



**Civil Bridge Building, Novi Sad, Vojvodina – Serbia**  
*Civil Society Situation in the Western Balkans Countries*

# MACEDONIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

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# Content

- Civil Society Definition
- History of Civil Society in Macedonia
- Present Situation
- Main Challenges
- Regional Cooperation

# Definition

Part of the societal space – outside of the family, the state, and the market – which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests.

Organisations of Civil Society = **Associations and Foundations (CSOs)**; Religious Communities; Trade Unions; Chambers of Commerce, Organisations of Employers; and Political Parties.

# History in Brief

- Significant impact in the period of the national renaissance at the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century: cultural and revolutionary associations;
- Charity organisations before WWII.
- Socialistic modernisation (1945-1990): cultural, sport, charity and professional organisations, still under control of Communist Union;
- New wave of civic organisations began with the transition: environmental, social-humanitarian and human rights.

# Present Situation - Structure

- ~9,000 associations and foundations – 4.5 CSOs on 1000 citizens;
- Limited breadth and depth of citizen participation in civil society;
- Quite organised with a significant level of networking among associations and within umbrella structures – 2/3 of CSOs are part of a network;
- High concentration of CSOs in the capital city and urban areas;
- Strong dependence on foreign (traditional donors).

# Present Situation - Environment

- The legal frame is enabling both in terms of registration and work, but the tax system is unfavourable;
- The new Law on Associations and Foundations adopted in April 2010 significantly improved the legal environment;
- Strategy of the Government for Cooperation with civil sector – Civil Society Unit;
- Changed Rule Book of the Government;
- Law on volunteerism; Law on donations and sponsorship for public activities;
- Mutually indifferent relations with business sector, but CSR in the progress;

# Present Situation - Values

- The strongest values are peace – non-violence and gender. The weakest value is transparency.
- The civil society is better in the promotion of democracy than practicing the same internally.
- Very few organisations provide public access to their financial accounts.

# Present Situation - Impact

- Key achievement - empowering citizens (especially women and marginalised persons) and informing and educating the citizens.
- Moderate or limited role - influencing public policies and meeting societal needs.
- Less or even no achievements in: impact on national budget process, anti-corruption (holding state accountable) and holding private corporations accountable.



# Main Challenges

- Limited participation of citizens:
  - Unfavourable political and socio-cultural context;
  - 24% of citizens are members of associations, half of them are inactive;
  - 10% are volunteering;
  - 41.2% have trust in civil society

# Main Challenges

- Financial sustainability:
  - Heavily dependence on foreign funding;
  - Foreign donors shifted to other regions that led to their withdrawing;
  - Lack of rules and procedures that limits access to state funding for CSOs;
  - Majority of citizens who donate give for socio-humanitarian activities - companies donate for sport, culture or education.

# Main Challenges

- Civic dialogue:
  - The Strategy for Cooperation of the Government with the Civil Sector contributed to the improvement of the civil dialogue, but not so much towards civil society development;
  - Adopted changes in the Rules of Procedure of the Government regulated participation of CSOs in preparation of laws, but there is no centrally established system for participation of CSO in policy making;

# Main Challenges

- Good governance in civil society:
  - Very few organisations provide public access to their reports, especially to the financial accounts and even fewer organisations provide audited accounts;
  - Lack of self-regulation mechanisms – unsuccessful efforts for adopting Code of Conduct;
  - Conflicts of interests – no division of non-executive and executive functions;
  - Lack of knowledge on good governance and interest to learn;

# Regional Cooperation

- Half of CSOs are part of regional or international network;
- Since a large number of organisations are active at the local and regional level and international cooperation is not a priority for them, this is satisfactory;
- EU Cross-Border Cooperation Programme contributed to improvement of regional cooperation;
- Cooperation and membership in EU platforms is still limited;



# Balkan Civil Society Development Network - BCSDN

- Initiated in 2001 as Capacity Building Hub Pilot Programme of MCIC, launched in December 2003 and formalized on July 6, 2009 as a foundation with 11 founding organizations;
- To empower civil society in the Balkans through sharing and developing local practices, concepts and strengthening civil society actors.



# Balkan Civil Society Development Network - BCSDN

- Capacity Building, 2001-2008:
  - Organised 14 trainings;
  - Supported or organized 29 exchange and 3 study visits;
  - Organized 3 workshops on EU integration, decentralization, diaconal practices;
  - Organized on-the-job training in Brussels for local CSO representatives;
  - Managing help-desk for EU and civil dialogue.



# Balkan Civil Society Development Network - BCSDN

- Information sharing, 2001-2008:
  - Website available in English and 4 local languages with approx. 4,000 annually and growing by 5%;
  - Published 175 editions of Weekly e-mail alerts distributed to over 700 addresses;
  - Published 5 issues of Balkan Civic Practices in 4 languages;
  - Published a newsletter; and
  - Available on-line search data-bases on members, trainings, donors and partner search.





# Balkan Civil Society Development Network - BCSDN

- Activities in 2009 - Advocacy on the EU level:
  - Workshop: The Right to be Heard: The EU Enlargement Policy and Civil Society in the Western Balkans, Brussels, 9th-10th September
  - Policy Paper: The Successes and Failures of the EU-Pre-accession Policy in the Balkans: Support to Civil Society (IPA Civil Society Facility)
  - Manifesto for European Parliamentary Elections 2009 (May)
  - Letters and meetings with the EC on IPA civil society consultations and lack of inclusion of local CSOs (23rd January, 5th June, 23rd July)

# References

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- MCIC (2010) Public Financing of CSOs
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