



EU TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

**COUNTRY CONSULTATIONS
NORTH MACEDONIA
1 MARCH 2021**

**Guidelines for EU Support
to Civil Society in the
Enlargement region, 2021-2027**





SHORT REPORT

BACKGROUND

For the needs of the European Commission, the Director General Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and in cooperation with the Delegation of the EU to North Macedonia, EU TACSO 3 organized an on-line consultation event on the Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in the Enlargement Region for the period 2021 – 2027 on Monday, 1 March 2021. The general aim of the event was to present the Guidelines and the integral results framework to the representatives of civil society, public institutions, donors and other stakeholders and consult them on content and potential improvements.

The Consultation concerned the revision and updating of the Guidelines that have already been in place and used throughout 2014 – 2020 and aimed to discuss the working version of the Guidelines with representatives of civil society, public institutions, donors and other local stakeholders in Albania.

The Guidelines explain how the EU will support civil society in the region in 2021 -2027, mainly through its Civil Society Facility (CSF). They are intended for three types of audience:

- For **EU staff**: to assist them in preparing and implementing EU support to civil society in the Western Balkans and Turkey; in monitoring the effectiveness of the support; and in analyzing the evolution of the IPA beneficiary state of affairs concerning civil society;
- For **policy-makers and administrators in the Western Balkans and Turkey**: to understand the standards towards which DG NEAR is aspiring in terms of IPA beneficiaries own support to civil society in the context of EU enlargement – notably in terms of the enabling environment for stimulating participatory democracy and civil society involvement in public policymaking and the EU integration process;
- For **civil society in the region**: to know the standards towards which DG NEAR is working in terms of their capacity, effectiveness, resilience, independence, and accountability.

Furthermore, the Guidelines, and in particular their results framework, provide concrete objectives, targets, indicators, and benchmarks in support of these efforts.

The revision of the Guidelines have been carried out in a participatory way. The previous version of the Guidelines and the first draft of the revised Guidelines' result framework is available on www.tacso.eu. In December 2020, TACSO issued a call for written inputs from CSOs. In January 2020, a regional consultation for civil society and public authorities took place in Skopje. Consultations have been organized in each IPA beneficiary country to present and discuss the Guidelines with civil society organizations, public institutions, donors, and others to receive feedback for their finalization. Moreover, all interested stakeholders were available to submit any further written comments by Friday, 12 March to consultations@tacso.eu.

A Call for Participation was launched on the 19th of February to invite CSOs in North Macedonia to register and participate in the consultation event. As a result, 68 CSOs registered. Public institutions and donors were invited through a direct invitation. In total, 79 representatives of CSOs, public institutions, donors and other stakeholders operating in North Macedonia were registered, while 34 of these - 23 representatives of CSOs, 6 from public institutions, 3 from donors and 2 other stakeholders attended the event in full or in part (See detailed list in Annex 2: List of participants).



INTRODUCTION SESSION

Tanja Hafner Ademi, EU TACSO 3 Team Leader provided information about the event's purpose and gave instructions about language translation and other administrative information was provided. The event was held in English, but participants could use Macedonian language translation as well.

Liselotte Isaksson, Head of Section, Western Balkans Regional Cooperation and Programmes Civil Society and Social Inclusion (D.5), DG NEAR, emphasized the importance of the Guidelines and the development and prospect of the civil society as a key priority for the EU. Civil society is considered an important actor that actively promotes and supports the fundamental rights that are at the heart of the EU, such as freedom of expression, rule of law, democracy and respect for human rights including the minority rights. Active civil society represents the views and aspirations of the citizens and holds the institutions accountable. In addition, she talked about the important role civil society plays in service provision to communities and recently, the very specific role of supporting the communities in emergencies. CSOs are important partners also in proposing a vision for the society and in testing and promoting innovative solutions to sustainable development challenges. With regard to the Enlargement process, she emphasized the importance of civil society in deepening the understanding of citizens about necessary reforms to qualify for membership. The EU needs CSOs that are capable, professional and resilient, but also public institutions that will put in place an enabling environment for the work of civil society. In addition, there should also be good systems to facilitate the cooperation and exchange between civil society and government. She explained that the Civil Society Facility (CSF) established in 2009 with the role to channel both the bilateral support such as that to North Macedonia as well as support at regional level. In the previous period, approximately 3% of the budget of IPA I and II have been allocated for civil society whereas the average annual amount is around 80 million EUR. This orientation of EU to support civil society will remain at the same level in the future period through IPA III. She reflected on the importance of the Guidelines in this new financing period 2021 – 2027 and the need to revise them in a participatory manner and with active participation and understanding of all stakeholders such as public institutions and civil society. She emphasized the three-fold purpose of the Guidelines. First for the EU to plan, monitor and analyze the support provided to civil society, secondly, to the policy makers and public officials to understand the standards and expectations that the EU has in terms of enabling environment for civil society and involvement of the civil society in public policy making. In addition, the Guidelines are seen as assisting in the development of the strategies for cooperation between the governments and civil society. The third purpose of the Guidelines is for the CSOs to know the standards towards which they should work in terms of their own capacities. She shortly reflected on the structure and the results framework that also includes indicators to measure the progress that are anchored in the international standards and legal framework.

Nicola Bertolini Head of the Cooperation Sector, the Delegation of the EU to North Macedonia reflected on four key elements relevant for the Guidelines. First, he reflected on the history of the Guidelines which started in 2013. At that time, there was no guiding document for the support provided to civil society and it was widely understood that the support is good for democracy. However, the guiding principles included within the Guidelines provided much more direction and framework for support. The second important element he mentioned was the Strategy for the development of civil society in North Macedonia, which at that time served as a basis for the Guidelines. Although very progressive at that time, still the problem was that nothing substantial happened once the Strategy was adopted. The new Guidelines will serve the new strategy to design and implement an Action plan. It is important to understand that civil society is key to democracy and CSOs can work freely with citizens in developing new ways and inclusiveness of society. The fourth



element he referred to was that it is time to move from civil society being the center of the first Guidelines to the beneficiaries and linking to the constituencies and their needs as a new focus of the Guidelines in the period 2021 – 2027.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Tanja Hafner Ademi, EU TACSO 3 Team Leader and Emina Nuredinoska, EU TACSO 3 P2P Manager presented the process of development of the new version of the Guidelines and the results framework as integral part of the document. The starting point for development was the Regional Civil Society Forum organized by EU TACSO 3 in January 2020, continuing with the call for written input issued in December 2020 and the consultation events that have been currently conducted in all seven countries of the Western Balkan Region and Turkey. Both experts provided information about the content of the Guidelines and explained in detail the structure of the results framework. The three aspects covered with the Guidelines were presented: conducive environment, Changing relations between CSOs and IPA Beneficiary authorities/institutions and CSO resilience and capacities. Conducive environment includes fundamental freedoms and enabling financial environment as main areas. The fundamental freedoms are represented through the right of CSOs for free association and assembly, the right of protection of CSOs from interference, equal treatment of CSOs with businesses and policies for small organizations and initiatives. The area of financial environment is represented through the freedom of CSOs to solicit and receive funding, public funding to CSOs, tax benefits and volunteers and employment. The changing relations between the CSOs and IPA Beneficiary authorities are presented through the inclusion of the civil society in decision – making processes in the country and secondly through the mainstream of the civil society and acknowledging the importance of the development and cooperation. The indicators in this part refer to the consultation mechanisms and structural dialogue with the civil society. Within the CSOs resilience and capacities area, three important aspects have been presented including: 1) Capable, transparent and accountable CSOs; 2) Strategically-led and supported CSOs and 3) Resource-Based CSOs. In the conclusion of the presentation, information about the monitoring methodology and limitations in data collection process were provided. Participants were invited to submit further written input until Friday, 12 March, 2021.

Irena Ivanova, Programme Manager in the Delegation of the EU to North Macedonia provided a short reflection on the importance of the Guidelines and contribution of civil society and public institutions in finalizing this important framework. She called for openness in the discussion regarding the results achieved so far, but also the shortcomings in the implementation of the Guidelines. In addition, she reflected on the shared ownership on the Guidelines not just as a document of the EU and that of the Delegation, but also as guidance for the public institutions and CSOs. The presence of the representatives of the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society on one side, the State Secretary of the Secretariat for European Affairs and representatives of the public institutions confirm that things are moving towards increased cooperation and strengthened liability. She outlined that the support by the EU provided through the CSF to North Macedonia starting from 2014 on is more than 20 million EUR, the EU also supported the creation of 71 regional networks. She also informed participants that there have been around 80 grants implemented in North Macedonia so far. She expressed her observation on the participation to this consultation, which does not really represent a balance between the participants present from the civil society on the event and number of grants awarded. She invited colleagues from civil society to further disseminate the standards prescribed with the Guidelines, especially with CSOs working at local level and include them in their work as minimum standards of cooperation. She recommended that the conclusion from this event should be further disseminated to colleagues who are not present at the event and call them to provide their written input. She emphasized the importance of cooperation, but also continuous improvement on the side



of civil society in terms of capacity development to improve the relations with citizens and improve their wellbeing.

In the discussion part, the moderator Ms. Elizabeta Markovska Spasenoska, EU TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for North Macedonia briefly explained the ground rules for discussion and opened the floor. Comments and discussion by different participants are presented below.

Kalinka Gaber, State Secretary in the Secretariat for European Affairs expressed her belief about the importance of this kind of consultation for inclusion of civil society in these important processes and for the development of society itself and in light of the EU reform agenda. She divided the process of cooperation into two stages: the first stage is characterized by setting the principles of cooperation, the environment and the communication between the government and civil society. Many structural forums have been established dedicated to hearing and integrating CSO voices in policy-making processes. She reflected also on the establishment of the Council for Cooperation with and the Development of the Civil Sector expressing expectation that the Council would strengthen its role and work within the next mandate and composition. She shared her personal position that there is expertise in civil society in the country. What comes as future obligations is wrapping up of the regulatory framework related with the functioning of the sector and financial environment in order to secure sustainability of the processes and organizations. She affirmed the Guidelines and called the Council for Cooperation with and the Development of Civil Society to integrate the Guidelines in the development of the new Strategy on Cooperation with Civil Society. She also emphasized the importance of integrating the Guidelines in design of amendments to the Law on Associations and Foundations as well as in the creation of the Fund for support to civil society. She also supported the importance of increased promotion of the work of CSOs as well as increased linkage with constituencies and their needs.

Eli Cakar, the representative of the Council for Cooperation with and the Development of the Civil Society from the Ministry of the Local Self Government emphasized the need to have a better picture of what the sector does for the public good, because then public funding will be clearer with better insight. There should be minimum standards for cooperation and transparency at local level between civil society and municipal authorities.

Irena Cvetkovik, member of the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society and representative of Coalition Margini talked about the support to women organizations as important considering the possibilities to open larger sub-granting schemes, introduce long-term granting and provide funds for capacity development. In addition, both Irena Cvetkovik as well as

Bekim Asani from LGBTI United Tetovo reflected on the importance of the grassroots organisations discussing the need to find a way to support the non-registered local movements.

Jasna Ercegovic from the Resource Center for Parents of Children with Special Needs discussed the position of CSOs that are working with people with disabilities. Funding is not enough for the sector to have the power to represent the citizens. There should always be a balance between the donor, the beneficiaries and the organization itself. If there is strong/stable financial support, it will be easier to communicate with the authorities and react to specific problems.

Tome Krstevski from CSO Global discussed the importance of having stable financial support for organizations and especially the local level organizations. It is difficult for CSOs to deliver public goods without funding. Municipalities have a selective approach in allocating funds to the CSOs, so at local level, CSOs will have to stop working because of the funding.



Valentina Atanasovska from the Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation and Coordinator of the National Resource Centre proposed a number of additional indicators relating to the capacities for advocacy, resource mobilization and internal documents for long-term planning of capacity development. She reflected on indicator 4.4. proposing an additional indicator on M&E on organizational level, regarding indicator 5.3 she proposed an additional indicator on the number of networks initiated by EU funding, indicator 5.4 should be related to the tax and legislation, an indicator for percentage of CSOs that have fundraising strategies should also be added. In addition, she discussed the importance of constituency-building that is not clearly included in the document and the importance to focus on the internal capacity building and include an indicator on the percentage of CSOs, which have an internal capacity building action plan.

Biljana Kotevska, representative of the European Policy Institute addressed the issue of human rights defenders and support for human rights defenders which could be more mainstreamed through the Guidelines. She emphasized that they consider that the issue of women human rights defenders and defenders of the rights of marginalized groups should be duly considered within this. Based on the research conducted, the results show that human rights defenders are working without support, are vulnerable, excluded, not recognized as a particular category under the law, and so on. A focus on human rights does not necessarily mean a focus on human rights defenders. In addition, she also reflected on indicator 5.3 and the need for CSOs to have enough resources to identify the root causes of the problems through their research and advocacy activities. Sometimes to address root causes CSOs need to do things which citizens do not necessarily perceive as important since deep systemic issues are not always so straightforward.

Natasha Chavdarovska from CSO Forum 16 reflected on the effectiveness of the sub-granting mechanisms. While on one hand, the sub-granting opened more possibilities for financing of the smaller CSOs, on the other hand, it contributed to making these organizations co-dependent of the bigger organization and created so-called “elite” of grant givers among bigger CSOs.

Liselotte Isaksson considered the comments on regional networking as something that might be revised in the results framework. The importance of the regional networks should be measured not just by the number of established networks, but also how large (and inclusive) they are and what is the cooperation inside. With regard to the financial support, she reflected on the importance of sub-granting not just for support to less experienced organizations, but also as mechanisms to instigate capacity development.

Tanja Hafner Ademi spoke about the issue of public financing, accountability and accessibility to funds as very important. Such issues have also been raised in consultations in other countries. The enabling environment, work and operation of the smaller organizations is captured in this version of the framework as especially relevant, both at the level of basic rights and freedoms and at the level of access to public funding. She shared the existing dilemma with regard to Area 3, i.e. whether to focus on monitoring the situation of civil society on country level and regional level or to go more in depth and focus only on capacities built with EU financing. The intention is that the indicators will speak to both local level organizations and those who are more developed and on a national level. In addition, the indicators will address the gender aspects as well as the human rights defenders issue, although there is still a dilemma on how to measure all these specifics. Additionally, in terms of attempts to collect data on public funding at local level. The results roughly showed that public funding at local level is double what is available at national level and this is the same situation in other countries too.

Emina Nuredinoska, EU TACSO 3 P2P Manager explained that 71 regional networks that are identified with the research are not just formally registered but also those who are informal and work jointly to



support specific issues. With regards to public funding, she explained that numerous indicators included in the results framework will monitor different aspects of public funding not just the amount but also the quality of process. The public benefits status is covered by the Guidelines however, there is still a possibility to reflect this further.

CONCLUSIONS

In the conclusion of the event participants were informed about the possibility to send written inputs to consultations@tacso.eu by Friday, 12 March, 2021. The finalization of the Guidelines result framework and work on methodology, operationalization is foreseen in March. The Regional launching event on the final Guidelines document is going to be held in April 2021 and the promotion of the new framework, implementation and monitoring is to follow thereafter.



Annex 1. Agenda

GUIDELINES FOR EU SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY IN ENLARGEMENT REGION FOR THE PERIOD 2021-2027 COUNTRY CONSULTATIONS NORTH MACEDONIA 1 MARCH, 2021

On-line public consultation process AGENDA

01. 03. 2021 CONSULTATION SESSION

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|---------------|---|
| 11:30 – 11:45 | Introduction, objectives of the process <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liselotte Isaksson, Head of Section, Western Balkans Regional Cooperation and Programmes - Civil Society and Social Inclusion (D.5), DG NEAR• Nicola Bertolini, Head of the Cooperation Sector, EU Delegation in the Republic of North Macedonia• Tanja Hafner Ademi, Team Leader, EU TACSO3 |
| 11:45 – 12:15 | EU Civil Society Guidelines for the Enlargement region, 2021-2027 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation of the 1st draft framework of the EUCSG by EU TACSO 3 experts, Tanja Hafner Ademi and Emina Nuredinoska• Reflection on the EUCSG, Irena Ivanova, Programme Manager, EU Delegation in the Republic of North Macedonia• Q&A |
| 12:15 – 13:45 | Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moderated by Elizabeta Markovska Spasenoska, EU TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for North Macedonia |
| 13:45 – 14:00 | Conclusions & next steps |



Annex 2: List of participants

Nr.	Name	Surname	Organization/ Institution
1	Ana	Dajovska	GET Inovacija Bitola
2	Bekim	Asani	Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People LGBT United Tetovo
3	Biljana	Kovachevikj	University Goce Delchev
4	Biljana	Kotevska	EPI Skopje
5	Biljana	Trajkovska	Ministry of Education and Science
6	Biljana	Georgievska	UNDP, Reload project
7	Bogdan	Kolev	HOPS
8	Dushan	Tomshikj	Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
9	Eli	Cakar	Ministry of Local Self-Government
10	Goran	Lazarov	Foundation Open Society Macedonia
11	Gordana	Klincharova	Macedonia 2025
12	Gordana	Gapikj Dimitrovska	Ministry of Information Society and Administration
13	Irena	Cvetkovikj	Coalition MARGINI
14	Ivana	Popovska	Ministry of Education and Science
15	Jasminka	K.	Association for single-parenting
16	Jasna	Ercegovich	Resursen Center na roditeli na deca so posebni potrebi
17	Jean- Baptiste	Kastel	European Commission
18	Kalinka	Gaber	The Secretariat for European Affairs
19	Kristina	Kolozova	The Embassy of Switzerland - SDC
20	Katerina	Klimovska	ISLAA
21	Katerina	Partinova	AGORA Center
22	Klime	Babunski	Zdruzenie PRO MEDIA Skopje
23	Liljana	Jonoski	Rural Coalition
24	Maja	Smilevska	SOS Children Village Skopje
25	Julie	Maraval	French Embassy
26	Natasha	Chavdarovska	FORUM 16
27	Neda	Petkovska	REACTOR - Research in Action
28	Suzana	Nikodijevic Filipovska	The Unit for Cooperation with CSOs
29	Tania	Ivanova	REACTOR - Research in Action
30	Tatjana	Stoimenovska	HOPS
31	Tome	Krstevski	Zdruzenie Global Bitola
32	Valentina	Atanasovska	Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation
33	Venera	Hajrulahu	Technical Assistance for Improving the Enabling Environment for Civil Society Organizations in the Republic of North Macedonia
34	Natasa	Petrovic	GMF Balkan Trust for Democracy

