Enlargement countries in the area of civil society, and we published our [11th consecutive analysis](#) of the European Commission Enlargement Package 2020. Based on this expertise and our members' experience, we have prepared our [Position](#) towards the review of the Guidelines for EU support to civil society in enlargement countries, 2014-2020. As the Draft for the New Guidelines was just published, and the consultation process launched towards the end of this year, we will start the next year by providing an updated position.

Besides the detailed Monitoring Matrix reports, together with our members and contracted by TACSO, we carried out the research for the [Assessment on the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society against the Guidelines for EU support to Civil Society in Enlargement Region](#), 2014-2020 for the period 2018-2019. Finally, in partnership with the USAID and FHI 360, we prepared the [CSOSI for North Macedonia 2019](#) as a contribution to the Civil Society Organizations Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

Promoting civil society as a competent partner in the EU accession process and Contributing to more effective funding for CSOs

We have continued with our advocacy towards the EU promoting the civil society as competent actor for ensuring sustainable and functioning democracies in the Balkans. Aiming to reach out to broader and more diverse stakeholders, we partnered with NALAS, and organized [a workshop in Brussels](#) to discuss how to improve the EU integration process and the role CSOs and local authorities play in it, vis-a-vis the planning cycle for the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. We have contributed to two important documents regarding the CSO role in the EU- Western Balkan Summit: [the CSO Declaration on Zagreb EU – Western Balkans Summit](#) and the [EESC Declaration](#), and we actively participated and contributed to several regional events including the Regional Civil Society Forum organized by TACSO in Skopje, January 2020.

Towards the Preparation of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III), BCSDN has contributed to the [Consultation of Civil Society Organizations](#), alluding that the IPA implementing mechanisms should provide clear basis for defending the civic space and stronger financial viability of the civil society in the enlargement countries. Our [contribution](#) here has been based on BCSDN's members vast experience gathered in our [Opinion](#) prepared last year. Finally, to be even more transparent and accountable in our advocacy, we have developed BCSDN's [Advocacy Platform](#) to show what it is that we stand and advocate for, taking stock of the vast experience accumulated in the network in supporting the civil society to contribute towards more sustainable and functioning democracies in the Balkans.

Strengthening CSO capacities: Launching the grant support within HUB and our work on Accountability



With the aim to provide strategic support for regional actions for promoting the civic space, BCSDN established the [Regional Civil Society Development HUB in 2019](#), and in the past year, we have been working on launching the HUB's grant support mechanisms. First, with the support of our members and the [Hub's Steering Group](#), we have finalized the [Hub's Strategy](#) that outlines the strategic framework and the intervention logic of our Hub. And we have launched two types of support for other CSOs: i. [Ad-hoc grants](#) to provide rapid support for immediate actions of CSOs aimed to protect or advance the civic space; and ii. [regional multi-action country grants](#), to support regional initiatives, wider civil society participation, and enhanced cooperation in the region for promoting civic space. The regional call had two objectives: (1) to contribute to a more conducive environment for civil society development by addressing [the challenges identified with our detailed monitoring](#) of the civil society operating environment; (2) to contribute towards more resilient and accountable work of CSOs for promoting the civic space, in line with our efforts to promote the concept of dynamic accountability embedded in the Global Standard for CSO accountability. To ensure outreach for the calls, we have organized [open consultations](#) and distributed the announcements on all of our communications channels and those of our members.

Within the **Global Standard for CSO Accountability**, we have organized a [workshop](#) for Macedonian networks to share lessons on CSO accountability and the self-assessment mechanisms. By using the Rendir App, translated into [the Macedonian language](#), the CSOs representatives have tested their internal accountability. Five of the networks [have received funding](#), under our EU –funded programme: "Sustainable Civil Society – State Financing of CSOs", implemented by MCIC in partnership with BCSDN and CNVOS from Slovenia during the period 2018-2021, to improve their internal accountability and have continued their work with BCSDN and the Global Standard. To ensure greater visibility among CSOs, together with MCIC, we have created a [video](#) to guide CSOs using the Rendir App.

Our solidarity in times of Covid-19



Monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic impact on civil society, we have developed a [Special Edition](#) on the Effects of COVID-19 on Civil Society in the Balkans. The website provides regular updates on the regional overviews: [The State of CSOs, their involvement in the Crisis Response & State, and Donors Support](#), and [Restrictions on Civic Space and Citizens' Basic Freedoms](#), explores different topics across countries, and covers all materials published, including our thematic newsletters [Solidarity in Times of COVID-19](#). Collecting the results of the surveys conducted by our members, we have also provided [recommendations](#) to CSOs, governments, and donors, advocating for strengthened CSOs position and more enabling environment, contributing to overall CSO sustainability in the relief of the crisis.

In a joint conference with [ECNL](#), together with CoE and OGP representatives, we have [discussed](#) the challenges of public participation in the Balkans during the crisis. This was a follow up on the event on [Emergency End Game- Oversight of Covid 19 Measures that impact civic space in the Western Balkans, Croatia, and Romania](#), held in May 2020. Find more information about the topic in the [first](#) and the [second](#) blog post, prepared by BCSDN and ECNL.

Contributing to global initiatives

As part of the [CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness \(CPDE\)](#) global activity in evidencing Effectiveness in COVID-19 response, we held a [regional webinar](#) for presenting of case studies from Europe about evidencing effectiveness in Covid-19 responses.

In partnership with [FOND Romania](#), who are coordinating the Black Sea Region, BCSDN will be implementing three years EC financed programme of the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE), "Advancing CSO Advocacy and Capacity on EDC and Partnerships". The programme aims to contribute to the enabling environment of CSOs, improving CSO capacity to engage development partnerships, and broaden support base for CSOs and their positions.

On the 13th edition of the [Black Sea NGO Forum](#), focused on CSOs' challenges during crisis, BCSDN ED Biljana Spasovska discussed the importance of civil society cooperation for achieving sustainable development in the region.

BCSDN continued the research for the CIVICUS Monitor: Tracking Civic Space project, providing bi-monthly research updates for the Western Balkans, Turkey, and Croatia on the freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression.

Lastly, [contribution form](#) BCSDN has been integrated in the global Compilation of Carnage Europe: Coronavirus as a Catalyst for Global Civil Society, where in the joint article "Filling Democracy's Gaps in the Western Balkans" by our current and former Executive Directors Biljana Spasovska and Ilina Neshikj speak about the challenges and achievements of the civil society organization in our region in times of covid-19 crisis.



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