



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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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's 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 30th 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. Bulgarian Center for Non Profit Law (BCNL), Bulgaria
2. Center for Development of NGOs (CRNVO), Montenegro;
3. Centre for Information Services, Cooperation and Development of NGOs (CNVOS), Slovenia;
4. Center for Promotion of Civil Society (CPCS), Bosnia and Herzegovina;
5. Civic Initiatives, Serbia;
6. Diakonia Agapes, Albania;
7. Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO), Serbia;
8. Civil Society Development Foundation (FDSC), 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 2020.

Board members (mandate until 2023)

1. Tina Divjak, Slovenia, Chair of the Board;
2. Taulant Hohxa, Kosoo
3. Ana Novakovic, Montenegro;
4. Bojana Selakovic, Serbia;
5. Aida Daguda, Bosnia and Herzegovina,
6. Klotilda Kosta, Albania,
7. Rana Kotan, Turkey.

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. As of September 1st, BCSDN's Executive Director is Biljana Spasovska.

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

Although 2020 was a year marked with numerous, unprecedented challenges caused by the covid-19 pandemic, we adapted successfully achieving, although with some delays all planned activities and results. We were still guided by our Mid-term Strategy 2017-2020, which had been co-created by BCSDN members and governing bodies in 2016 and it was in the final year of implementation. In the fourth quarter of the year, we have started a new process of strategic planning by undergoing a process of an external evaluation of the network. We have started the 2020 with increased focus on advocacy towards the EU in the wake of the new developments and dynamic of the EU accession by taking the lead in the review process of the EU Guidelines for civil society, preparing transparent and accountable advocacy platform towards the EU, organizing a workshop in Brussels and attending relevant conferences and workshops. Throughout the whole year a strong focus has been put on the further strategic development of the Regional Civil Society

Hub funded by SIDA, by finalizing the HUB's organizational set-up for which external evaluation was performed, preparing the HUB's Strategy, launching of a re-granting programme, and completing a full monitoring cycle of the civil society environment conducted through the methodology of our Monitoring Matrix. Unavoidable, we also devoted efforts to contribute to improved civil society resilience amid the covid-19 crisis by coordinating the exchange of information among our members and partners about the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on civil society and good CSO responses to it. Lastly, continued our commitment to promote civil society accountability and to contribute to global platforms and international partnerships.

IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES

1.1. 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.*

Monitoring and Promoting an Enabling Environment for civil society development

Immediate results and impact include:

BCSDN conducted full cycle of monitoring the civil society enabling environment

In January 2020, a full cycle of monitoring the civil society enabling environment in the region for 2019 was kick started. Because of the complexity of the monitoring methodology, and pace of actual changes that are being monitored, the full MM methodology is conducted every second year; in the years in between there is a partial implementation of the methodology and a follow-up. This was the first cycle after the one in 2016 that implemented the full MM methodology.

BCSDN's members implementing the Monitoring Matrix have completed the field research by the end of February 2020 and submitted to the EO draft national reports and data collection templates. Most of [national reports](#) were finalized and published by the summer 2020, while few occurred some delays and had them finalized in the Autumn. BCSDN EO prepared a regional report that synthesized the key findings from the national reports. [The regional report](#) identifies the key common issues related to the enabling environment for civil society development across the region, and through sets of recommendations, the report aims to support efforts of CSOs, public authorities, and the European Union in the creation of a more conducive environment for civil society. The findings are used for continuous awareness-raising about the importance of enabling environment among the wider civil society and the relevant stakeholders, and for evidence-based advocacy on a national level by BCSDN members. On a regional level, the monitoring findings are guiding the network's advocacy efforts also towards the EU and the other relevant international institutions. As the Monitoring process, as of 2019 has been integrated within BCSDN's Regional Civil Society Development Hub, the findings of the monitoring are also basis for developing the intervention logic and the priority areas for the re-granting programme of the Hub. This made it possible for BCSDN to bring in and support more actors in for tackling the key

challenges concerning the civil society operating environment in the region. To provide for easier presentation and comparison of the monitoring findings, a [new Monitoring Matrix website](#) was launched that allows for more user friendly experience.

In 2020, we also finalized the Needs Assessment on the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society of the Western Balkan and Turkey (Needs Assessment) for which we were contracted by TACSO. The overall purpose of the [Needs Assessment](#) Report 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, the monitoring process and its review.

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 2020, 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. 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.

BCSDN partnered with USAID and FHI 360 to produce the 2019 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) for Macedonia, as part of USAID's 23rd 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, 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 the 20th November in Skopje.

1.2. 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 continues the monitoring of the EU support in this context, providing best practices of CSO's 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

In 2020 BCSDN has continued with our advocacy to promote the civil society as competent actor for ensuring sustainable and functioning democracies in the Balkans. BCSDN started the year with publishing our [Position towards the review of the Guidelines for EU support to civil society in enlargement countries](#),

[2014-2020](#), which was promoted and presented jointly by BCSDN members on the Regional Civil Society Forum organized by TACSO in Skopje, January 2020.

In March, BCSDN participated at the Western Balkans Think Tank Forum “Stimulating Strategic Autonomy. Western Balkans’ contribution for a shared European Future.” The regional event, was organized by The

Immediate results and impact include:

BCSDN finding new ways of promoting the role of the civil society within and for the accession process of the Western Balkans and Turkey

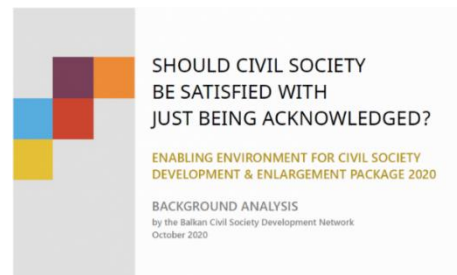
Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” Skopje (IDSCS) together with the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) as an integral part of the 2020 Berlin Process Co-Presidency programme hosted by the governments of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia. On behalf of BCSDN, Biljana Spasovska was part of the Panel Session “The Future of Europe” where Corina Stratulat from the European Policy Centre (EPC), Hedvig Morvai, from the ERSTE Foundation, and Milica Delevic from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) discussed how the Western Balkans to be more proactive and credible partner in the EU

accession process, by improving societal resilience and fighting for democracy.

Following the increased focus on the EU Accession Process as one of the priorities of the Croatian Presidency with the European Council, BCSDN had the opportunity to contribute to two important documents to highlight the need for commitment to the civil society development. BCSDN was part of the informal working group of CSOs lead by CROSOL preparing the [CSO Declaration on Zagreb EU – Western Balkans Summit](#). Thanks to our member from Romania, The Civil Society Development Foundation (FDSC), we also had the opportunity to contribute to the [Declaration of the EESC's External Relation Section](#) contribution to the EU-Western Balkans Summit on 6th May 2020.

With an increased focus on EU advocacy, at times when the EU Accession process is in important moment of new political external and internal challenges, changes introduced in the accession methodology, new Composition of the European Commission and ahead of a preparation of a new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for the forthcoming 7 years, BCSDN found it important to be even more transparent and accountable when it comes to its advocacy efforts. Therefore, with the aim to show what is that BCSDN stands and advocate for we have developed [BCSDN's Advocacy Platform](#). The Advocacy platform stands on three pillars: *I.* A Comprehensive EU Framework for Civil Society Development in the Enlargement Countries; *II.* IPA III Support for a Strong and Sustainable Civil Society; *III.* Advanced Policy Dialogue between the EU and Civil Society. The platform was developed in a collaborative way with BCSDN's members and takes 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.

BCSDN published its [11th consecutive Background analysis](#) of the European Commission Enlargement Package 2020, assessing the progress made in the area of civil society development and dialogue with public institutions in Enlargement countries, and published recently, against BCSDN's Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development. In the new enlargement package, although civil society continues to be separately assessed within the Political criteria as one of the four pillars of Democracy, there is a lack of a consistent and systematic monitoring of the state of play with the civil society in all Enlargement countries.



1.3. 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.

In March 2020, with the aim to reach out to broader stakeholders, BCSDN partnered up with the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (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. The workshop titled "*A new bottom-up approach to bring the EU closer to its future citizens: Rethinking the EU Support to Local Authorities and Civil Society in the Western Balkans*" gathered over 30 representatives from relevant EU institutions and from CSOs and Local Authority Associations from the Western Balkans to discuss.



The workshop was divided in two-panel session. The first one was devoted to the broader discussion about the need for a more bottom-up approach in the EU accession with more meaningful involvement of the LAs and CSOs. The second panel discussed the planning of the new IPA III highlighting the need for more meaningful financial support to Local Authorities, and more effective support to civil society. The workshop was opened with welcome remarks by NALAS Executive Director – Kelmend Zajazi and BCSDN's than Policy Advocacy Officer – Biljana Spasovska, and keynote addresses by Ms. Alessandra Viezzer, Deputy Head of Unit in the DG NEAR and by Mr. Frédéric Vallier, Secretary-General of the Council of European municipalities and regions.

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 has been based on BCSDN's members vast experience gathered in our Opinion prepared last year.

1.4. 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.

Sub-granting support launched to support CSOs capacities for promoting the civic space

Immediate results and impact:

Strategic regional approach to promoting the civic space developed

Other CSOs brought on board and supported for promoting the civic space

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 as a pilot programme supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in a period of two years. The objective of the Hub is strengthened regional cooperation to promote civic space in the Western Balkan countries by enabling CSOs to contribute to a conducive environment for civil society development that enables them to be influential actors in the society; and by supporting CSOs to contribute towards effective, transparent and accountable work in protecting civic space. In 2020, BCSDN efforts were focused on

launching the HUB's grant support mechanisms. First in the Spring of 2020, an external expert was contracted to evaluate the organization set-up of the HUB. The evaluation report provided the following key conclusions:

- There is a good balance of the optimal use of the resources of the network and matching them with outside and independent expertise;
- There is clarity and shared understanding about the roles and responsibilities, as well as the lines of interaction among the different bodies involved in the governance and implementation, as a result of the participatory process in developing this structure;
- There is no visible overlap of the tasks and responsibilities of the different bodies and their involvement in the different processes of the functioning of the

The report also noted that even though it is a new set up designed specifically for this project, in practice this structure and mechanisms are rooted in the previously tested experience of the network to self-organize its own resources and attract outside expertise in the framework of core activities related to the strategic research strategies, as well as in managing re-granting programs as a collective responsibility of the network (implementation of the EU funded 4-year grants program in the past).

Following a recommendation from the evaluation, BCSDN with the support of its members and the Hub's [Steering Group](#), developed a detailed [Strategy for the HUB's](#) pilot period 2019-2021 that outlines the strategic framework and the intervention logic of our Hub. The strategy, was developed taking into consideration the vast experience of accumulated in the network and the HUB regarding supporting the civil society development in the region, as well as the findings from the monitoring on the ground of the state of play and the challenges to for the civil society development on the ground.

Based on the Strategic framework, two types of support for other CSOs were launched in the summer: i. [Ad-hoc grants](#) to provide rapid support to CSOs on rolling basis 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 pro-mote the concept



of dynamic accountability embedded in the Global Standard for CSO accountability. To ensure outreach for the calls, the Executive Office organized [open consultations](#) on regional level, and the Task Groups organized national level consultations. All announcements were distributed and promoted on all of our communications channels and those of our members.

Global Standard Promoted Widely in the Region and Europe

Immediate results and impact:

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

During 2020, BCSDN continued the activities in the scope of the Global Standard for CSO Accountability, developed together with eight other accountability initiatives 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 as one of the networks that 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 in 2020 accommodated the Rendir App, a self-assessment tool designed to improve CSO accountability, [in Macedonian language](#). We have organized a [workshop](#) for Macedonian networks to share lessons on CSO accountability and the self-assessment mechanisms. By using the Rendir App, the CSOs representatives have tested their internal accountability and to ensure greater visibility among CSOs, together with MCIC, we have created a [video](#) to guide CSOs using the Rendir App

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 from Slovenia between January 2018 and April 2021. In the scope of the abovementioned programme and a public call launched in October 2019, BCSDN has provided funding to five the networks to support the capacity building of CSO networks for transparent and accountable work. The maximum amount per individual grant is of 4,400 EUR.

Within our Global Standard project BCSDN continued with the activities to contribute to the creation of a knowledge pool on the Global Standard for CSOs in Albania. Based on the BCSDN experience and knowledge shared on the Global Standards for CSO accountability, BCSDN member Partners Albania for Change and Development and the National Resource Centre of Partners Albania have further developed the Code of Standards for Albanian CSOs. More than 200 Albanian CSOs across the country participated in a series of roundtables on the Code of Standard Initiative and 18 Albanian CSOs became a part of the working group to create the Code of Standards. In July 2020, BCSDN’s Executive Director presented BCSDN’s work on accountability and the relevance of dynamic accountability in CSOs work at the Non-for-Profit Academy aimed at increasing the professionalism of NPO directors and managers.

From 12-16 October 2020, BCSDN, as part of CIVICUS’s group of national network organisations (AGNA) and the Global Standard for CSO Accountability, celebrated the Global Accountability Week (GAW) 2020, to promote civil society accountability by presenting CSO accountability initiatives across the world, and to improve the understanding of the dynamic accountability. On the second day of the GAW, BCSDN led a session on



CSO Accountability in times of COVID 19. The event was followed by more than 35 CSO international representatives, where BCSDN together with prominent speakers from India, Argentina, and the Balkans discussed challenges and responses regarding CSO accountability during crisis

The key takeaways from the discussion were that CSOs all across the world have demonstrated great flexibility and ability to quickly adapt to the crisis in effectively serving their constituencies. However, it was also emphasized that in order to be recognized in their societies, especially in the wake of serious shrinking of the civic space CSOs must better communicate their results and contributions to the society.

1.5. 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 (3) Cs: communication, coordination and cooperation, but also increase opportunities for collaboration. A communications strategy, as well as protocols regarding issuing public statements, fundraising etc. will be developed for strengthening the internal collaboration and the network's effectiveness and efficiency. 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.

Collaboration and Solidarity in times of Crisis

As the COVID- 19 pandemic has influenced every aspect of our work, our social, economic, and cultural

Immediate results and impact:

Improved awareness about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the civil society.

Improved CSO capacities to respond to the Covid-19 crisis

life, shutting down our borders and interrupting our ability to meet, the commitment to collaboration and solidarity of our network has been further strengthened. We have relied on our partnership and collaboration to gather information and raise awareness about the consequences of the covid-19 crisis on the civil society in the region and we have contributed towards improved effectiveness and visibility about the CSO responses to the outbreak of the covid-19 crisis. To track and to informing about the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the civil society, and to enable exchanging expertise, peer-learning about the CSOs responses in the crisis, we have launched a platform, a special edition of the [Balkan Civic Practices: Civil Society in the Covid-19](#)

pandemic that provides table presentation on topics divided into nine (9) different areas. The website provides regular updates on the regional overviews: [The State of civil society](#), [The CSO involvement in the Crisis Response](#), [State Support](#), and [Donors Support](#), and [Restrictions on Civic Space and Citizens' Basic Freedoms](#), [Changes to the legal frameworks](#) and provides recommendations on the [Way Forward](#). It also includes [four thematic newsletters Solidarity in Times of COVID-19](#) .

As part of our aim to provide platform for exchange of information, discussion and learning, BCSDN hosted two on-line events together with ECNL. The first webinar, "[Emergency End Game- Oversight of Covid 19](#)

[Measures that impact civic space in the Western Balkans, Croatia, and Romania](#)” was held in May 2020. The webinar provided the overview of current practices and responses in the Western Balkans, Croatia and Romania, with an underlying questions – how can civil society effectively monitor and prepare to request lifting of restrictions?

Following up on the discussions of the webinar, BCSDN and ECNL organized an online conference [Public Participation at the Forefront of the Corona Crisis in the Balkans](#) . The conference held in July 2020, hosted Anna Rurka, The President of the Conference of INGOs at Council of Europe (CoE) and Paul Maassen, Chief, Country Support at Open Government Partnership (OGP) as key note speakers, discussing the challenges of public participation in the Balkans during the crisis. The aim of the discussion was to share experience, instruments, best practices, and innovative approaches from global and European level in promoting civil society participation, including the potential for the use of social media as a way for broader engagement of stakeholders.

The information we gathered with the help of our members, and the valuable discussions on the webinars, provided valuable insight to various stakeholders about the effects of the covid-19 crisis on the civil society, and the effective CSO responses in this way have reached multiple stakeholders. Such information has contributed towards more effective actions of CSOs demanding improved civil society involvement in policy and decision making processes; they have provided arguments why CSOs need be involved in government crisis response packages, and why there is a necessity for greater donor flexibility; and finally they have provided an opportunity for CSOs to learn from each other how to be more effective, and more accountable in the way they serve their communities.

As a knowledge- and resource-sharing platform disseminating information of benefit to CSOs in the Balkans it has enabled us to further expand our partnerships and join forces with likeminded organizations committed to promoting the civic space and civil society resilience.

These activities have been supported with a six months’ grant provided by the European Endowment for Democracy.

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. The Monitoring Matrix platform had been finally launched in 2019, and all Monitoring Matrix reports have been published including more user-friendly presentation of the key monitoring findings and recommendations.

The special webpage of the Balkan Civic Practices: Civil Society in the Covid-19 and the overviews shared were referenced in multiple regional and international publications, such as the Global Compilation published by [Carnegie Europe, Coronavirus as a Catalyst for Global Civil Society](#); the [Activizeship #5 – Civic Space Watch Report 2020](#); The [Civic Space Watch: BCSDN: COVID-19 – The Effects to and the Impact of Civil Society in the Balkan Region \(Part II\)](#), The [FOMOSO: The Effect Of The Pandemic On The Civil Society In MOSO Countries](#). The information gathered also was presented at relevant international events: BCSDN Communication and Information Officer, Marija Vishinova, participated on the fifth edition of the Future of Governance dialogue series which aimed to shed light on the current state and challenges of digital activism and civic engagement in the context of the pandemic and beyond, conducted by UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub. Also, BCSDN Executive Director Biljana Spasovska, and Communication Officer,

Marija Vishinova by providing from the BCP online edition, participated on ECNL online session series on protest rights and monitoring.

In 2020, 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 5,431 (increase by 13% from last year) 4,842 "likes" and 6,115 (increase by 20% from last year). The most engaging post had been the posts published to announce the two sub-granting opportunities, resulting with more than 5000 engagements (reactions, comments or shares).

The Email Alerts (EMAs) have remained BCSDN's most important tool for reaching expert audience and BCSDN's 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 [4 thematic newsletters: Solidarity in Times of COVID-19](#), dedicated on the CSOs' work, efforts and actions on the situation caused by the ongoing Corona crises. At the end of the year, BCSDN has also published its [Yearly Newsletter](#), covering network's projects and accomplishments during 2020. The audience for both EMAs and our Newsletter is more than 1.800 Subscribers.

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.

External Cooperation and Networking

In terms of public actors, BCSDN has continued its work with a diversity of European institutions, esp. with European Commission, European Parliament and EESC via organizing debates and meetings. Representatives of this institutions took part at the BCSDN workshop organized in March 2020.

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). As members of CIVICUS, BCSDN took part at a pilot mentoring programme for promoting Diversity and Inclusion, and as member of the AGNA BCSDN contributed to the AGNA Annual Council Meeting, as well as the Global Accountability Week.

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 2020. CPDE is an open platform that unites civil society voices from around the world to contribute towards improved development cooperation and effectiveness. One of the main focus areas of CPDE is promoting more enabling environment for the civil society to be able to take part in development partnerships and promoting CSO effectiveness and accountability. As of October 2020, BCSDN will be performing the role of focal point for the Europe Region within CPDE implementing a three-year programme "Strengthening development partnerships for contributing to more sustainable development in Europe and beyond" The programme if funded by the EU, SIDA and ADA.

As part of the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) global activity in evidencing Effectiveness in COVID-19 response, BCSDN 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.

Lastly, contribution from 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 Ilna Neshikj speak about the challenges and achievements of the civil society organization in our region in times of covid-19 crisis.

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 Pilot 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. In this respect, in 2020, the Hub launched regional multi-country grants scheme and an ad-hoc emergency support mechanisms, through which will be supporting civil society organizations from the region to contribute to promoting the civic space throughout 2021.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, RULES AND PROCEDURES

BCSDN held the Annual Council Meeting in April 2020, online on the Zoom platform. On the ACM the Council approved the joining of a new member in BCSDN, The Bulgarian Center for Non Profit Law (BCNL). There were two additional Council sessions this year: one remote session for making necessary amendments to BCSDN, took place in August and September and one Special session for kick starting the strategic planning process for presentation and verification of BCSDN evaluation findings that was held online on the Zoom Platform in October. In the course of 2020 there were (3) Board sessions throughout the year.

External Evaluations and Assessment

The network implemented the regular management actions such as the external institutional audit and registration updates as per national legislation. During 2020 three other evaluation processes were performed:

1. Mid-Term Evaluation of the Project of the Balkan Civil Society Development Network: "Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub"

The external mid-term evaluation for assessing the functioning of the HUB, as per the agreement with SIDA was performed in April 2020.

2. Evaluation of the BCSDN

An independent evaluation of the network's functioning and performance has not been performed yet, even though the network has been growing and developing. As BCSDN is to develop new Strategic framework after 2020, an evaluation of the network was commissioned to review BCSDN performance and achievements in the past years, methods of cooperation established among the members, credibility, and recognition within target groups, to identify the strengths of our network, but also to determine the weaknesses and challenges.

3. Assessment of Internal Control of Balkan Civil Society Development Network

As part of the Agreement with SIDA for the Regional Civil Society Development Hub, a Due Diligence process was agreed to be performed for Assessing the functioning and the Internal control mechanisms of BCSDN. The Due Diligence was performed by Ernest and Young Sweden in the course of October and November who delivered a report that was discussed on the Annual meeting BCSDN and SIDA held in December. For addressing the findings and recommendations provided, BCSDN prepared a Management Response with and Action Plan.

Internal Rules and Procedures

In 2020, the Financial and Procurement Policy was finalized and adopted and BCSDN continued the process of update of its HR management policy, and policies for prevention of fraud and corruption.

The changes introduced in the HR Policy followed upon the findings and recommendations of a Diversity and Inclusion audit performed for BCSDN in 2019 as part of a pilot project support by CIVICUS, the conclusions from BCSDN Board session for developing Salary scaling system, and the recommendations provided by the due diligence process conducted by EY for benchmarking of salaries against similar organization. The changes in the HR include update of the Rulebook on working relations.

The Policies for prevention of conflict of interest, fraud and corruption are in the process of development. In the upcoming year, further policies arising from the Recommendations of the Due Diligence process will be developed.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT (IN EUR)

	Budget lines	Financial report till 31st Dec	Financial report till 31st Dec	Financial report till 31st Dec	Financial report till 31st Dec
		2017	2018	2019	2020
1	Members	3.256	2.750	4.708	2.475
2	BTD	22.137	15.380	36.923	/
3	EC IPA CSF FPA 2012-2014-2016	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	13.045
6	Rockefeller Brothers Fund	/	/	44.208	40.773
7	SIDA/Global Standard for CSO Accountability	31.426	20.197	24.999	/
8	CSO Sustainability index / FHI360 / USAID	3.529	11.258	7.180	10.841
9	Horizont3000	6.580	52	/	/
10	CIVICUS CSM	6.700	12.286	13.366	24.202
11	Protecting Civic Space: Duties and participants (Civica Mobilitas – SDC, NIRAS, SIPU, MCIC)	16.242	8.887	/	/
12	CPDE	/	/	10.735	36.720
13	Other revenues (Tax ret., exch.rates, reimburs.)	12.192	3.993	4	217
14	GDSI Limited (Tacso Needs Assesment)	/	/	6.590	63.455
15	SIDA – CS Development Hub	/	/	652.300	731.086
	CARRIED OVER	50.162	15.030	31.939	583.204
	TOTAL REVENUES	164.742	104.723	863.009	1.506.018

	Budget lines	Financial Report till 31 st Dec	Financial Report till 31 st Dec	Financial Report till 31 st Dec	Budget Approved	Financial Report till 31 st Dec
		2017	2018	2019	2020	2020
1	OFFICE COSTS (incl. overhead)	14,698	12,545	15,217	19,440	16,258
2	TRAVEL & MEETINGS (incl. network organs)	12,103	7,09	9,359	7,500	5,388
3	COMMUNICATIONS	2,303	1,554	1,596	3000	2,610
4	STAFF SALARIES	48,484	56,032	81,818	100,210	102,595
5	INFORMATION SERVICES (web, alerts etc.)	5,384	2,021	2,068	9,800	8,805
6	FINANCIAL SERVICES (incl. audit)	6,605	6,232	6,941	8,460	8,317
7	EXCHANGE RATE DIFFERENCES	5,399	34	597	1,200	728
8	DIRECT COSTS CARRIED FORWARD	69,766 /	18,396 /	139,304 (606,109)		229,481 (1.131.836)
	TOTAL EXPENDITURES	164,742	104,723	256,900 (863,009)		374,182 (1,506,018)