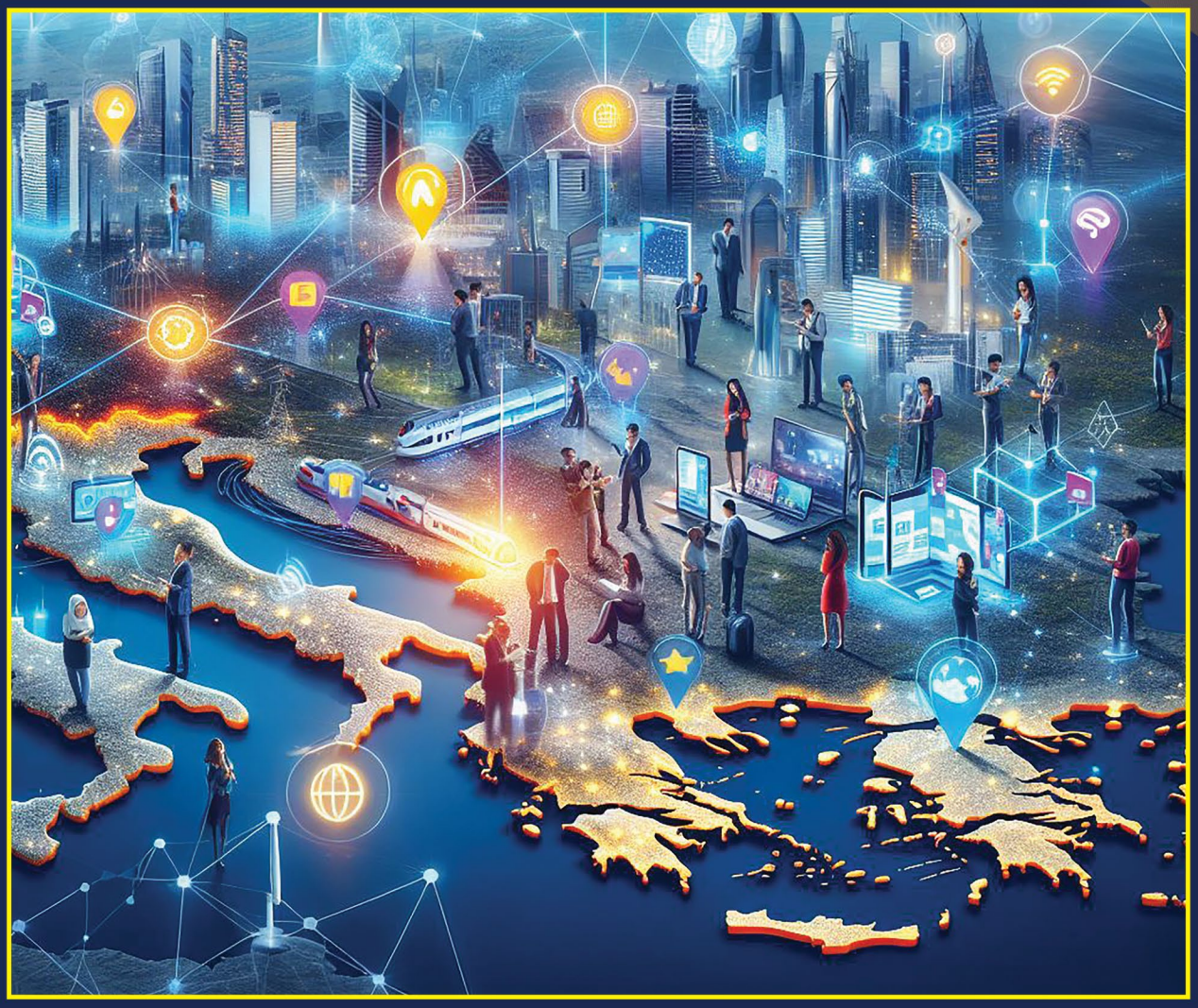
ANALYSIS

OF THE CURRENT SITUATION AND JOINT PARTICIPATION OF THE GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY SECTORS

in BiH and the region in the EU integration process



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Sarajevo, 2025

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I. ABBREVIATIONS

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BDBiH	Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina
DEI	Directorate for European Integration
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EU acquis	Acquis Communautaire
ECF	European Civic Forum
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
GONGO	Government-organised NGO
IPA	Instrument for pre-accession assistance
IREI	Institute for Development and European Integration
NPAA	National program for the adoption of the acquis
NGO	Non-governmental organisations
CSO	Civil society organisations
RS	Republika Srpska
SLAPP	Strategic lawsuits against public participation
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
CoM	Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina
WB	Western Balkans

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been striving for more than 25 years to meet the requirements and join the European Union, but it is still far from membership due to government inefficiency and a lack of dialogue with civil society.

This lag in the integration process is a consequence of numerous factors, among the most important of which is the long-standing inefficiency of the authorities at all levels in fulfilling key economic, political and legal criteria. The lack of a structured dialogue between institutions and CSOs has certainly had an adverse impact on the entire process. Experiences from countries in the region, which are far ahead of BiH in the EU pre-accession process, show that an engaged, well-connected and constructive civil society is one of the key factors in successful progress towards EU membership.

In response to these issues, the Institute for Development and European Integration (IREI) is implementing the initiative "Stronger Civil Society in the Region – Faster Development and EU Accession" with the support of the SMART Balkans – Civil Society for Shared Society in the Western Balkans" regional project implemented by the Centar za promociju civilnog društva (CPCD), Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM) and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) and financially supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA).

As a starting point, the author conducted an analysis of the state of civil society organisations in BiH, with the aim of better understanding their role and obstacles in the EU integration process. The methodological approach included desk analysis of the content of available secondary sources (public policies, reports, etc.) and the collection of qualitative information through meetings and interviews with DEI and CSOs in BiH. The experiences of WB countries were considered through online interviews to collect useful information on the experiences and models of cooperation between the government and the civil sector.

CSO representatives informed us about the current state of civil society in BiH, key needs, challenges, as well as opportunities for improving the situation, with a focus on greater inclusion of civil society in the pre-accession process and strengthening cooperation between the government and non-governmental sectors along the way.

CSOs in BiH face many challenges in their work. In general, the environment for civil society is assessed as unstimulating and demotivating for work in the civil sector. The main reasons are unfavourable

laws, lack of capacity and the absence of a civic culture that would encourage more active involvement of citizens in the processes of creating and implementing public policies.

One of the key problems faced by CSOs is the lack of funds to finance program activities. Among the large number of CSOs in BiH (according to the latest data, there are more than 25,000 organisations), there are a number of highly professional organisations that have specialized in various areas of importance for the EU integration process. However, most CSOs operate in a poorly coordinated manner towards the European integration process, while their capacities are significantly limited.

Although the formal prerequisites for the inclusion of civil society in decision-making processes exist, in practice this form of citizen participation is almost non-existent. In addition to being at the top of the priorities of European policies, the inclusion of CSOs in decision-making and public policy-making processes is one of the conditions for EU accession. At the meeting held with DEI representatives, important inputs were received on improving the participation of CSOs in the pre-accession process through better cooperation mechanisms and by better connecting organisations. With the expressed readiness of this institution for cooperation, a greater degree of CSO participation in the European integration process can be expected in the coming period.

The lack of adequate mechanisms for cooperation and networking between CSOs, both among themselves and with competent institutions, which would enable and support meaningful participation of civil society in various phases of the (pre-)accession process is a key shortcoming identified through research by the Institute for Development and European Integration.

In the context of BiH's accession to the EU, additional efforts by the government and proactive, well-coordinated civil society action are needed to guide and direct various actors within civil society in this process, relying on and at the same time improving the capacities of existing resource centres.

Key recommendations arising from the research:

- Strengthen the culture of partnership and transparency of the decision-making process when fulfilling the conditions for EU accession.
- Define a model for structured dialogue through a Platform (in the next phase of the IREI project) and include civil society in all processes and phases related to BiH's accession to the EU.
- Ensure greater involvement of local authorities and local CSOs in the process of BiH's accession to the EU, while strengthening their mutual cooperation.

- Improve collaboration and networking of CSOs through a broader platform to support the improvement of the EU country's pre-accession process.
- Build an institutional infrastructure for the development of civil society in the form of a foundation for the development of civil society in BiH, as the fruit of a joint initiative of CSOs, with the aim of creating conditions for sustainable development of civil society through cross-sectoral cooperation and ensuring adequate funding.
- Strengthen the capacities of CSOs, with a special focus on building expertise on negotiation chapters or topics, relying primarily on existing resource centres.
- Encourage regional cooperation and transfer of knowledge and experience between CSOs that have already gained significant experience in working on self-organisation and strengthening civil society participation in the European integration process.
- Conduct thematic campaigns aimed at promoting the importance of European integration in an innovative way that is content adapted to the wider citizenry in BiH.

III. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the Analysis is to identify key obstacles in relations between authorities and CSOs in the European integration process and generate recommendations for improving cooperation mechanisms to ensure greater and more effective involvement of the civil sector in this process. The research is primarily focused on existing institutional mechanisms and cooperation models, strategic and legal frameworks, practices, as well as tools for informing and involving civil society in the EU integration process.

Given that the EU accession process is complex and demanding, and that it is not known how long this process will last in BiH, it is important to update the analysis of the situation in this area, take into account the lessons and experiences of other countries in the region, and based on the analysis, create a policy platform for more efficient work, as well as review the opinions of CSOs on the need to create a BiH network of CSOs to support the improvement of the pre-accession process of the EU country. The analysis of the current situation and the joint participation of the government and civil society sectors in BiH and the region in the EU integration process relies on relevant content from secondary sources, discussions with key stakeholders in the European integration process in BiH and the region.

This introductory part of the analysis presents introductory and general information on the EU accession process, the stages of the negotiation process, including a chronological review of the steps taken so far in BiH's approach to the EU. To better understand the integration process, the new EU enlargement methodology is presented, which divides the negotiation chapters into six thematic clusters for negotiations.

Section IV refers to the description of the methodology used during the analysis.

Section V is dedicated to an overview, or analysis, of the state and environment of civil society in BiH, existing institutional mechanisms and forms of cooperation, as well as an (re)assessment of the capacities of CSOs to participate in the European integration process.

Section VI presents examples from the practice of CSOs working on topics important for EU integration of BiH, which were identified through research.

Section VII is dedicated to EU mechanisms and forms of support to civil society.

Section VIII discusses models of cooperation and experiences of CSOs in the countries of the Western Balkans region and the EU in the (pre-)accession process.

The concluding Section IX refers to concluding remarks and recommendations, which were created by synthesizing key findings and available information collected during the research.

Annexes available online separately include a list of literature used during the research is provided, as well as a list of contacts with whom cooperation was carried out, along with a list of mapped organisations (created in the initial phase of the research). The list of organisations with which cooperation was achieved is also available.

The team of the Association "Institute for Development and European Integration" (IREI) would like to express great gratitude to all participants who contributed to the preparation of the analysis and formulation of recommendations.

A. General information about the process of EU integration of BiH

BiH has been a candidate country for EU membership since December 2022. BiH's European path was officially opened in 2008 with the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU.[1] This Agreement entered into force on June 1, 2015.

For the purposes of supervising the application and enforcement of the SAA, joint EU and BiH bodies have been established:

- *Stabilisation and Association Council* – consists of members of the EU Council and members of the European Commission (EC), on the one hand, and members of the Council of Ministers, on the other.
- *Stabilization and Association Parliamentary Committee* – a forum of representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH and the European Parliament.

[1] The Agreement promotes cooperation in the following areas: Promoting the free movement of goods; Creating efficient institutions; Developing a market economy; Reducing crime and corruption; Promoting higher education reform; Developing democracy, human rights and independent media; Improving transport infrastructure in the region.

- *Stabilization and Association Committee* - a technical body that assists the Stabilization and Association Council in the performance of its duties.
- *Seven subcommittees*[2] and
- *Special group for public administration reform* operating under the authority of the Stabilisation and Association Committee.

The signatory country is required to gradually adapt its legislation to the EU Acquis Communautaire[3] and establish a free trade area with the EU.[4] Given that this is an extremely complex and demanding process, civil society can provide support that is of crucial importance for the accession process. In addition to being a source of useful information and expertise, an important function that CSOs can have is to supervise, i.e. monitor the EU integration process. Since the adaptation of legal frameworks in the EU integration process relates to the EU acquis in the sphere of economy, human rights, culture, education, democracy and the rule of law, etc., there is therefore a large scope for cooperation between government institutions and civil society.

Chronologically, after the signing of the SAA, the process that continued included several important steps, of which we highlight[5]:

- In May 2019, the EC published a positive opinion on BiH's application for candidate status, in which it identified 14 key priorities for opening EU accession negotiations. with an emphasis on the areas of democracy and state functionality, the rule of law, fundamental rights and public administration reform. The Council of the EU adopted conclusions on this Commission opinion on 10 December 2019.
- In December 2022, BiH was granted the status of candidate country for EU membership, assuming that it will implement the steps outlined in the Commission's communication of 12 October 2022 on enlargement policy to strengthen the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, migration management and fundamental rights.

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[2] Subcommittee on Trade, Industry, Customs and Taxation; Subcommittee on Agriculture and Fisheries; Subcommittee on the Internal Market and Competition; Subcommittee on Economic and Financial Affairs and Statistics; Subcommittee on Justice, Freedom and Security; Subcommittee on Innovation, Information Society and Social Policy; Subcommittee on Transport, Energy, Environment and Regional Development; Special Group on Public Administration Reform

[3] The EU acquis is a set of common rights and obligations binding on all EU member states. More information on the DEI website: https://www.dei.gov.ba/bs/sta-je-acquis

[4] https://www.dei.gov.ba/bs/page-stabilization-agreement

[5] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/hr/policies/bosnia-herzegovina/

- On 8 November 2023, the EC issued a recommendation to open accession negotiations with BiH once the necessary compliance with the membership criteria has been achieved.
- In December 2023, EU leaders expressed their readiness to open accession negotiations once BiH reached that key milestone.
- In March 2024, the leaders of the EU countries gave the green light for the opening of accession negotiations based on the Commission's recommendation of March 12, 2024. To this end, they called on the Commission to prepare a negotiation framework and called on the Council to adopt that framework after BiH takes all the relevant steps listed in the Commission's report of October 12, 2022.

The Council usually adopts conclusions on enlargement every year, which review the progress made by EU candidate countries on their path to European integration.

The Directorate for European Integration (DEI), as an expert body of the Council of Ministers of BiH, is responsible for coordinating the process and activities of institutions arising from the integration of BiH into the EU.[6]

The BiH EU Integration Program was finalized and submitted to the European Commission in March 2024, as a key step towards establishing a National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA).[7]

The enlargement process is taking place according to the methodology revised by the EC in 2020, which divides the negotiation chapters into six thematic clusters for negotiations, presented in Figure 1. In the same year, the EC adopted the Economic and Investment Plan to support and bring the WB region closer to the EU. This plan aims to encourage long-term economic recovery of the region and regional economic integration.

[6] For more information, visit https://www.dei.gov.ba/bs/o-nama-71

[7] Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2024, together with the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee, available at the link: https://www.dei.gov.ba/uploads/documents/izvjesce-o-bosni-i-hercegovini-za-2024-godinu_1730986501.pdf

Figure 1. Negotiation clusters[8]

Chapters 23 and 24 have retained a very important role in the "new methodology". They are part of Cluster 1 – Basics and this cluster is opened first and closed last. Progress in Cluster 1 – Basics determines the course of negotiations and is considered when deciding on opening new cluster(s).

Benchmarks for opening negotiations in Cluster 1 – Basics include a roadmap/action plan for chapters 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights), 24 (Justice, freedom and security) and a roadmap/action plan for public administration reform.

Accession negotiations are conducted through 3 key phases as described in Figure 2.

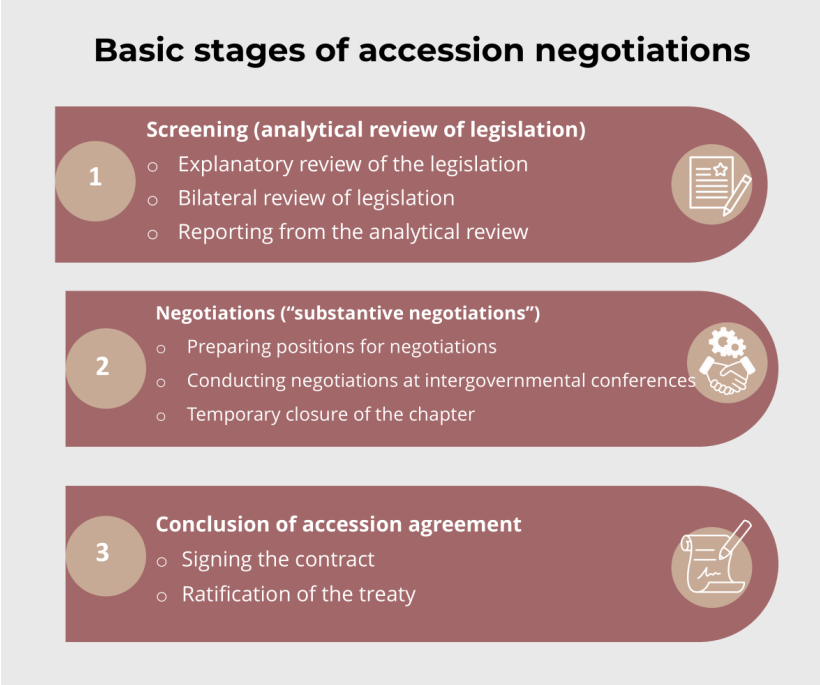
Since the introduction of the "new methodology" in 2020, negotiations have been opened by clusters (six clusters) and conducted and closed by individual chapters (33 negotiating chapters). Negotiating

[8] https://ieu-monitoring.com/editorial/eu-commission-adopts-2024-enlargement-package-main-points-and-reactions/445708

positions are prepared based on the results of the screening for each negotiating chapter, and are prepared by both parties.

The candidate country is always the first to submit its position to the EU Council, or to present it at an intergovernmental conference, indicating how it intends to adopt and implement the EU acquis, explaining its administrative capabilities. The EU's common negotiating position is proposed by the European Commission and adopted unanimously by the EU Council.

Figure 2. Negotiation phases



Prepared based on information from the DEI website[9]

In June 2024, DEI conducted a public opinion survey on support for BiH's accession to the EU and on topics related to European integration that are of interest to BiH citizens. The survey was conducted using the CATI method on a sample of 1,200 respondents, which is representative at the national level.[10]

[9] https://www.dei.gov.ba/bs/kako-se-vode-pregovori-o-pristupanju-u-evropsku-uniju

[10] Directorate for European Integration https://www.dei.gov.ba/bs/clanstvo-bih-u-eu-podrzava-712-posto-gradana

In the event of a referendum on BiH's entry into the EU, 71.2% of respondents, or seven out of ten citizens, would vote for membership. The three most important reasons for support for EU membership among respondents are the freedom of movement of people, goods and capital (35.1%), the guarantee of lasting peace and political stability (32.3%), and respect for laws and regulations (19.9%).

B. Definition and understanding of the sector/area Civil Society in BiH and the EU

The need for the inclusion of civil society in European integration stems, first, from the close connection of the very nature of the activities of this sector, within which various structures/actors of civil society represent the interests of certain target groups or some general, or public, interest such as environmental protection. with the reforms brought about by EU accession. According to the DG NEAR[11] Guidelines for EU support to civil society in the enlargement region for the period 2021-2027,[12] *Civil society organisations encompass a wide range of actors with multiple roles and mandates, which include all non-state, non-profit, independent and non-violent structures through which individuals organize to achieve common goals and ideals, whether political, cultural, religious, environmental, social or economic, related to health, etc. These include, among others: non-governmental organisations (NGOs), organisations representing indigenous peoples, women's and youth organisations, diaspora organisations, migrant organisations, local professional associations and citizens' groups, cooperatives, employers' associations and trade unions (social partners), organisations representing specific economic and social interests, organisations fighting corruption and fraud and promoting good governance, organisations advocating for respect for civil rights and organisations fighting discrimination, local organisations (including networks) involved in decentralized regional cooperation and integration, consumer organisations, environmental, educational, cultural, scientific and research organisations, universities, religious institutions, associations and communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations, non-profit media and all non-governmental associations and independent foundations, including independent political foundations.*

[11] The Guidelines are based on a set of strong standards. They are based on the EU acquis in the rule of law (Chapter 23 "Judiciary and fundamental rights" and Chapter 24 "Justice, freedom and security") and other relevant international and European standards. In addition, the Guidelines are aligned with the recommendations, opinions and guidance of international organisations and various intergovernmental fora. They apply standards developed by civil society specifically for the needs of civil society globally.

[12] Produced by the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) with the support of the "EU TACSO 3" project Skopje, June 2022 https://tacso.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/EU-Guidelines-for-Support-to-Civil-Society-in-the-Enlargement-region-2021-2027-BOS-_Final-version.pdf.

The term civil society in BiH mainly refers to non-governmental organisations of the classical type, such as citizens' associations and foundations. It is precisely this type of organisation that dominates the overall structure of civil society organisations in BiH.

In BiH, laws on associations and foundations have been passed at the state level, the RS and FBiH entities, and the BDBiH, while their operations are also regulated by other laws and regulations, such as laws governing taxation, accounting, etc. An association is understood to mean any form of voluntary association of three or more natural or legal persons, in all combinations, for the purpose of promoting and achieving a common or general interest or goal, in accordance with the Constitution and the law, and whose purpose is not to make a profit.

For the purposes of this analysis, the terms *civil society, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, and civil sector* are used as synonyms.

IV METHODOLOGY

IV. METHODOLOGY

The process of creating this analysis included 5 interconnected steps, namely:

1. Collection and processing of available data and information from secondary sources.
2. Visits and meetings with key stakeholders in the field of European integration in BiH.
3. Online meetings with CSOs in the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Croatia.
4. Analysis of the situation based on all available insights and knowledge.
5. Formulation of conclusions and recommendations.

The main methods used are:

- Content analysis,
- Research method – semi-structured interview technique.

In the initial phase of the research, a mapping of relevant stakeholders, policies and publications was conducted. from BiH. Information was collected on the activities of identified stakeholders through available secondary sources such as websites, public policies (strategies, action plans, etc.), reports, etc.

CSO mapping was conducted **in the Western Balkans region and Croatia**, from the aspect of connection to the topic and experience, based on which a list of organisations with basic and contact information was prepared.

Research into previous models of cooperation between governments, other institutions and interdepartmental working groups with the civil sector served as the basis for creating conclusions and analysis recommendations related to strengthening cooperation mechanisms between these targeted sectors.

The collection of opinions from the field was carried out through interviews conducted online and in person with selected representatives of civil society and the competent institution in BiH - DEI. As a suitable consultation method for this type of research, a semi-structured interview was used.

During the selection of CSOs, the following was considered:

- Experience and/or contribution of CSOs in the field of European integration.
- The organisation acts as a service or resource centre for strengthening citizen participation and/or empowering civil society.
- CSO represents an alliance/network/coalition that brings together non-governmental organisations throughout BiH active in the field of European integration or areas of importance for this process, especially in the field of civic participation.
- A CSO represents an umbrella organisation in a certain field or possesses special expertise of importance for European integration.

During April 2025, IREI representatives visited and held meetings with representatives of CSOs in Mostar, Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Tuzla. The participants were introduced to the project "Stronger Civil Society in the Region - Faster Development and Accession to the European Union", its goals and planned activities. It is important to mention that some CSO representatives from the RS expressed some concern regarding cooperation with representatives from the FBiH and the state level due to the new law on the work of associations in the RS, which was adopted, as they say, without their consent and participation.

Communication was established with the planned participants from Bijeljina, and a meeting in Bijeljina, or rather an interview, was proposed, which ultimately did not take place. To meet the planned number of participants from BiH, a CSO from Doboj was contacted. The interview with a representative of the CSO from Doboj was held online.

At a meeting with representatives of the Directorate for European Integration, also held in April 2025, important inputs were received on improving the participation of CSOs in the pre-accession process through better cooperation mechanisms and connecting organisations.

Online meetings were held with representatives of CSOs from the WB region and Croatia (list available on the last pages of this document).

Interviews were conducted with representatives of 17 organisations, i.e. stakeholders from BiH, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Montenegro and the Republic of Croatia. Interview requests were sent to organisations based on the list of mapped organisations. Interviews were scheduled and conducted with organisations that expressed willingness to participate. Despite several interventions, responses were not received from the remaining organisations on the

list, and other organisations, also listed in this document, were proposed and contacted. Although this sample cannot be considered representative in a statistical sense, the findings obtained through interviews with selected CSOs according to the above criteria provided sufficient quality inputs for drawing conclusions and recommendations. The total number of CSOs planned for interviews was determined, primarily, by the time and financial framework of the project.

The framework for a semi-structured interview with representatives of CSOs in BiH and the region consisted of 9-12 questions covering:

- Current status, needs and challenges in the civil sector
- Civil society involvement in the European integration process
- Existing mechanisms of cooperation between the government and civil society in the European integration process
- CSO capacities and their organisation in relation to the European integration process
- Examples of good practices / initiatives / programs / activities of cooperation between the government and non-governmental sectors that have contributed to meeting the criteria for EU membership
- Strategic and development frameworks for the development of civil society
- Recommendations for improving cooperation and joint participation of the government and non-government sectors in the country's further (pre-)accession process

Given that the Republic of Croatia has been a member of the EU since 2013, the questionnaire for CSOs from this country is designed somewhat differently. In addition to questions about the current situation, needs and challenges in the civil sector, we specifically focused on information from the pre-accession period, on the involvement of civil society in accession negotiations, as well as on the attitude of institutions/governments towards CSOs before and after Croatia's accession to the EU. We also learned about the activities of civil structures in today's Croatia in achieving reforms, i.e. development goals defined by EU policies, examples of good practice/initiatives/programs/activities of cooperation between the government and non-government sectors that have contributed to the EU approach. Finally, the participants shared quality recommendations for strengthening the role of CSOs and cooperation with government institutions in the process of European integration.

The interview with DEI representatives was focused on key issues within the jurisdiction of this institution. The semi-structured questionnaire included questions about:

- Strategic documents, plans and platforms on which communication and cooperation with civil society in the European integration process is based.
- Cooperation with CSOs.
- Research on the perception of the role and importance of civil society participation in the European integration process.
- Using NGO expertise when harmonizing legislation with the EU acquis.
- Examples of good practice / initiatives / programs / activities of cooperation between the government and non-governmental sectors that have contributed to meeting the criteria for EU membership.
- Recommendations for improving cooperation and joint participation of the governmental and non-governmental sectors in the country's further (pre-)accession process.

The research was conducted in the period March - May 2025.

V

OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN BiH

V. OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN BIH

A. Civil society – analysis of the situation and environment in BiH

According to the data of the Collective e-Register of Associations and Foundations in BiH[13], as of April 19, 2025, there are many CSOs in BiH, 27,432. Of the total number, mostly citizens' associations and foundations, 25,646 are active organisations, while the rest are in the categories *of Discontinued* and *Deleted*.

Among the wide range of CSOs, in this research, we focused primarily on citizens' associations. There are two key reasons, as well as limitations within the research:

1. Lack of precise data on different types of CSOs, with the assessment that civil society in BiH is largely made up of these organisations – citizens' associations, as can be concluded from the focus of other relevant sources.
2. Insufficient information on the activities and contributions of other types of CSOs within the European integration process.

To monitor the situation in civil society in a quality manner, it is necessary to review the actual number of active organisations, or to update the records in an adequate manner. Based on experience in working with CSOs, it can be estimated that the number of active organisations in BiH is less than 25,646 and amounts to several thousand CSOs. It is necessary to improve the systematic approach to updating data on CSOs according to their activities. It is also necessary to review the extent to which the classification of CSOs by areas of activity in the register is adequate, especially considering certain repetitions or similar formulations visible in several areas of activity.

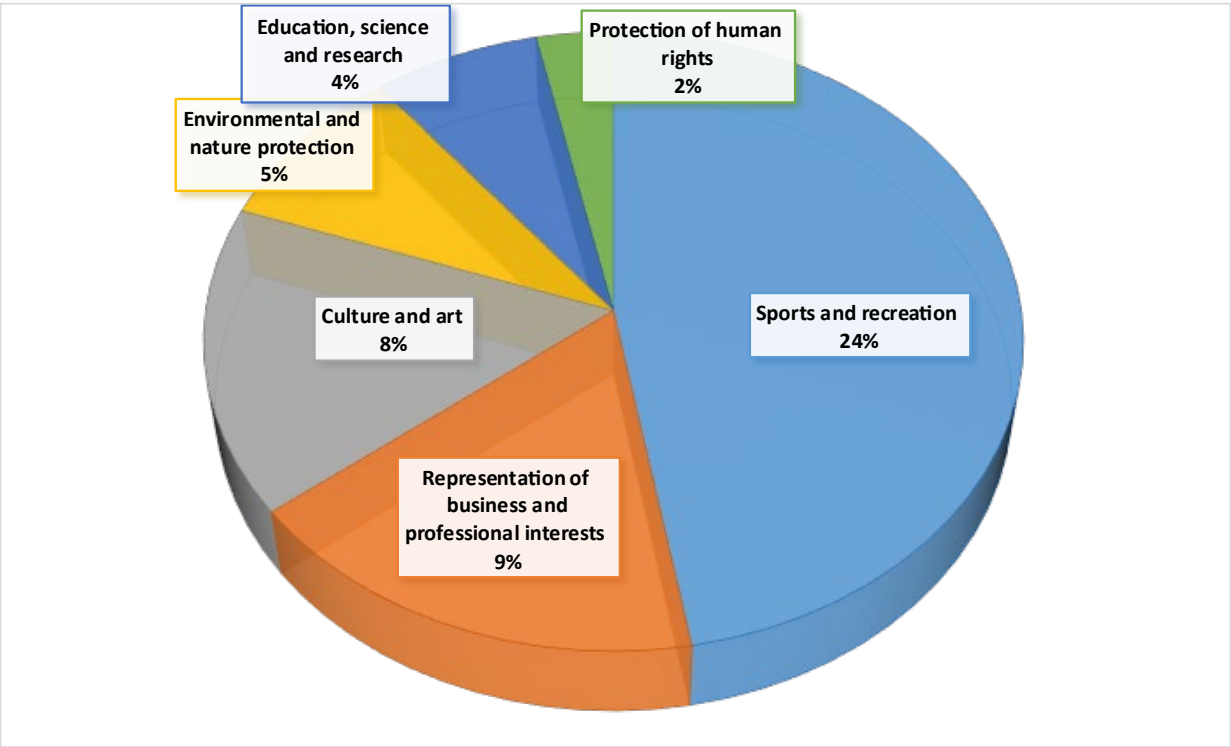
Within the category of active organisations, about 9% are those in the following areas of activity: *Civil society, Civic initiatives, Protection of human rights, Promotion of social and economic interests of certain social groups, Protection of the environment and nature, Sustainable development* (2,291).

[13] The collective e-register of associations and foundations in BiH was created because of cooperation between the Ministry of Justice of BiH and the EU within the project "Building the capacity of government institutions to conduct dialogue on public policies with civil society (CBGI project)." For more information about the project, visit the page http://zbirniregistri.gov.ba/Home/Info.

This register does not provide an accurate count of organisations involved in European integration. However, although not primarily dedicated or founded with the idea of dealing with EU integration, numerous organisations contribute to this process by working in specific and relevant areas of importance to the integration process.

Of the 25,646 active organisations, the largest number are those operating in the field of sports and recreation. Their share in the total structure of active CSOs is about 24%. In second place are organisations representing professional and business interests, followed by organisations in the field of culture and art. Based on the available data from the register, it can be concluded that, compared to the period 15 years ago, there has been a shift in focus within civil society from the areas of human rights, social issues and civic activism to other activities.

Chart 1. CSOs in BiH by areas of activity



Source: Collective e-register of associations and foundations in BiH

However, it should be borne in mind that the register is not updated regularly, so it is not possible to precisely determine the actual number of active citizens' associations and foundations, nor their areas of activity.

However, data from entity statistical offices and development documents do not show significant deviations from the total number of associations and foundations in the entities and Brčko District presented in the aggregate e-register.[14]

Relevant sources suggest that the environment in which CSOs operate is limited, especially in the RS. The 2024 BiH Report[15] states that the general framework for fundamental rights is largely in place, with further improvements needed. Freedom of assembly continues to be restricted, and civil society is targeted, particularly in the RS. Local CSOs are proactively advocating for policy changes. Activists working on sensitive issues (such as anti-corruption, women's rights, LGBTIQ rights, migrants' rights, environmental protection) continue to face threats and attacks.

Looking at the situation compared to previous years, a deterioration in civic space is noticeable, which continued between 2019 and 2023. According to the CIVICUS Monitor[16], which assesses the conditions of civic space globally, there has been a deterioration in civic space. Since 2019, the number of EU member states with an "open" rating has decreased from 14 to 12, while the number of member states with an "obstructed" rating has increased from 1 to 3. In the WB countries outside the EU, civic space also faces challenges, with Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina rated as "obstructed."[17]

Civil society has been at the forefront of advocating for reforms linked to meeting the priorities set by the European Commission, but their efforts have been hampered by limited political will and bureaucratic inertia. CSOs in BiH have united around the Civil Society Declaration: We want a step further

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[14] According to data from the Register of Business Entities of the Republic of Srpska Statistical Office, as of 31.12.2022. there were 8,548 citizen associations and 112 foundations. Citizen associations and foundations accounted for 23.32% of the total number of business entities in the Republika Srpska. Looking at the areas of activity, the largest number of citizen associations is in the S (Other service activities) sector 5,708 and R (Arts, entertainment and recreation) 2,263. More precise data on the representation of citizen associations is not available.
Based on statistical data on citizens' associations in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, data is available on the number of citizens' associations in the field of culture, which was 146 in 2022.
According to the data of the Joint Register of Associations and Foundations of BiH, the number of registered associations and foundations in the Brčko area is 503.

[15] Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2024, together with the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions https://www.dei.gov.ba/uploads/documents/izvjesce-o-bosni-i-hercegovini-za-2024-godinu_1730986501.pdf

[16] https://monitor.civicus.org/

[17] European Civic Forum and Civic Space Watch. (2024). Analysis within the framework of the Civil Society Space Report https://civic-forum.eu/civic-space-report-2024

towards the EU! In a joint request addressed to local authorities and the international community, 118 organisations expressed their determination and readiness to join the EU. They emphasize that the opening of negotiations is crucial for the country's future and its European path. In this complex and changing context, the role of civil society in BiH remains irreplaceable.[18]

In the RS, the recently adopted Law on a Special Registry and Transparency of Non-Profit Organisations[19] targets and stigmatises organisations that are funded from abroad.

According to the Statement of 28.02.2025, published on the Transparency International website[20], CSOs believe that the laws adopted by the parliamentary majority represent a retaliatory attack on all critical voices in the Republika Srpska, and above all on citizens' associations that are not under the control of the government, the media and opposition voices. The signed civil society organisations (45 of them) point out that by adopting the "Law on Foreign Agents", which has been threatened for many years, the government has created the prerequisites for the systematic persecution of dissenters. Also, the adoption of amendments to the Criminal Code, which seek to force state-level deputies, judicial office holders and other employees of BiH institutions to blindly obey the decisions of the ruling majority in the RS, represents a brutal attack on the foundations of democracy in this country.

These laws violate the constitutions of RS and BiH, the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and are not in line with the most important international standards. This will not only lead to the closure or banning of associations and the suppression of critical voices, but will also have negative economic consequences through the isolation of RS, the halting of European integration, and the reduction of investments.

The Constitutional Court of BiH has suspended the Law on the Special Registry and Transparency of the Work of Non-Profit Organisations.[21]

In the WB, especially in the RS in BiH, inflammatory rhetoric from political leaders and persistent attacks have increased the vulnerability of civil society, while in the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, CSOs

[18] Cvjetkovic, D, Jaskić, M, Brkić, J, 2024, Monitoring matrix for monitoring the enabling environment for civil society development, Report for BiH 2023, CPCD https://balkancsd.net/monitoring-matrix-country-reports-for-bosnia-herzegovina/.

[19] https://www.narodnaskupstinars.net/?q=la/akti/usvojeni-zakoni

[20] https://ti-bih.org/zakoni-koje-je-usvojila-nsrs-predstavljaju-osvetnicki-udar-na-sve-kriticke-glasove/

[21] https://www.ustavnisud.ba/bs/vanredna-plenarna-sjednica-2549

have faced repeated and excessive audits. In Serbia, systemic abuse of the media to tarnish the reputation of CSOs has become alarmingly common.

Serbia and BiH are among the highest in the WB in terms of the number of SLAPP cases[22], and journalists, media organisations, activists, CSOs, and especially defenders of the environment are the primary targets.

B. Institutionalization of cooperation between the government and civil sector in BiH from the perspective of European integration

The EC recognizes the very important role of CSOs in the reform processes implemented in candidate countries and potential candidates for EU membership, emphasizing the importance of cooperation with these organisations. According to the 2024 BiH Report, the authorities should promote an environment conducive to civil society and ensure effective consultations on draft regulations. Concerning models of cooperation between governments, other institutions and inter-ministerial working groups with the civil sector, considering the previous experiences and views of civil society representatives, the existing opportunities, although insufficient, have not been used.

The Decision on the Coordination System for European Integration (2016) opened space for the involvement of civil society in this process. The BiH CoM defined joint bodies within the coordination system, their composition, competencies and mutual relations. Four bodies were established[23] between different levels of government. The possibility for the participation of civil society actors is envisaged within the Commission and working groups for European integration. However, as stated in the analysis conducted by the Centers for Civic Initiatives[24], despite the envisaged possibility of CSO

[22] Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/694782/IPOL_STU(2021)694782(SUM01)_HR.pdf

[23] "Official Gazette of BiH", number: 72/16, 35/18 http://www.sluzbenilist.ba/page/akt/OhWGVQzgUZM= The Decision on the System of Coordination of the European Integration Process in BiH defines: the institutional and operational system and the method of achieving coordination of institutions in BiH in implementing activities related to the process of integrating BiH into the EU, joint bodies within the coordination system, their composition, and competencies and mutual relations.

[24] Centers for Civil Initiatives, 2022, Comparative analysis of legal and institutional mechanisms of cooperation between civil society organisations and government institutions in the process of accession to the

participation in the bodies of the coordination system, no CSO has participated in the activities so far by attending meetings of working groups or the Commission.

The BiH institutions' communication strategy on the accession process of Bosnia and Herzegovina recognizes civil society as a key partner of BiH institutions in communicating on the European integration process.[25] This represents a positive signal and a basis for improving and further developing cooperation between the government and civil society sectors in the European integration process.

As stated in this Strategy, during the organisation of public consultations, representatives of CSOs and the academic community in BiH expressed interest in topics from sectoral policies related to health, social protection, education, ecology, human rights, agriculture and rural development, and youth, noting that the focus of their activities changes over time, as does the need for specific information.

A formal framework for cooperation with civil society was established in 2017 in the form of the "Cooperation Agreement between the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina and NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina."[26] This document establishes common values, principles, tenets and priorities of cooperation between the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina and NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina has taken responsibility for continuing activities to improve institutional mechanisms for cooperation with civil society and to include citizens and NGOs in all phases of creating and implementing public policies within the competence of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This particularly applies to:

a) strengthening the capacities of the Sector for Legal Aid and Civil Society Development of the Ministry of Justice of BiH as a coordinator of cooperation between the CoM of BiH and NGOs.

b) establishment of an Advisory Body of the BiH CoM for cooperation with NGOs.

c) development of the Strategy for creating an enabling environment for the development of civil society by the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

European Union, EUresurs.ba, https://euresurs-api.page-services.net/Content/Documents/Komparativna_analiza_pravnih_i_institucionalnih_mehanizama_saradnje_izme%C4%91u_OCD_i_institucija_vlasti_u_procesu_pristupica_EU1664442159528.pdf

[25] Directorate for European Integration, 2020, Communication Strategy of BiH Institutions on the Process of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Accession to the European Union from Candidate Status to Membership

[26] Ministry of Justice of BiH, 2017, Cooperation Agreement between the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Non-Governmental Organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina http://www.mpr.gov.ba/NVO/default.aspx?id=7076&langTag=bs-BA .

This Agreement also defines the obligations of NGOs relating to:

- strengthening their capacities to participate in the processes of creating and implementing public policies
- timely and transparent information to the public about the interests they represent in the process of creating public policies
- cooperation with The Council of Ministers of BiH on the further development of institutional mechanisms and instruments of cooperation
- transparent management of public and other donor funds, and the development of self-regulation mechanisms that contribute to this practice
- providing support to the BiH CoM in fulfilling the conditions for EU membership and bringing this process closer to the citizens of BiH
- promoting the interests of BiH and its citizens in the European integration process and achieving other strategic goals of BiH

To implement the above obligations, it is necessary to ensure support for CSOs to strengthen their capacities. From the available information, it can be concluded that activities to strengthen the capacities of CSOs have so far been implemented mostly through programs funded by foreign donors.

According to the Agreement, **institutional mechanisms for cooperation with civil society are all mechanisms of state administration, including all state administration bodies, their organisational units, or advisory bodies whose exclusive or predominant competence includes issues of NGO cooperation and issues of involving citizens and NGOs in the creation and implementation of public policies within the competence of the BiH CoM**.

The development of civil society, according to this Agreement, is based on the principles of sustainable development and action for the common good, the participation of citizens and NGOs in achieving a society of prosperity and equal opportunities for all.

In September 2018, the Council of Ministers of BiH adopted a Decision on the establishment of the Advisory Body for Cooperation with NGOs in order to improve cooperation with NGOs, and to create

an enabling legal, institutional and financial environment for their activities in BiH.[27] The members of this body were appointed in 2020 by a decision of the Council of Ministers of BiH.[28] The work of this body was assessed as insufficiently efficient. At the end of 2024, a competition procedure was conducted to select members of the new convocation of this body, but no appointments have yet been made.

Strategy of the Council of Ministers of BiH for creating an enabling environment for the development of civil society 2025-2029

A positive example of the involvement of civil society by institutions is the development of the Strategy of the BiH CoM for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Development of Civil Society 2025-2029, when CSOs had the opportunity to contribute their comments through the consultations conducted.

The Strategy of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Development of Civil Society 2025-2029 fulfils the commitment from the Cooperation Agreement between the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina and NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2017, which envisaged such a strategy.[29]

The Strategy was created under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice of BiH as the competent body for civil society within the BiH CoM, with technical assistance from the EU4CivilSociety project of the EU Delegation to BiH. In addition to representatives of the Ministry of Justice of BiH, the working group that coordinated the Strategy also included members of the BiH CoM Advisory Body for Cooperation with NGOs.

During the development of the strategic document, the current situation was analysed, problems were identified, and the main strategic goal and four operational goals with measures and indicators were defined, as follows:

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[27] "Official Gazette of BiH", No. 89/18, Decision on the Establishment of the Advisory Body of the Council of Ministers of BiH for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations http://www.mpr.gov.ba/web_dokumenti/default.aspx?id=11091&langTag=bs-BA

[28] "Official Gazette of BiH", No. 80/20, Decision on the appointment of members of the Advisory Body of the Council of Ministers of BiH for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations http://www.mpr.gov.ba/web_dokumenti/default.aspx?id=11089&langTag=bs-BA

[29] Draft Strategy of the Council of Ministers of BiH for the creation of an encouraging environment for the development of civil society 2025 - 2029 https://ekonsultacije.gov.ba/legislativeactivities/details/122534

- Operational objective 1: Strengthening the efficiency and transparency of public funding of CSOs by BiH institutions
- Operational objective 2: Strengthening the normative framework and practice of involving CSOs in the preparation and monitoring of regulations and policies within the jurisdiction of BiH institutions
- Operational objective 3: Strengthening institutional mechanisms of cooperation between the Government of BiH and CSOs
- Operational objective 4: Strengthening the resource infrastructure of civil society.

An Action Plan for the implementation of the strategy for 2025 and 2026 has also been prepared.

From the perspective of European integration, the draft Strategy of the BiH CoM for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Development of Civil Society 2025-2029 envisages an important measure related to ensuring the effective inclusion of CSOs in accession negotiations with the EU.

Funds for the implementation of activities for 2025 and 2026 according to the Action Plan 2025-2026 are planned from the Budget of the BiH institutions, as well as with the support of the EU4CivilSociety project of the EU Delegation to BiH. The structure of funding sources is dominated by funds from the budget.

Of the total planned funds in the amount of 789,000 KM, 28% is planned for strengthening the resource capacities of civil society, namely for:

- Support for the development of shared services and resource infrastructure of CSOs
- Strengthening the coordination of international donor support to CSOs

Proposal for a Local Self-Government Development Strategy in RS for the period 2023–2029

In the domain of strategic frameworks for strengthening civil society participation, it is important to mention the Proposal for a Strategy for the Development of Local Self-Government in the RS, which, according to available sources, is in line with documents relevant to the European integration process and other internationally undertaken obligations of the RS and BiH, based on the Stabilization and Association Agreement and the European Charter on Local Self-Government.

The development of the Local Self-Government Development Strategy in the RS for the period 2023–2029 was carried out with the support of the EU4CivilSociety project, funded by the EU.

This strategy contains a series of measures related to strengthening the participation of citizens and CSOs in the affairs and development of local self-government units. It is planned to involve CSOs more and more intensively in the creation, implementation and monitoring of local policies and instruments, as well as to create conditions for launching and including initiatives that represent the interests of citizens. On the other hand, it is planned to provide greater logistical and financial support to these organisations from local governments, while ensuring a higher level of transparency in the allocation and monitoring of the use of funds.

In August 2023, the RS Government adopted the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Local Self-Government Development Strategy in RS for the period 2024-2026, the implementation of which should improve their position, financing, and improve the quality and availability of services within their jurisdiction.

NGO accreditation within the framework of the work of the National Assembly of the RS

In the RS, there is a mechanism for accreditation of NGOs to attend sessions and committees of the National Assembly of the RS, based on a public invitation, i.e. a selection procedure conducted by the assembly itself. According to the invitation from the end of 2024, a request to attend sessions of the National Assembly of the RS could be submitted by RS associations that have the status of public interest associations that have acquired the status in accordance with the Law on Associations and Foundations of the RS ("Official Gazette of the Republika Srpska", No. 52/01 and 42/05) and the Decision on granting the status of public interest associations ("Official Gazette of the Republika Srpska", No.: 100/06, 117/10, 7/16 and 43/21).[30]

NGOs, foundations, trade unions and other citizen associations registered in accordance with the Law on Associations and Foundations of the RS ("Official Gazette of the Republika Srpska", No. 52/01 and 42/05) could submit a request for accreditation to attend sessions of the National Assembly of the RS committees.

[30] https://www.narodnaskupstinars.net/?q=la/vijesti/raspisan-javni-poziv-za-dodjelu-akretidacija-za-prisustvo-sjednicama-narodne-skup%C5%A1tine-republike-srpske-i-skup%C5%A1tinskih-odbora-u-2025-godini

The basic criterion for granting accreditation is the compatibility between the applicant's registered activity and the responsibilities of the committee whose sessions are required to be attended, with the note that it is possible to select a maximum of two committees.

There is a committee or commission for European integration in the entity-level parliaments. The Government of the Brčko District of BiH has a Department for European Integration and International Cooperation.

Online citizen participation (e-consultations, etc.)

The participation of the public and the non-governmental sector in the process of creating laws and public policies is regulated by the "Uniform Rules for the Drafting of Legal Regulations in the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina[31]"and the "Rules for Consultations." In 2017, an online institutional consultation mechanism was created in the form of a website/platform "eConsultations."[32] The goal of the platform is to enable the interested public, CSOs and citizens to participate in the creation and implementation of public policies that are within the jurisdiction of the institutions of BiH, not only through classic methods of public consultations, but also via the Internet. It is important to emphasize that online consultations are not the only form of consultation provided for by the Rules, but other forms such as public hearings, round tables, etc. are also defined.

Based on the available report from the Ministry of Justice of BiH, it is evident that civil society participation in consultation processes is at a low level.[33] Based on available secondary sources, as well as interviews conducted, some of the key reasons for this situation are passivity, i.e. lack of a culture of civic activism, distrust in the work of public institutions, lack of capacity of CSOs to participate in consultations on certain and specific topics, short deadlines defined by institutions for conducting consultations, and sometimes unavailable information about consultations.

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[31] Uniform Rules for Drafting Legal Regulations in the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina ("Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina" No. 11/05, 58/14, 60/14, 50/17 and 70/17) https://advokat-prnjavorac.com/zakoni/Jedinstvena-pravila-za-izradu-pravnih-propisa-u-institucijama-Bosne-i-Hercegovine.pdf

[32] Rules for consultations in the development of legal regulations, Article 7 ("Official Gazette of BiH" No. 05/17) http://www.sluzbenilist.ba/page/akt/zLcnWynJShM= Link to the website: https://www.ekonsultacije.gov.ba/

[33] Ministry of Justice of BiH, 2023, Report on the implementation of the rules for consultations in the development of legal regulations for 2022 http://www.mpr.gov.ba/web_dokumenti/default.aspx?id=13466&langTag=bs-BA .

In this section, it is important to mention other tools for online citizen participation. As a project of the Government of the Republic of Srpska and the Agency for the Information Society of the Republic of Srpska, the Portal eSrpska was created, which enables the provision of public services electronically. The portal provides information on the rights and obligations of importance to citizens, the conditions for exercising rights, as well as the procedures for obtaining certain public and state administration services.

In April 2018, the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a Decision on the establishment of the E-Government web portal of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, www.eupravafbih.gov.ba, although the site was not functional at the time of the research. The aim of establishing and operating the E-Government portal of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is to ensure public and transparent communication between the interested public and the federal administration bodies in one place, i.e. on a separate website of the Government of the Federation of BiH, and thus increase the level of transparency of the work of the administration bodies in providing public services.

JavnaRasprava.ba is a web platform, launched by the NGO "Zašto ne", intended for citizen participation in public debates, i.e. in decision-making processes. On this portal, in addition to a wealth of information about laws and other regulations, citizens can ask questions to parliamentarians and participate in debates. Through this platform, citizens can learn more about the law-making process in BiH and the work of legislative bodies at the state and entity levels; join the discussion on draft laws that are in the procedure and communicate with elected parliamentarians. The lack of citizen participation is accompanied by this, as well as other similar channels of communication with citizens that publish information about the preparation and adoption of public policies.

Informing the public and conducting consultations with civil society in the process of developing public policies in the entities and BDBiH is regulated by various documents in the form of regulations, rules, decisions, rules of procedure, and guidelines. However, their implementation in practice is neither complete nor consistent.

Digital technologies have opened new possibilities for mobilizing citizens around specific social topics and issues, as well as for increasing civic participation. This opens opportunities for citizens to participate in public debates online, to express their opinions and views on social issues. It is noticeable that citizens are more engaged in the virtual sphere, but the level of participation is generally low. It is im-

portant to emphasize that online participation must never be a substitute for live participation, because for some regulations and documents that are extremely important, it is necessary to ensure other types of civil society participation.

According to the European Commission's working document - report for 2024, BiH should ensure productive and systematic consultations with civil society within the framework of an inclusive policy dialogue and adopt a framework for transparent financing of civil society organisations, thus ensuring an enabling environment for civil society (Key Priority 11 of the Opinion).

In general, it can be concluded that the partnership between the government and civil society has not been built. There is no strategic approach to the development of this cooperation. Organisations are poorly active in consultations of various kinds, this applies to both consultations conducted by the government in BiH, and consultations conducted by the EU.

C. CSO capacities for participation in the European integration process

CSOs in today's Bosnian and Herzegovinan society face many challenges in their work. which negatively affects the ability of CSOs to work on building their capacities. The biggest challenge is the unfavourable overall environment for civil society.

One of the research participants pointed to a wide range of problems faced by CSOs:

"There are many challenges, from the constant narrowing of the space for work, which is reflected in the adoption of restrictive laws or the announcement of their adoption, to the threats that very often come from the highest representatives of the authorities, which are not adequately sanctioned. All of this contributes to a feeling, above all, of legal insecurity, complete distrust in what we call the rule of law, to the fear that is increasingly present among many people who are increasingly afraid to speak out publicly, speak publicly, and express their opinions. There is a very objective fear among a number of activists, not for themselves but for their family members. Targeting is not new."

Due to its diverse structure, civil society in BiH is fragmented. One of the challenges facing the civil sector in BiH is the small number of strong, developed organisations and the large number of grassroots, locally or problem-oriented and less developed organisations, while there is a lack of medium-sized organisations that could progress and develop.

According to the opinion of some respondents, competition among CSOs is also noticeable, which, as they state, should not be the case. Civil society in BiH is not sufficiently networked, there is a lack of synergy within the sector, which reduces the strength of this sector.

Among the large number of CSOs in BiH (as mentioned above, there are more than 25,000 organisations), **there are a number of highly professional organisations that have specialized in various areas of importance for the EU integration process. However, most CSOs operate in a poorly coordinated manner towards the European integration process, while their capacities are significantly limited.**

In the context of EU integration, CSOs generally do not have sufficient knowledge about this process. On the other hand, for a large part of the negotiation chapters there are organisations that have experience in these chapters and can provide their contribution.

"*It is important for organisations to diversify and specialize, which would be much better, and this knowledge will be much more useful for this process tomorrow,*" emphasized one of the participants.

Generally speaking, the capacities of CSOs in BiH are limited by various factors, one of the most significant being the lack of funds for financing activities and programs.

Sources of funding for CSOs are hybrid and include membership fees, support from public budgets, donations and grants from international organisations, etc. Among the various sources of funding for CSOs in BiH, according to available sources, funds received from European and international funds dominate.

One of the important issues related to the financing of CSOs is the aspect of possible connections between organisations primarily financed from public budgets and government bodies and ruling political parties, which reduces their independence.

In the absence of a civil society financing model, the activities of most CSOs depend on foreign sources. This situation also negatively affects the perception of the role and importance of CSOs, and they are often considered "foreign mercenaries." Political circumstances have had a very negative impact on the working conditions of the civil sector, especially in the last two years.

"*The cessation of American funding has triggered an avalanche of other events. So now there are campaigns against NGOs. Not only in BiH but also in the region. Repressive measures, individuals are being targeted. The situation is much more difficult in terms of security,*" said one of the research participants.

The continuous narrowing of the space for CSOs to operate results in a reduction in CSO activities, as well as fewer opportunities for capacity development of these organisations. Administrative factors represent an obstacle to more active involvement of civil society in reform-related processes. Operating in an unfavourable political environment is particularly difficult for CSOs. Therefore, a rapid response and a good platform for action that includes more joint work of the government and civil society sectors to address the widespread challenges affecting civil society are necessary.

When it comes to the capacities of CSOs to participate in the European integration process, there are no significant differences in the views of the respondents. It can be assessed that a smaller part of organisations in BiH have built capacities and expertise for certain topics, negotiation chapters that are among the first to be opened, while more intensive and continuous work is needed to build the capacities of the vast majority of local CSOs.

VI EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICIES IN WORKING ON TOPICS IMPORTANT FOR EU INTEGRATION

VI. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES IN WORKING ON TOPICS IMPORTANT FOR EU INTEGRATION

At the beginning of 2013, **the Initiative for Monitoring BiH's European Integration was formed**[34] as an informal coalition of CSOs that contributes to monitoring reforms and oversees the implementation of EU policies, laws and standards, focusing on issues of democratization, the rule of law, and human and minority rights. Its goal is to monitor the European integration process in a transparent, professional and non-partisan manner.

The action of this coalition - Initiative is focused on the following areas:

- Monitoring, documentation and reporting.
- Research (systemic approach to various issues, review and monitoring of the work of institutions, research around structures and processes, preparation and promotion of reports on the state of progress of BiH in European integration).
- Capacity building of members (gathering and accepting into membership CSOs, as well as other interested individuals who work on promoting the rule of law, building a democratic society and advocating for human rights).
- Advocacy (policy, reform of the political/legal system, rights to equal access to justice for all citizens).
- Promoting the work of the Initiative, or rather its members, through web portals, social networks, and media.
- Education (researchers, government representatives, civil society organisations, the general public).

The Local Democracy Agency Mostar[35] is an example of a highly professionalized civil society organisation that continuously introduces innovative approaches and practices. Together with active citizens, LDA has been building successful communities, advancing deliberative democracy and fostering good

[34] https://eu-monitoring.ba/o-inicijativi/
[35] https://www.ldamostar.org/

governance for more than 20 years. It is the holder of the first accredited platform for the implementation of the ELoGE methodology[36] in BiH. Twelve local governments from BiH have opted to enter the implementation process of the Council of Europe's European Label of Excellence in Governance (ELoGE) Programme through the LDA Mostar project "LINK for cooperation/collaboration." A total of 16 representatives of this platform have been certified by the Council of Europe for the implementation of ELoGE, who are available to local governments as ELoGE experts. The local governments that have reached the ELoGE standard and received the ELoGE label together are the Municipality of Jablanica, the City of Prijedor and the Municipality of Žepče. This label is valid for two years, after which the ELoGE process is repeated.

The Center for the Promotion of Civil Society (CPCD)[37] is an independent and professional organisation that has been strengthening civil society in BiH and the Western Balkans for almost 30 years by providing quality programs and services to CSOs, the media, citizens, the business sector and authorities, and encouraging their cooperation and networking. CPCD develops activism, entrepreneurship and citizen competences.

Some of the key strategies of CPCD's activities relate to:

- Strengthening the role of CSOs in BiH and the countries of the region in the processes of accession and action in the EU, the processes of democratization and establishment of sustainable rule of law.
- Encouraging, strengthening and promoting civic participation and civic activism at all levels of governance.
- Analyses and research in key areas of CPCD's work, which include civil society, media, rule of law, environment, democracy and other related areas, etc.

The Center for the Promotion of Civil Society opened the Civil Society Resource Center in 2006, in response to the need for such an intermediary structure that would provide NGOs with various types of services, from training, education, various forms of advice and consultations, networking opportunities and wider distribution and exchange of information. The center's services are used by over 10,000

[36] Good governance – the responsible management of public affairs and the management of public resources – is summarised in the 12 principles of good governance of the Council of Europe. The European Label of Excellence in Governance (ELoGE) is awarded to local authorities that have achieved a high overall level of good governance measured against a relevant standard. More information available at: https://www.link4cooperation.ba/eloge-program/

[37] https://civilnodrustvo.ba/o-nama/

CSOs, companies, government institutions and citizens from all over BiH and the region, improving their knowledge and skills and ensuring increased business excellence.[38]

The Centers for Civic Initiatives (CCI) is one of the important organisations that promotes and encourages civic activism and contributes to strengthening the capacities of individuals and organisations in solving problems in communities throughout BiH. This organisation has been implementing projects that contribute to the European integration process for many years. As part of the project "Resource Center for Civil Society in BiH in the EU Integration Process" (2018-2021), among other things, the web platform www.EUresurs.ba was created as a service and support for CSOs and citizens in the European integration process. The Resource Center for CSOs in BiH was developed with the aim of developing and strengthening the capacities of CSOs, encouraging their networking, and improving their skills. In this context, the Resource Center seeks to play a key role as a central point for connecting, coordinating, and developing the capacities of CSOs, providing them with the necessary support to effectively respond to the demands of reform processes.

Since February 2024, in partnership with the Vermont Youth Center from Brčko, CCI has been implementing the Resource Center for Civil Society Organisations of BiH[39], a 36-month project.

The aim of the project is to encourage the participation of CSOs in decision-making processes, with a special emphasis on the necessary reform processes for EU accession.

The project is particularly focused on:

- Developing the capacity of CSOs, including local organisations and informal groups, to become self-sustainable, recognized and influential actors in reform processes. The project will provide a range of services, resources, information, training and mentoring assistance to local CSOs. This support will strengthen their capacity and sustainability, positioning them as influential actors in their areas of operation.
- Assist CSOs in participating in reform processes by engaging in consultation mechanisms, advocating for the adoption of critical legislation and monitoring progress in areas relevant to EU integration. The project will provide baseline analyses, roadmaps and monitoring reports that

[38] https://www.linkedin.com/in/smart-resource-center-523a6a70/?originalSubdomain=ba

[39] More information about the project: https://euresurs.ba/aktuelni-eu-projekti/resursni-centar-za-organizacije-civilnog-drustva-u-bih/

will serve as input for advocating for specific measures in areas of vital importance for EU integration, with an emphasis on Clusters I, II and III. The BiH CSO Resource Center project will also support CSOs and/or their networks in advocating and participating in working groups of relevant institutions.

- Improving the environment for civil society in BiH, emphasizing transparency, objectivity and impartiality of public funding of CSOs. The project will advocate for improving the environment for the work of CSOs, focusing on financing CSOs from public funds, especially at higher levels of government (state, entity, cantonal). Furthermore, it will address at least one other issue of importance for the work of civil society, such as improving and updating the register of active CSOs or developing a strategy for creating an enabling environment for the development of civil society in BiH.

It is also important to mention the CCI's experience in working with informal groups of citizens. According to information from this organisation, they have supported the creation of over 50 informal citizen groups. This is a large project to fight corruption, funded by USAID, which was supposed to continue. Through the project, they achieved excellent results - many informal groups have grown into organisations.

Among the examples of good practice, it is important to highlight modern concepts of encouraging citizen participation in decision-making processes, such as deliberative democracy. The process of deliberative democracy is "a process in which a representative group of people analyses evidence, conducts discussions with the aim of finding a common position, and prepares detailed recommendations on public policy issues for public authorities" (OECD, 2020). The process is based on the idea that democratic political decision-making should be based on "fair and reasoned discussion among citizens" and that these decisions should be subject to "deliberation by free and equal citizens".[40]

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2023) to member states (6 September 2023 at the 1473rd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)[41] on deliberative democracy. It is recommended that member state governments:

[40] https://rm.coe.int/cg-2002-42-12-bos-beyond-elections-the-use-of-deliberative-methods-in-/1680aa232d
[41] https://rm.coe.int/preporuka-odbora-ministara-drzavama-clanicama-o-deliberativnoj-demokraciji/1680acf278

- recognize that deliberation processes, if properly implemented, can complement representative democracy and expand opportunities for citizens to contribute to policy development and legislative drafting.
- any deliberation process they decide to undertake shall be conducted in accordance with the following principles:
    - availability of the legal framework,
    - clarity of mandate and design,
    - fair representation,
    - enabled and informed participation,
    - competent leadership (facilitation),
    - responsibility,
    - supervision and good management,
    - evaluation and learning.
- establish measures and take actions, including, where appropriate, the introduction of provisions in the legal framework, to enable or encourage public institutions at national, regional and local level that wish to conduct deliberation procedures to do so in accordance with the above principles, as set out in the Annex.
- ensure that this recommendation, including its Appendix, is translated and widely disseminated to relevant bodies at national, regional and local levels.

Innovating Democratic Participation at the Local Level in Bosnia and Herzegovina" is being implemented in BiH, which aims to improve the quality of local democracy and create opportunities for citizens to engage in innovative participatory processes in Mostar and throughout BiH. The project promotes new democratic approaches, open government, public ethics, transparent and inclusive local policy-making in the country.

The project is implemented by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe as part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for BiH 2022-2025, and in accordance with the principles

contained in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and the Additional Protocol on the right to participation in the affairs of local government (CETS No. 207).[42]

The deliberation process is a more advanced form of citizen participation in many communities in which authorities at the local, regional or national level wish to include representative groups of citizens in the decision-making process. The deliberation process consists of four main phases: citizen selection, learning, capacity building and deliberation. The City of Mostar entered the deliberation process back in 2021, when the first Citizens' Assembly in Mostar was organised.[43] The group gathered a representative group of 48 randomly selected citizens who deliberated over four consecutive weekends and developed 32 recommendations related to the cleanliness of the city and the maintenance of public spaces in Mostar. The Citizens' Assembly process of the City of Mostar provides for a special role for local stakeholders, such as institutions, informal groups of residents and NGOs. All of them have the right to propose specific topics to be addressed during the learning phase, experts for presentations, and they can also propose recommendations themselves.

"Green Kick"[44]- the project is implemented by the Center for Development and Support of CRP Tuzla in partnership with the organisations Foundation for the Development of Northern Montenegro, FORS Montenegro and SMART Kolektiv from Serbia. The project aims to increase the influence of civil society in BiH, Montenegro and Serbia on legislation in the field of decarbonization and climate change mitigation, through capacity building, improving cooperation between CSOs and local governments, and the regional GEAR network campaign. The three-year project will be implemented in the above-mentioned countries, and the main activities include training for CSOs; Awareness-raising campaign; Participatory process for the development of local environmental policies (SECAP), etc. This project is part of the European Climate Initiative (EUKI) (https://www.euki.de/en) of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK).

[42] https://www.coe.int/bs/web/sarajevo/innovating-democratic-participation-at-local-level-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina

[43] It was implemented by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities within the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for BiH for the period 2022-2025 and is in line with the principles defined by the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No.122) and the Additional Protocol on the right to participation in the affairs of local authorities (CETS No. 207). More information about the project is available at the link: https://mostargradimo.ba/

[44] Center for Development and Support, Tuzla https://crp.org.ba/

"BH Green Triangle" - the project is implemented by the Center for Development and Support, LINK and LIR Evolution. The project aims to enhance the impact of civil society in BiH in the field of environmental protection and climate change, through capacity building, improved cooperation between CSOs and authorities, and a public campaign by the regional GreenWorks network of CSOs. The project enables further strengthening of the established GreenWorks network, through capacity building and improved cooperation with 15 local governments in BiH, enabling the process of decarbonization, adaptation and mitigation of climate change, with public participation in planning, policymaking, decision-making, and representing the interests of citizens.

The project directly encourages the decarbonization process at the local level through strengthening the capacities of local government units and developing 15 Sustainable Energy Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) for the period up to 2030, promoting the use of clean and sustainable energy, and an environmental local policy plan, thus supporting the implementation of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the WB for the period 2021-2030.

BH Green Triangle also plans to strengthen capacity, award sub-grants, and network 15 civil society organisations. Through the project, CSOs will strengthen their capacities in the areas of decarbonization, adaptation, and climate change mitigation at the local level.

The project is funded by the EU through the Program: EU4CS - Support to existing and newly established networks of civil society organisations.

"Network of Aarhus Centres for Green Agenda and Environmental Protection" is a project implemented by the Resource Aarhus Centre in BiH, Environmental Centre Banja Luka, Centre for Ecology and Energy Tuzla, Eco Forum Zenica, Dinarica Association Mostar.

The aim of the project is to strengthen the involvement of the Aarhus Centres network in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies, policies and decision-making processes related to EU integration in the environmental and climate change sector.

The project focuses on:

- Improving transparency and dialogue between the government and non-governmental sectors, especially regarding the implementation of the Sofia Declaration and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the ratification of the PRTR Protocol

- Strengthening citizen participation in environmental policy and decision-making processes at the local level by strengthening the adequate implementation of the Aarhus Convention, strengthening local civil society organisations in their fight against corruption in the environmental and energy sectors, and educating citizens to adequately participate in environmental decision-making processes
- Initiating the creation of a legal framework that will adequately protect citizens and environmental activists from abuse and marginalization that they face by calling for positive environmental changes in BiH, and by educating citizens to fight SLAPP lawsuits
- Promoting and raising awareness of citizens about all important aspects of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the upcoming socio-economic transition by supporting the green transition and socio-economic development.[45]

The project is funded by the following sources:

- EU4CS – Support to existing and newly established Civil Society Organisations' networks – EuropeAid/176421/DD/ACT/BA, Aarhus Centers' Network for Green Agenda and Environmental Protection BH"
- Ministry of Spatial Planning, Transport and Communications and Environmental Protection ZDK
- FBiH Environmental Protection Fund.

Despite some progress, targeted programs and projects, the process of European integration of BiH is slow and the results so far are insufficient. The main reasons are the inefficiency of the government, internal divisions on a political basis, a more declarative than substantive commitment to accelerate reform processes, etc. When it comes to cooperation between the government and civil society, the process is slowed down by the insufficient commitment of institutions to cooperation and fulfilment of obligations related to the inclusion of civil society, insufficient connectivity and lack of coordination within civil society, as well as a lack of resources that affects the reduced opportunities and limited capacities of CSOs.

[45] https://www.ekoforumzenica.ba/projekti/mreza-arhus-centara-za-zelenu-agendu-i-zastitu-zivotne-sredine/

VII MECHANISM AND SUPPORT FOR EU CIVIL SOCIETY

VII. MECHANISMS AND SUPPORT FOR EU CIVIL SOCIETY

The focus of EU support to civil society for the period 2021-2027 is **to strengthen participatory democracies and the alignment and integration processes of the WB and Turkey with the EU** by strengthening the contribution of civil society in this area. It will aim to achieve the following three outcomes:

1. An enabling environment for the implementation of civil society activities

- An enabling environment in terms of laws and policies for the enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms, with an emphasis on freedom of association, assembly and expression
- An enabling financial environment that ensures support for the sustainability of CSOs, with appropriate funding and taxation rules for civil society

2. Strengthened cooperation and partnership between CSOs and public sector institutions

- Public sector institutions of IPA beneficiary countries include CSOs in decision-making, public policy and oversight processes and recognize their importance for social debate on public policies and the European integration process
- Public sector institutions of IPA beneficiary countries contribute to the strengthening of civil society by cooperating with it within the framework of strategic policies and relevant institutional mechanisms

3. Increased capacity and resilience of CSOs to carry out their activities more effectively

- CSOs are trained to act, they act transparently and responsibly
- CSO operations are vision-driven, strategically focused and evidence-based
- CSOs have adequate staff and financial resources

The EU is the main provider of financial assistance to BiH, in particular under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) II (2014-2020) with a total of EUR 539.6 million and EUR 309.8 million under IPA III (2021-2024). The foundations for EU accession – good governance, rule of law and human rights – receive 43.97% of assistance under IPA III, while 56.03% goes to targeted sustainable and inclusive

growth. EU assistance also includes funding for civil society and co-financing participation in Union programmes.[46]

BiH participates in three cross-border cooperation programs, as well as in transnational cooperation programs for the Adriatic-Ionian region and the Danube region.

BiH participates in eight EU programs: Fiscalis 2020, Customs 2020, Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME), Erasmus+, Creative Europe, Europe for Citizens, Horizon 2020, and the Health Program 2014-2020.

When it comes to mechanisms for involving civil society and strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation in the EU, it is important to mention the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The EESC represents a unique forum for consultation, dialogue and consensus-building among representatives of all different sectors of "organised civil society", which includes employers, trade unions and groups such as professional and local associations, youth organisations, women's associations, consumers, environmentalists and many others.[47]

The E SSO aims to help ensure a more democratic and effective creation of EU policies and laws that truly reflect the needs of EU citizens. Three basic tasks ESSO are:

- Advise the European Parliament, the Council and the EC.
- Make sure that the views of CSOs are listened to in Brussels and increase their awareness of the effect that EU legislation has on the lives of Union citizens.
- Support and strengthen organised civil society inside and outside the EU.

The ESSO resolution on the topic "Involvement of organised civil society in national recovery and resilience plans - What works and what doesn't?"[48], prepared on the basis of consultations held in 27 Mem-

[46] Report on BiH for 2024 https://www.dei.gov.ba/uploads/documents/izvjesce-o-bosni-i-hercegovini-za-2024-godinu_1730986501.pdf

[47] https://www.hgk.hr/egso/europski-gospodarski-i-socijalni-odbor-egso

[48] European Economic and Social Committee, (2021/C 155/01), Resolution of the European Economic and Social Committee on the topic "Involvement of organised civil society in national recovery and resilience plans - What works and what doesn't?" (based on consultations held in 27 Member States) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021XE0693

ber States, indicated that, although a large number of Member States foresee some form of consultation with CSOs when drafting recovery and resilience plans, significantly fewer of them enable their genuine participation in that process and the real effectiveness of the proposals that arise from that participation.

ESSO believes that the participation of civil society must go beyond the economic, social and environmental dimensions and extend to important areas such as the future of Europe or accession and pre-accession negotiations with candidate countries for EU membership.

According to Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing a Recovery and Resilience Facility, Member States are required to conduct their economic policies in a way that contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the Union and in the context of general guidelines established by the Council.[49] A Member State wishing to receive a financial contribution shall submit a recovery and resilience plan to the Commission. A plan for recovery and resilience must be properly explained and supported by evidence. It must specifically state the prescribed elements, among other things, for the development and, if possible, the implementation of the recovery and resilience plan, a summary of the consultation process, carried out in accordance with the national legal framework, with local and regional authorities, social partners, CSOs, youth organisations and other relevant actors, and the way in which the contribution of actors was taken into account in the recovery and resilience plan.

The conclusions on European democracy, adopted at the Conference on the Future of Europe on May 9, 2022, set out the objectives of greater citizen participation and stronger structures of participatory democracy and deliberative action. In view of the outcomes of the Conference on the Future of Europe and its important role, the ESSO presented various options that could serve as a blueprint for institutional reforms that would best serve its purpose.[50]

Among other things, ESSO will launch a European Civil Society Week to strengthen its role as the home of European civil society and to extend the reach of its flagship initiatives such as Civil Society Day, European Citizens' Initiative Day, Your Europe, Your Say (YEYS) and the Civil Society Awards. This initiative will bring together key actors in European and national civil society organisations and provide a forum for dialogue on issues of concern to civil society actors at European level. It will seek to

[49] Official Journal of the European Union of 18.2.2021, Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing a Recovery and Resilience Facility https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R0241

[50] https://www.odraz.hr/novosti/novosti-iz-egso-a/rezolucija-egso-a-ujedinjeni-za-demokraciju/

strengthen activities at local level to include as much as possible those whose opportunities to participate in debates on European issues are limited and to ensure that their voices are considered in decision-making processes.

CSOs appreciate that the announcement of the adoption of the Strategy for the Support, Empowerment and Protection of Civil Society within the framework of the European Commission's Work Programme for 2025 is a historic opportunity to strengthen democracy and reverse the long-standing trend of shrinking civic space.[51] The decision comes after a campaign by the ECF, and other actors, advocating for a strategy to address the widespread challenges affecting civil society in Europe – including hostile laws, funding restrictions, smear campaigns, harassment and SLAPP lawsuits.

It is important to mention that the EU is committed to achieving the 2030 Agenda. The Sustainable Development Goals are part of all Commission proposals, policies and strategies, as well as the Commission's annual work programmes.[52] The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals has been monitored by the EC since 2017 within the framework of annual reports on monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals.

Civil society must play a key role in the implementation of the Program for the period until 2030 at the world, regional and national level.

As a reminder, in 2016, ESSO called for the establishment of a European Civil Society Forum for Sustainable Development to promote and monitor the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[53] In this Forum, all stakeholders, including the Council, the Commission, the Parliament and civil society, should fully participate as key actors in order to make the Forum's work more transparent to European citizens and its accountability clearer. **The democratic implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the full involvement of CSOs at all levels, including monitoring and auditing**. It is proposed to establish a specific programme and funding line to support capacity building for CSOs so that they can fully participate in this process.

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[51] https://gong.hr/2025/02/12/eu-komisija-obecala-donijeti-strategiju-o-zastiti-i-osnazivanju-civilnog-drustva/

[52] https://croatia.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-pred-un-om-predstavio-pregled-provedbe-programa-odrzivog-razvoja-do-2030-2023-07-19_hr

[53] Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the topic Agenda for the period until 2030 - Commitment of the European Union to the achievement of the goals of sustainable development at the global level, Rapporteur: Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX%3A52016IE0758

VIII

MODELS OF COOPERATION AND EXPERIENCES OF CSOs IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE WESTERN BALKANS REGION AND THE EU IN THE (PRE)ACCESSION PROCESS

VIII. MODELS OF COOPERATION AND EXPERIENCES OF CSOS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS REGION AND THE EU IN THE (PRE)ACCESSION PROCESS

A. Republic of Serbia

The Republic of Serbia applied for EU membership in December 2009 and was granted candidate country status in March 2012. Accession negotiations between the EU and Serbia began in January 2014. So far, 22 negotiation chapters have been opened.

To successfully conduct negotiations on EU membership, which require a high level of coordination of all state institutions, the Republic of Serbia has formed several bodies to carry out this process. In accordance with the new methodology for accession negotiations in 2021, a new structure for conducting negotiations with the EU was formed and the institutions responsible for the European integration process were reorganised.

By decision of the Government of Serbia, the Coordination Body for the Conduct of Negotiations of the Republic of Serbia was established, headed by the Minister for European Integration, and the Negotiation Support Team, whose members are the coordinators of the six negotiation clusters. The position of Chief Negotiator was introduced, held by the Minister for European Integration.

The Coordination for the Conduct of Negotiations of the Republic of Serbia is responsible for the preparation and drafting of all proposals during the accession negotiations. In addition, its task is to direct and evaluate the work of the Negotiation Support Team.[54]

The Negotiation Support Team is established to perform the tasks of preparing and drafting negotiating positions for conducting negotiations on the accession of the Republic of Serbia to the EU and providing assistance to the authorized chief negotiator of the Republic of Serbia - the Minister in the Government responsible for European Integration in the process of conducting negotiations on the accession of the Republic of Serbia to the EU.

[54] Ministry for European Integration of the Republic of Serbia https://www.mei.gov.rs/srl/obuka/e-obuke/vodic-kroz-pregovore-srbije-i-evropske-unije/uvod/organizaciona-struktura-republike-srbije-za-vodjenje-pristupnih-pregovora/

The negotiation support team consists of:

- Coordinator of the areas covered by the negotiation cluster Basics
- Coordinator of EU policy areas covered by the Internal Market negotiation cluster
- Coordinators who jointly coordinate the policy areas of the Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth negotiation cluster
- Coordinators who jointly coordinate the policy areas of the Green Deal and Sustainable Connectivity negotiation cluster
- Coordinators who jointly coordinate the policy areas of the negotiating cluster Resources, Agriculture and Cohesion
- Coordinator of the policy area of the negotiation cluster Foreign Relations
- State Secretary or Assistant Minister in the Ministry responsible for finance specifically responsible for coordinating the fulfilment of the economic criteria included in the negotiating cluster Basis
- Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija or his/her deputy specifically responsible for coordinating the achievement of the implementation of commitments in the EU-facilitated dialogue included in the negotiating cluster Basis
- Head of the Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the EU - Ambassador
- representative of the Cabinet of the Prime Minister
- representative of the General Secretariat of the Government
- Head of Cabinet of the Chief Negotiator - Minister responsible for European Integration
- expert members

The Chief Negotiator - Minister for European Integration, at meetings of the Coordination for Conducting Accession Negotiations with the coordinators of policy areas of the negotiation clusters in the Negotiation Support Team, determines the work assignments, considers their implementation, assesses the contribution to the work of the Team, as well as the degree of preparation achieved by individual members of the Team within their scope of work.

Negotiating groups represent interdepartmental working bodies, whose members are representatives of institutions responsible for proposing and implementing regulations that are aligned with the EU acquis.

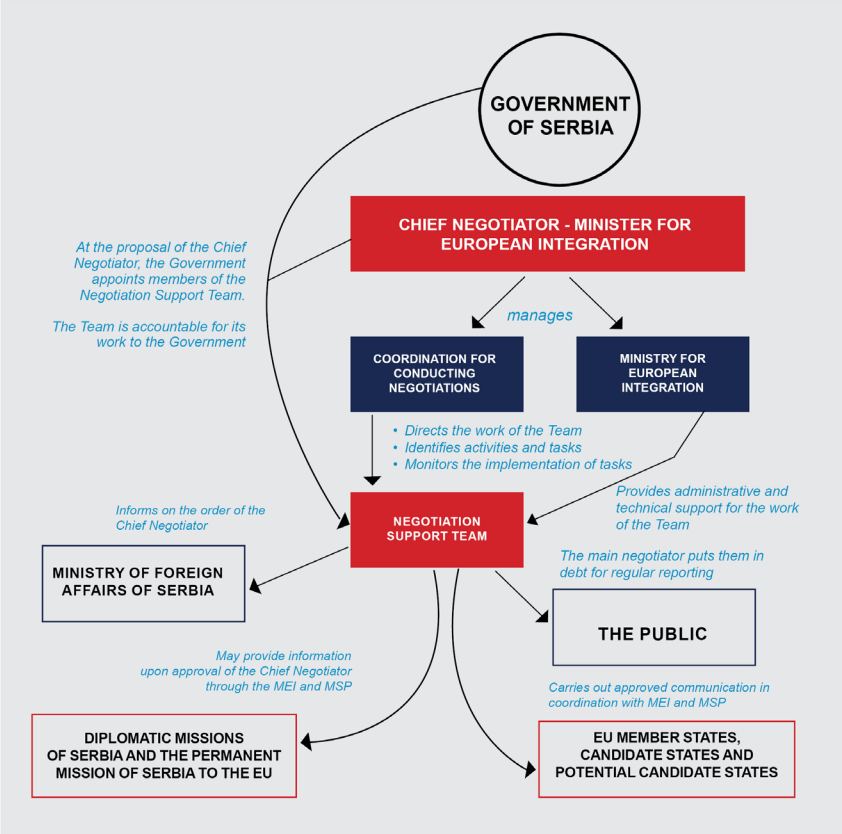
The Negotiation Support Team and the Ministry for European Integration participate in the work of all negotiating groups at all stages of the process.

In Serbia, CSOs are involved through the National Convention on the EU, but their involvement is often limited to consultations that are not binding.

According to our respondents, the key obstacle is the lack of a systemic mechanism that would ensure that the opinions and recommendations of CSOs have a real impact on the content of negotiation documents and public policies.

Nevertheless, their voice is still valued and heard in Brussels itself. For example, CSOs are invited every year by the EC to provide their feedback on the state of play in the negotiations between the EU and Serbia, thus exerting a significant influence on the content of the EC's annual reports. With these and other initiatives, CSOs exert an indirect but significant influence on the negotiations.

Figure 3. Negotiation structure in the Republic of Serbia



Source: Center for European Policies, Author: Strahinja Subotić, Program Manager and Senior Researcher
Designer: Anesa Omeragić, communications and event organisation coordinator

The National Convention on the EU has a formal role in the negotiation process, which is based on a memorandum signed in 2014 with the then parliament, and the position of the convention is reflected in the fact that, formally, the working groups of the National Convention have a role in approving the negotiating positions for each specific chapter. Therefore, the negotiating position developed by the state, which should go towards the EU to work out a common EU position, must undergo that final clearance by the CSOs gathered in the working group relevant to a specific chapter.

The National Convention on the EU[55] is an alliance of associations created with the aim of maintaining and promoting dialogue between representatives of the state administration, political parties, NGOs, experts, businesses, trade unions and professional organisations on Serbia's accession to the EU. The mission of the convention is to monitor, analyse and evaluate progress in the accession process, to advocate and present to the citizens of Serbia the benefits and costs of EU membership.

[55] https://euconvention.org/

Together with more than 850 member organisations, it represents the largest organised support for Serbia's integration into the EU. The Convention is made up of CSOs selected according to the criteria of expertise, representativeness, existing references and already formed networks. The main role of the working groups is to monitor, analyse and evaluate progress in negotiations with the EU in relevant chapters. The work of the Convention's working groups thematically follows the structure of the Negotiation Working Groups for Negotiations with the EU of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. There is also the possibility of joining in cross-sectoral working groups or establishing one or more subgroups in accordance with the complexity of the chapters they monitor. Working groups conceive their work and create programs completely autonomously.

In Serbia, there are separate working groups led by the state and civil society working groups that do shadow monitoring of what the state does.

Based on the experiences of the respondents, we learn that the process of involving civil society in 2015, 2016 and 2017 was quite constructive. That is, they had the right to jointly develop an action plan for Chapter 23, which, among other things, was the basis for adopting a common negotiating position. The Convention, or rather the working group, oversaw monitoring, shadow monitoring of it, and the government is obliged, in accordance with this agreed work model, to report to CSOs twice a year on the progress it has made in certain aspects. According to the respondents, the situation changed drastically from 2017 to 2020, when the attempt to reform the judiciary in accordance with Chapter 23 began, when the ministry tried to present its own version of what the system should look like, which was opposed not only by CSOs, but also by professional associations and certain high courts.

The current situation in terms of the environment in which civil society operates in Serbia is very unfavourable, and this is not a new trend, according to respondents. This is something that has been improving since 2018, but in the last year there has been an extreme decline in the enabling environment for civil society to operate.

In February of this year, the National Convention decided to freeze all activities related to communication with the political level of the Government and the National Assembly. They left the possibility of cooperation at the technical level, because these connections must be maintained regardless of who is currently in power. This includes cooperation with people who are employed in ministries, who deal with certain areas, for a certain level of cooperation to survive.

The Convention made such a decision due to the situation in the country, namely the treatment of protesters by the government and the increasingly frequent attacks on civil society, including members of the National Convention.

While the Convention made this decision, a group of CSOs decided to withdraw from all working groups and bodies that are under the auspices of the government or the assembly and that they will avoid participation in this type of format until further notice, unless it is about something that would significantly improve human rights.

Based on the author's interviews, relevant civil society, especially in the context of European integration, currently has no type of communication with the government or the National Assembly, until the conditions that led to a break in communication change, which is primarily a specific attack on CSOs and fake court proceedings against them, and the failure to meet the demands of protesters on the streets.

When it comes to capacities, especially CSO expertise, the situation differs from working group to working group, because the composition of working groups different. Some include individual experts, others include representatives of CSOs, representatives of judicial associations and other types of associations, for example employers or trade unions, and even university representatives in several working groups.

The motley composition is most often in the economic chapters, where it is much more difficult to find CSOs that deal with exactly those topics, which is why efforts are being made to ensure a wider composition.

In addition to the National Convention, there is a prEUgovor Coalition in Serbia, which consists of seven CSOs. The coalition's mission is to monitor the implementation of policies in the areas of judiciary and fundamental rights (Chapter 23) and justice, freedom and security (Chapter 24) and propose measures to improve the situation.[56]

Furthermore, there is Coalition 27, which was founded by CSOs in 2014 primarily to monitor and contribute to negotiations related to Chapter 27 (now in Cluster 4) – Environment and Climate Change.[57]

The Strategy (2022-2030) for creating an enabling environment for the development of civil society in Serbia was adopted in February 2022, and the Council for Development and Cooperation with Civil Society was formed, whose mandate is to monitor and analyse the situation and make proposals for improvement in areas such as freedom of association and freedom of assembly; freedom of expres-

[56] https://preugovor.org/prEUgovor/121/O-nama.shtml
[57] https://www.koalicija27.org/o-koaliciji-27/

sion; inclusion of citizens in the decision-making process, transparency and access to information; legal framework for the operation of organisations (legal and financial framework of operation); financing from public funds; philanthropy; provision of services; volunteering, non-formal education and civic activism . This working body also aims to monitor the implementation of the Strategy and the implementation of the accompanying action plans. However, the Strategy has remained at the document level, and the Council does not meet.

There are over 30,000 registered associations in Serbia (mostly in urban areas, mostly in Belgrade and Vojvodina), the vast majority of which face insufficient capacities for activism or advocacy. According to respondents, among these organisations are the GONGO organisations established by the ruling party for the purpose of distributing - misusing budget funds and to simulate public support.

CSOs operating at the local level mostly implement ad hoc projects for which they apply mainly for very limited financial resources from local governments. Transparency and sustainability are additional challenges, since funds are allocated locally through competitions, but mostly in a non-transparent manner, and it is almost impossible to find publicly published monitoring or evaluation reports on the implementation and effects of these projects. The sustainability of local CSOs largely depends on their capacities to develop projects for international donors, provide services, network and build local-regional partnerships.

The obligation of public consultation when adopting public policies exists through the Guidelines, but it is not implemented consistently, which especially applies to the local government level. A positive example is the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Government which has shown readiness for participation and cooperation with civil society. For example, CSOs participated in working groups when drafting the action plan for public administration reform.

The key documents on which the cooperation between the civil and government sectors relies, with a focus on the area of European integration, are:

- Government work program and sector strategies.
- Reform agenda of the Republic of Serbia within the Reform and Growth Instrument.
- Economic Reform Program (ERP).
- National program for the adoption of the EU acquis.

The Reform Agenda (2024) implies that civil society has a role in monitoring sectoral areas, but the continued easy acceptance of many reform obligations, the adoption of emergency regulations to only formally meet the criteria have become common practice. However, civil society did not have any real participation in defining reform steps within the Reform Agenda of the Republic of Serbia. The Ministry

for European Integration coordinated cooperation between state actors in the development of that document, but cooperation with civil society was minimal and limited to informing about the process.

There are good practices, especially in the field of public administration reform (PAR), where the recommendations of the WeBER[58] initiative are integrated into national documents (e.g. North Macedonia, Albania, Serbia), and civil society representatives are included in working groups, as is the case with the inclusion of the WeBER National Working Group for PAR in Serbia (a working group with 28 CSO members) in the Inter-Ministerial Project Group for Monitoring the PAR Strategy in Serbia for 2021. Also, public administrations in WB countries have adopted several recommendations from previous cycles of monitoring public administration reform within the WeBER initiative, which has led to improvements in various areas of PAR. Additionally, in line with the recommendations from the WeBER policy brief, the public administrations of the WB have started publishing conclusions from the meetings of the Special Groups for PAR, which monitor the implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) in the candidate countries.

Furthermore, the recommendations of the European Policy Center, developed through the Operational Strategic Grant funded by the EUD for 2023, have been included in the Economic Reform Program of Serbia (ERP). Although encouraging, such cases are still the exception, not the rule.

Civil society in Serbia demonstrates a high level of professionalism and expertise, especially in areas related to good governance, public administration reform, the rule of law and European integration.

Through initiatives coordinated by the European Policy Center, such as WeBER, organisations in Serbia but also in the Western Balkans region have demonstrated their ability to conduct analytical work, advocate for change, and collaborate with institutions and international actors (SIGMA/OECD, DEU). However, key challenges remain limited institutional dialogue with authorities, formalistic approaches to public participation without real impact (e.g. consultations that are ineffective or organised late), and insufficient funding for the work of CSOs outside the capital and larger cities (funding limited to opportunities through small grant programs that are project-funded).

[58] The Center for European Policies is the coordinator of the consultative WeBER platform in which CSOs from the WB participate. Through this regional platform, they promote and improve dialogue with relevant institutions on the public administration reform (PAR) process, which is taking place in parallel in the WB countries. https://cep.org.rs/partnerstva/weber-platforma-2/

B. Republic of Montenegro

Accession to the European Union is defined as one of the foreign policy priorities, through the Constitution of Montenegro, as well as numerous international obligations undertaken through a series of ratified international acts.

The EU integration process began with the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement in 2007, while accession negotiations were officially opened in 2012. When forming the negotiating structure, the Government of Montenegro made a decision that enabled CSOs to become an integral part of this structure. Thus, representatives of non-governmental organisations are included in the working groups for all 33 chapters. This is a unique example in the Western Balkans that CSO representatives are directly included in the working groups for negotiations. Since 2020, when the last chapter 8 – Competition was opened, all 33 negotiating chapters have been opened, and 3 have been temporarily closed – chapters 25 – Science and Research, 26 – Education and Culture, and 30 – External Relations.[59]

The participation of civil society in the European integration process is regulated by a series of legal, by-law and strategic acts:

- **Regulation on the election of NGO representatives to working bodies of state administration bodies and the conduct of public debate in the preparation of laws and strategies** ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", No. 41/2018), which establishes the criteria and procedure for the election of NGO representatives to working groups and other working bodies established by state administration bodies, as well as the procedure and manner of conducting public debate in the preparation of laws and strategies.
- **The Decision on the Establishment of a Structure for Negotiations on Montenegro's Accession to the EU** ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", No. 112/2022) defines a structure consisting of:
    - Negotiations Committee
    - Rule of Law Council
    - Negotiation team
    - Negotiating working groups for each individual chapter

[59] Marković, Z, Knežević, P, 2022, Analysis of the participation of civil society organisations in the European integration process in 2022, Center for the Development of Non-Governmental Organisations (CRNVO)

CSO representatives are included in the negotiating working groups and the Rule of Law Council, based on the Regulation on the election of NGO representatives to working bodies of state administration bodies and the implementation of public debate in the preparation of laws and strategies.

- **Decisions on the establishment of negotiating working groups for the preparation and conduct of negotiations on Montenegro's accession to the EU for each individual chapter**[60]
- **Strategy for informing the public about Montenegro's accession to the European Union 2019-2022**[61]

In 2022, there were a total of 37 NGO representatives in the 33 negotiating working groups at one point. NGOs were not represented in equal numbers in all negotiating working groups: their representation depended on the activities and orientation of NGOs in individual areas of the acquis and their interest in certain areas. The highest number of NGO representatives was in chapters 11 – Agriculture and Rural Development (5 members), 19 – Social Policy and Employment (6 members), 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights (6 members until September 2022, currently 3 members), and 27 – Environmental Protection (5 members). There were no NGO representatives in the working groups for chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17, 21, 22, 25, 29, 30, 31, 33.[62]

One of the challenges identified through the analysis is the dissatisfaction of NGO representatives due to their perceived inadequate status in working groups, which is reflected in disrespect for their positions, outvoting, and lack of deliberation in decision-making. This leads to the nominal inclusion of NGO representatives in the work, while their substantive contribution is not reflected in the final results. This leads to dissatisfaction and a decrease in interest among NGO representatives to apply for participation in working bodies.

The NGO Development Center implemented a project that involved forming a coalition of non-governmental organisations that would monitor Chapters 23 and 24. They brought together about 30

[60] Decisions are available at: www.eu.me, and www.sluzbenilist.me

[61] Strategy for informing the public about Montenegro's accession to the European Union 2019-2022. Available at: https://wapi.gov.me/download-preview/2340a0e9-3df3-4a9b-9d8f-866f25eec3b8?version=1.0.

[62] Marković, Z, Knežević, P, 2022, Analysis of the participation of civil society organisations in the European integration process in 2022, Center for the Development of Non-Governmental Organisations (CRNVO).

organisations for that project, and they are still active today when it comes to some of the issues related to Chapters 23 and 24. Based on their initiative, other organisations joined forces within Chapter 27 Environment.

Based on the interviews conducted, when it comes to cooperation between government institutions and civil society, the situation can be assessed as correct, but declaratively. Participants state that the legally guaranteed participation mechanisms were often largely circumvented, whether due to the need for speed in some processes or for other reasons, but this has not changed in relation to some other processes that were taking place from which civil society was completely excluded.

One of the participants noted, *"This process is still not recognized as a real need of state administration bodies and as something that contributes to making these processes better, to making them quality documents that will be adopted, which will determine the strategic framework for a future period. Those non-governmental organisations that have a critical view of what state authorities are doing are, as in the previous period, exposed to significant pressure, and this year some very dirty campaigns have started again. The situation, if not worse, is certainly not more favourable than in the previous period. We have enabled participation in working groups, not only for representatives of non-governmental organisations, but also for other professional organisations and the academic community, experts, etc. For our ministries, at that moment it was significant that they included non-governmental organisations, because they had neither the knowledge nor the expertise in preparing strategic documents. Initially, we had great interest from representatives of non-governmental organisations, we have a regulation according to which NGO representatives are elected to working bodies. In accordance with that regulation, they were also elected to negotiating structures, there was a large number of registered candidates from NGOs. Enthusiasm was visible and the process was unusual. What happened after that is the fact of how those working groups worked. How the contribution of non-governmental organisations was accepted. How they had the opportunity and obligation to participate, led to a significantly lower interest and response in subsequent calls. Some bodies failed to form because there were no NGO representatives interested in applying. All of this is equally reflected in the segment related to European integration. Especially considering the closed nature of those working groups, especially considering the unavailability of information, especially considering that at one time even the opinions of the European Commission were not available to representatives of non-governmental organisations.*

Within the framework of the regional project: Regional Convention on European Integration (2014-2015), a cooperation model called the National Convention for the Integration of Montenegro into the

EU was created in Montenegro.[63] However, no information was collected during the research on the activities of this convention in the period after the project.

One of the respondents shared his experiences in CSO networking:

"*There were attempts to coordinate, to report together. The strongest were the organisations for environmental protection, gender equality, and they were able to connect and cooperate, but the connection remained more in the environment* ."

When it comes to financing CSOs, as our respondents stated, there are funds for NGOs in every ministry. There used to be a fund for games of chance, but it was abolished.

"*Now all ministries have funds, all municipalities have funds for NGOs. These are not large funds, but there is stability. In addition to the institutional support that the state provides, it is a very good thing that in 2018 a fund was created for co-financing EU funds, a minimum of 10%, 15%, 20%, which is actually the existence, or salary for organisations. Of course, it must be applied for and that is very good* ."

According to the CSO registry[64], there were 7,005 registered CSOs in Montenegro by the end of 2023. The report shows that CSOs face challenges that hinder their work. After years of efforts, the working group for the preparation of the new NGO Law has not yet submitted a draft, and progress is unknown due to the lack of transparency in the process.

Civil society enjoys a considerable level of freedom of expression, with sporadic and new threats coming, in some cases, from high-ranking government officials. SLAPPs are present to a small extent, with several active cases. There is no systemic response to this threat, which leads CSOs and activists to rely on their own capacities.

As this report states, civil society has many complaints about the distribution of grants by line ministries and municipalities, accusing commissions and grant recipients of abuses.

In Montenegro, the Strategy for Cooperation between State Administration Bodies and Non-Governmental Organisations 2022–2026 is in force, which regulates the relationship of cooperation between

[63] https://www.emins.org/regionalni-konvent-o-evropskoj-integraciji/

[64] Knežević, P, 2024, Monitoring matrix for monitoring the enabling environment for civil society development Report for Montenegro, Center for the Development of Non-Governmental Organisations (CRNVO) https://balkancsd.net/novo/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Monitoring-matrica-za-pracenje-podsticajnog-okruzenja-za-razvoj-civilnog-drustva-u-Crnoj-Gori-2023.pdf.

state administration bodies and NGOs.[65] The strategic goal is to ensure a long-term, reliable and quality partnership between the state and NGOs. The document has two operational objectives, namely:

- Improving the existing normative and strategic framework for long-term partnerships with NGOs
- Strengthening the capacity of the NGO sector to cooperate with the state in preparing public policies and providing services to citizens.

The new strategy, in addition to improving the existing normative and institutional framework for the work of NGOs and improving the capacity of public administration for cooperation with the NGO sector, presents a set of new activities related to the digitalization of the procedure for registering NGOs, publishing all data on their work and their financing, creating conditions for financing resource centres, especially volunteer centres, calls for innovations in the non-governmental sector and youth employment. in this sector, which determine a different approach to further cooperation and the creation of non-governmental sector as a strong partner of the state in the process of creating public policies, Montenegro's accession to the EU and the provision of better services to citizens.

C. Republic of North Macedonia

North Macedonia applied for EU membership in March 2004. In November 2005, the Commission published an opinion on North Macedonia's application for EU membership and recommended that the country be granted candidate country status.

North Macedonia was granted the status of a candidate country in December 2005.[66]

According to the 2023 North Macedonia Country Report, the overall environment for CSOs in North Macedonia is generally supportive, but there are areas that require improvement. The government should step up its efforts to integrate civil society engagement into priority areas and consultation

[65] Strategic document planned by the Work Programme of the Government of Montenegro for 2022 and the EU Accession Programme of Montenegro 2022–2023 https://smartbalkansproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Strategija-saradnje-organa-drzavne-uprave-i-nevladinih-organizacija.pdf.

[66] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/hr/policies/republic-north-macedonia/.

processes. CSOs should play a significant role in the reform agenda and be actively involved in decision-making processes.[67]

The number of registered CSOs in 2023 was 11,922.

One of the biggest challenges for civil society in North Macedonia is the lack of a model for state financing of civil society, although the Council for Civil Society and Government Cooperation worked on a model for state financing of civil society in previous years (2018-2020). Among other things, CSOs proposed that the state create a foundation or fund based on the Croatian model for co-financing projects financed by the EU. These are projects that civil society is working on for the integration of North Macedonia into the EU and should ensure co-financing that is difficult to obtain. This model was generally accepted by the government at that time. Legal provisions were created and integrated into the then proposal for amendments to the Law on Associations and Foundations. However, after the change of government after the elections, this process was stopped.

Furthermore, although there are various institutional mechanisms for civil society involvement, the actual involvement of this sector has not yet been fully achieved. CSOs have proposed a model for the inclusion of civil society in the negotiation structure, drawing on the knowledge and capacity of this sector. However, the negotiation process did not start, although it passed the Screening.

The general assessment of civil society representatives is that citizens do not trust institutions, while CSOs are there to establish a bridge between citizens and institutions, because citizens often cannot understand the language spoken by CSOs.

The institutional involvement of CSOs in the accession process, directly, as is the case with Montenegro (participation in the work of government institutions and working bodies) and indirectly, in a consultative manner (through the establishment of national CSO conventions that monitor the progress of accession negotiations and provide recommendations on negotiating positions), as is the case with Serbia, is not new, but it is also not immune to obstruction by the authorities.[68]

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[67] Stanoevski, D. Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, 2024, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation https://balkancsd.net/novo/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Country_Report_for_2023_MM_in_North_Macedonia.pdf

[68] Nikolovski, I, 2020, Civil Society Organisations and European Integration of North Macedonia: Towards Strategic Participation and Transparent Accession Negotiations, Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) in North Macedonia https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CSO-and-accession-negotiations.pdf

The role of civil society in the integration process was first recognized and encouraged by the Parliament's resolution on the priorities for North Macedonia's EU accession in 2007. According to that resolution, the Parliament committed to including CSOs in all activities aimed at intensifying accession negotiations and recommended that the Government use all potential in society.

Over the years, CSOs have been consulted (through a public call) during the drafting of the National Program for the Adoption of the EU Acquis (NPAA), as well as in connection with the distribution of IPA funds.

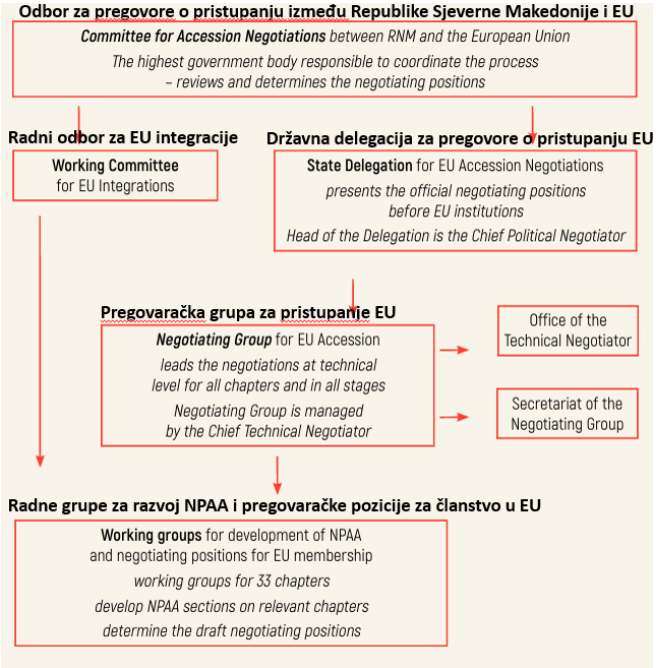
Furthermore, CSOs, among other things, are involved in the work of several bodies of the Government and Parliament, with direct or indirect responsibilities regarding the European integration process, such as the National Council for European Integration, the Council for Cooperation and Development of Civil Society, the Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Judicial Reform Strategy, the Council for Civilian Oversight of Security Services, as well as in working groups of individual ministries and IPA sectoral groups.

The country's negotiating structure is defined by seven Government decisions published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia on 1 August 2019. The involvement of CSOs is prescribed by Article 6 of the Decision on the Establishment of Working Groups for the Preparation of the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) and the Development of Negotiating Positions for EU Membership Negotiations, which stipulates:

“Members of the working group may include representatives of state bodies, services of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, ministries and other state administration bodies and administrative organisations, legal entities entrusted with the exercise of public powers, regulatory bodies, judicial bodies, local self-government units, business community and chambers of commerce, trade unions, academic community and civil society, as well as other stakeholders.”

Co-creation exists in the development of the plan within the Open Government Partnership - the government and civil society co-create the plan together.

Figure 4. Negotiation structure of North Macedonia[69]



The key national document on which the cooperation between the government and the civil sector relies is the Strategy for Cooperation and Development of Civil Society and its Action Plan for the period 2022-2024, which were adopted in December 2021. Key priorities are improving the legal framework for civil society development, improving the institutional framework for cooperation between the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, state institutions and CSOs, as well as developing an appropriate fiscal framework for CSOs that considers the specificities of CSOs and enables their development and operation, including the adoption of an appropriate state financing model.[70]

A positive example of cooperation between the government and civil society is the creation of the portal https://open.finance.gov.mk/mk/home where all payments are publicly presented. This was an initiative through the Open Government Partnership[71] and civil society collaborated with the Ministry of Finance to improve transparency and accountability at the state level.

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[69] Petrovska, I, 2021, Guide on Institutional Mechanisms for Civil Society Participation in Policy-Making Related to EU Integration, Foundation Open Society – Macedonia, with translation of body names

[70] https://eu4cr.mk/news/the-strategy-for-cooperation-with-and-development-of-civil-society-2022-2024-adopted/#

[71] The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a global multilateral initiative for transparency and openness in the work of public authorities, and its participants are countries that, by becoming members of

Another example is the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest, a new law created in 2019. The government accepted the model requested by civil society that the Independent State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption be elected in a transparent manner with the participation of civil society in the commission that selects members. The state adopted a policy that was agreed upon.

Furthermore, the process of drafting the 2019 Freedom of Access to Information Act was transparent and the law was improved at a time when it was being brought closer to the EU.

According to available data, BiH has a higher number of CSOs per 1,000 inhabitants than Macedonia and Serbia, which have almost twice the population of BiH. Given the estimate that the number of active CSOs is realistically lower than the total number of active organisations in the Aggregate Register, it can be concluded that the available data does not reflect the real situation.

D. Republic of Croatia

On July 1, 2013, the Republic of Croatia became the twenty-eighth member of the EU. Croatia's European integration journey lasted more than twelve years. It formally began in 2001 with the signing of the SAA, while Croatia submitted its application for membership in 2003. Croatia received candidate status in 2004, and negotiations began in 2005, which ended in 2011, and the EU Accession Treaty was signed in December of the same year.

The structure for negotiations on the accession of the Republic of Croatia to the EU was established by the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia of April 7, 2005. The decision determined the composition and scope of the bodies that make up the structure for conducting negotiations and concluding the Treaty on the Accession of the Republic of Croatia to the EU, and state administration bodies were designated as leaders and their deputies for each negotiation chapter.

The decision established the following bodies within the negotiating structure:

- State delegation of the Republic of Croatia for negotiations on the accession of the Republic of Croatia to the EU.
- Coordination for negotiations on the accession of the Republic of Croatia to the EU.

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the Partnership, commit to specific measures and actions in the areas of transparency, strengthening citizen participation in government, fighting corruption, and introducing new technologies that make public administration as efficient as possible.

- Negotiating group for conducting negotiations on the accession of the Republic of Croatia to the EU.
- Working groups for the preparation of negotiations by individual chapters of the negotiations - acquis of the EU.
- Office of the Chief Negotiator.
- Secretariat of the Negotiating Group.

Coordination for Negotiations - a temporary interdepartmental working body of the Government of the Republic of Croatia - whose members were the Deputy Prime Ministers, ministers and the Chief Negotiator according to their function. It is the only body of direct two-way communication between the executive and legislative branches. The procedural function referred to discussing all issues in the negotiation process, appointing members of working groups for individual negotiation chapters and confirming negotiating positions. The practical function was achieving consensus among departments on important issues at the ministerial level, and before the Government sessions when final decisions are made.

Working groups for the preparation of negotiations by individual chapters, within the mandate, had the following tasks:

- To participate in the analytical review and assessment of legislative compliance (screening), and in the development of draft proposals for negotiating positions, with the support of state administration bodies or other bodies designated as responsible for a particular chapter of the EU acquis and the European coordinator of that body. "According to data from 2010, approximately a third were not representatives of the state administration - 1868 members at the end of the process, including representatives of CSOs.
- Gathering and connecting expertise inside and outside the state administration.

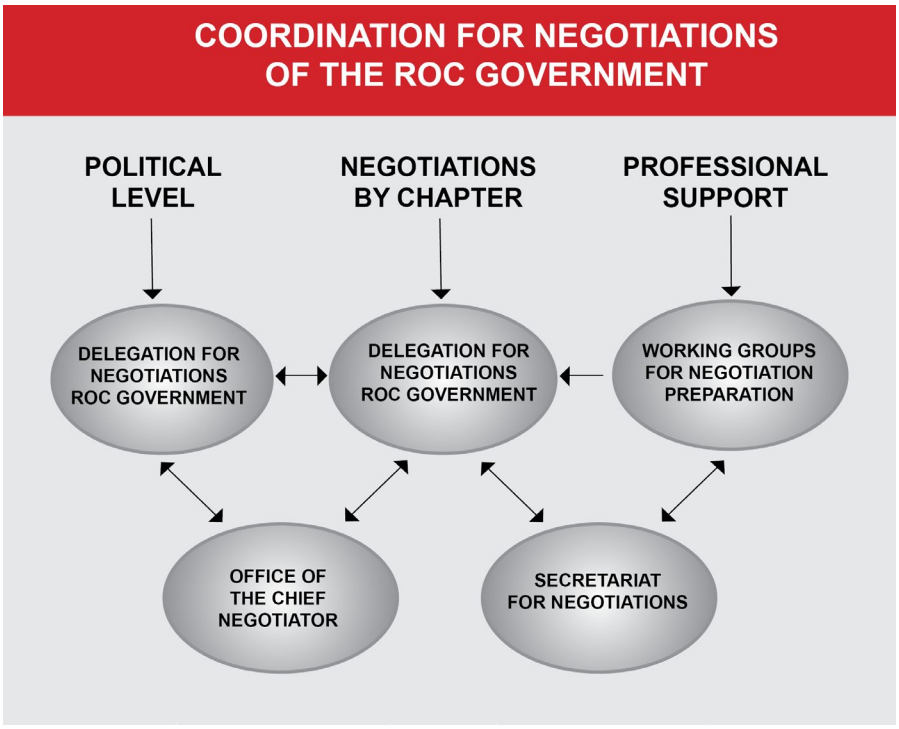
There were differences in the extent of involvement in the negotiations themselves - depending on the negotiator. The problem was that the obligations, rights and manner of communication between negotiators and working group members were not defined.

The National Committee for Monitoring the Negotiations on the Accession of the Republic of Croatia to the EU is a special working body of the Croatian Parliament established at the beginning of the negotiations in 2005 as a mechanism for ensuring political consensus regardless of changes in government which:

- Supervises and evaluates the course of negotiations, gives opinions and guidelines on negotiating positions on behalf of the Croatian Parliament,
- Considers and gives opinions on issues that arise during negotiations,
- Holds regular consultations with the head of delegation and the chief negotiator on the course of negotiations, gives an opinion on the harmonisation of Croatian legislation with the acquis.

In addition to representatives of parliamentary parties (an equal number), members included representatives of the economy, trade unions, the academic community, and the President of the Republic of Croatia, but not CSOs, or more precisely, associations.

Figure 5. Structure of negotiations at the Government level[72]



In the process of joining the EU, there was pressure on the Croatian government and state institutions for cooperation with CSOs to be at a higher level. With the very entry into the EU, there was a decline in cooperation. According to respondents, it depends on the composition of the government and various other factors.

[72] Overview of the negotiation process between the Republic of Croatia and the EU with a focus on the role of the public and civil society. Prepared by: Marina Škrabalo, Gordan Bosanac and Sandra Benčić with the professional support of Mirna Vlašić Feketija, former secretary of coordination of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for negotiations Belgrade, 07/05/2013. https://www.slideserve.com/ziazan/pregled-pregovara-kog-procesa-izme-u-rh-i-eu-s-fokusom-na-ulogu-javnosti-i-civilnog-dru-tva.

Factors that influenced success were:

- Extreme political importance of the topic for the political elite.
- EC and Member States openness to and interest in the opinion of civil society organisations.
- Reputation and credibility of organisations that were members of the coalition in the public, the media, but also in relation to political institutions within the sector - mutual value recognition and familiarity, trust in the editorial board.
- Ongoing monitoring of reforms.
    - Good knowledge of the problem.
    - The ability to quickly collect and process relevant information from various sources.
    - The spectrum of contacts from citizens to relevant institutions.
- Experience of cooperation with the media and developed contacts.
- Joint effort
    - Participatory planning and analysis, distribution of responsibilities.
    - Flexibility and availability of individual experts and organisations for last-minute clarifications.

In the period of the 2000s, when Croatia was in the period of accession, it pointed out some examples of good practice. The Council for the Development of Civil Society, the National Foundation for the Development of Civil Society[73], and the Office for NGOs of the Republic of Croatia were established. In that period, those institutions had quite good and concrete, meaningful cooperation with CSOs, the opinion of the organisations was considered through the negotiation process, through public consultations. It can be said that Croatia was a leader in the region, and more broadly in Europe, in terms of institutional mechanisms for the development of civil society.

[73] The National Foundation is the leading public institution for cooperation, networking and financing of CSOs in the Republic of Croatia. The National Foundation was registered in the Foundation Register on 24 November 2003, with a founding capital of two million kuna and a continuous inflow of funds from a portion of the income from games of chance and state budget funds, income from its own activities and participation in financial support programs from international sources and EU programs. The Foundation provides professional and financial support to programs that encourage the sustainability of the non-profit sector, cross-sector cooperation, civic initiatives, philanthropy, volunteering, which improve the democratic institutions of society, as well as other programs that achieve the fundamental purpose of the Foundation. For more information, see https://zaklada.civilnodrustvo.hr/zaklada.

After joining the EU, especially after 2016, cooperation began to decline, although these institutions still exist. Not only the National Foundation, but also the Office for NGOs of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, which began to participate in exhausting CSOs with excessive bureaucratization, with large delays and delays in payments, with excessively rigorous and strict controls, with the dilution of civil society activities and the depoliticization of civil society activities.

The Operational Program *Effective Human Resources,* through which funds from the European Social Fund were channelled to the National Foundation for the Development of Civil Society, still exists today, and many have applied for projects in that area. These were often programs and projects oriented towards the critical role of civil society, active citizenship, volunteering, the watchdog role of CSOs, critical thinking, etc. However, in recent years this has not happened anymore. Competitions are only announced for social services that certain organisations provide for various marginalized groups: people with disabilities, people with learning disabilities, and this part for organisations engaged in critical work has been completely marginalized, even eliminated.

The National strategy for the development of civil society has expired, a new one has not been adopted, according to respondents, the process has been blocked by the ruling structures. The introduction of civic education was also stopped. It is implemented only at a local level, in a few cities.

“In the process of accession to the EU, the EU was like a mentor or a great teacher, some source of power that could always "pressure" the government to do something, to enter into some reform, to pass some new law, because then every government, regardless of the mandate, always took care to satisfy, if not all, the majority of the needs arising from the accession process and obligations," said one of the interviewees.

In the pre-accession period, Platform 112 was active in Croatia, which was practically an advocacy network, gathering around 70 CSOs. The platform also had 112 in its name because they agreed on 112 demands towards the government, and then from year to year they somehow pushed those demands in different areas, from open government, democratic standards, the fight against corruption, issues related to dealing with the past, national minorities, environmental protection, etc.

According to the respondents, this gathering started relatively late, considering the accession process. Platform 112 was active for about three years after accession, which is a fairly short period, and it was very late that CSOs began to become more strongly and actively involved in this process.

The situation in the civil sector in Croatia today is formally regulated by various laws. There is the Law on Associations, as well as various other laws that are ()related. Formally, CSOs should have all the

rights guaranteed to them by those laws, which are in line with European values, the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, etc.

In recent years, CSOs have been faced with a shrinking space for civil society to operate in practice. This is happening in various ways. One of them is the reduction in funding, the reduction in the availability of public calls for funding for NGO projects, which are becoming fewer and fewer at the national level, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain any funds from public sources.

One aspect is tokenization, the inclusion of CSOs in the decision-making process, but in a way that the organisations are invited only pro-forma, to sit in working bodies, councils, groups, etc. But their recommendations, advice, opinions are not considered.

In Croatia, there is an e-consultation mechanism. CSOs, as well as citizens, can give their comments in the phase of adopting laws and other acts. It takes place online. However, the vast majority of these recommendations and opinions are not considered. Sometimes "cosmetic" changes are eventually accepted.

In a growing number of working groups, interdepartmental bodies and other bodies where CSOs should in principle be included in the process of adopting public policies, more and more people are being appointed who are not from civil society, who are often representatives of state institutions.

The big challenge is in terms of capacity and cross-sector cooperation. There is a big difference in the development of CSOs in smaller communities compared to Zagreb and larger communities. Likewise, in terms of cooperation between civil society and the entrepreneurial and academic sectors.

In recent years, in Croatia, there has been a noticeable negative trend of creating a public perception, i.e. image of civil society as an enemy, i.e. "foreign mercenaries" and so on. Attacks on civil society are increasingly being carried out in the media, including by politicians and various political parties. Classic stories are insinuated that it is about people "sucking" public money, while the National Foundation is not financed by taxes and is not in the state budget.

IX CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IX. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Strengthening cooperation between the government and civil society sectors in BiH in the European integration process

- **Change the culture of partnership - from a culture of closure to a culture of transparency**

Public participation is an important element of good governance and has a key value in improving democratic decision-making. Good governance implies decision-making that is participatory, inclusive, accountable and transparent.

The complex socio-economic and political context in BiH, the imbalance of power, the dysfunctional governance structures and the lack of information make it difficult for citizens to participate in the decision-making process in BiH. The analysis of the situation has shown a constant weakening of the role of civil society. Citizen initiatives are often marginalized, while the participation of CSOs in the development and implementation of public policies is reduced to satisfying the form, rather than the essence.

One of the biggest challenges for the civil sector is the insufficient openness of the authorities to cooperation, along with the accompanying lack of transparency in the decision-making process. In this regard, additional efforts are needed from the authorities, along with well-coordinated action by civil society, which, in cooperation with government institutions, could guide and direct various actors within civil society in the EU integration process, relying on and at the same time improving the capacities of existing resource centres. It is particularly important to ensure the involvement of a diverse and broad spectrum of civil society actors - such as employers' associations, trade unions, the academic community, etc. The main prerequisite is that institutions are more open to such a form of cooperation, not only formally and legally, but also in a substantive sense.

- **Define a model for structured dialogue through a Platform and include civil society in all processes and phases related to BiH's accession to the EU**

Despite the existing consultative mechanisms in the form of rules for drafting laws, regulations and rules of procedure regulating the procedure for public debates on draft laws, etc., legal acts of local governments, etc., it is evident that civil society participation in decision-making processes is insufficient. This is most vividly demonstrated in public consultation processes. The key reasons are general distrust in the work of public institutions, lack of capacity of CSOs to participate in consultations on

certain and specific topics, insufficiently developed awareness of the culture of participation, sometimes short deadlines defined by institutions for conducting consultations, and lack of information.

The experiences of CSOs in BiH and other countries in the region show that the (full) inclusion of civil society does not depend only on legislative possibilities, but above all, it is necessary to create a favourable environment to encourage civil society to participate more actively. Visibility and availability of information about the process and activities in European integration by research participants - representatives of civil society was generally assessed as low. Meaningful citizen participation requires, above all, that participants are provided with unbiased, comprehensive information and documents written in a way that can be easily understood, regardless of the level of education of the participants. Therefore, in this process, it is necessary **to ensure a regular meaningful dialogue and** the availability of information to civil society, primarily through existing institutional mechanisms. It is necessary to establish/define clear criteria and rules according to which cooperation will take place, ensure compliance with procedural deadlines, as well as access to information, and timely and complete information for all participants.

When it comes to the pre-accession process, it is important that the initiative to increase civil society participation comes from the sector itself, i.e. from below. In cooperation with DEI and other institutional actors, relevant CSOs (regarding thematic experience and expertise) could propose an adequate model of cooperation which will be inclusive and transparent, which is planned within the next phase of the IREI project. In this process, it is necessary to ensure that civil society is included in all phases of the EU integration process, from the very beginning, not only through participation in the development of certain documents, but also through monitoring the process and receiving feedback from institutions. To be able to participate equally and monitor the European integration process, CSOs need to have the same knowledge and information about this process as government institutions. CSO education needs to be approached systematically through the engagement of all relevant stakeholders, unlike previous experiences based mainly on the use of ad-hoc opportunities.

While in Serbia, there are separate working groups led by the state and working groups of civil society that shadow monitor what the state does, in Montenegro, civil society representatives participate in the work of joint working groups.

Dialogue between CSOs and institutions should be as structured as possible, with clearly specified roles, deadlines for execution, and dynamics of cooperation.

Relevant sources estimate that around 60% of the EU acquis is implemented at the local government level. Therefore, special importance should be given to the role of local communities. The key recommendation in this section is:

- **Ensure greater involvement of local authorities and local CSOs in the EU accession process**

Local authorities are not sufficiently informed or involved in the European integration process, nor are local CSOs. Cooperation between local authorities and civil society is generally considered to be underdeveloped. It is necessary to work on greater involvement of local authorities, in parallel with local CSOs, in this process.

It is also necessary to strengthen the capacities of both mentioned sectors for participation in EU integration, to be better prepared to participate in the future negotiation process. Formalized forms of cooperation in the form of memorandums of understanding, etc. would contribute to local NGOs and civil society in general being more recognized and included in these processes, while at the same time they could intensify joint project preparation and application for available EU programs and funds.

Current reform processes, together with the deliberative approach and digital democracy, open new opportunities for strengthening citizen participation. A concrete example is citizens' assemblies, which need to be more widely promoted and organised throughout BiH.

B. Strengthening the capacities of CSOs to participate in the European integration process

- **Review the current framework of cooperation and improve joint action, as well as the way of linking and communicating between CSOs**

The lack of adequate mechanisms for cooperation and networking between CSOs, both among themselves and with competent institutions, that would enable and support meaningful participation of civil society in different phases of the (pre-)accession process is a key shortcoming identified through this research. CSOs need to act in a coordinated and more proactive manner regarding participation and contribution to the EU integration process. This requires a greater degree of self-organisation within civil society. Great progress has been achieved within civil society in the Republic of Serbia by establishing the National Convention on the EU as a unique example of a model of organised civil society action in the European integration process in the region. The advantages of cooperation between CSOs have also been demonstrated in other observed countries, where the work and effects of

the civil sector's work are integrated into the overall European integration process. At a time when the existence of formal mechanisms for the inclusion of civil society in the development and implementation of public policies is not a guarantee that they will be achieved, CSO networking is of particular importance and can give the necessary strength to the initiatives of this sector.

It is proposed to strengthen cooperation and networking of CSOs as a broader civil society platform, which would act jointly in relation to institutions both in BiH and at the EU level. This could result in an increase in the level of civil society participation, but also in the quality of the EU integration process.

- **Build the institutional infrastructure for the development of civil society**

For the sustainable development of civil society in BiH, it is necessary to ensure the successful implementation of strategic frameworks and action documents in which CSOs, citizens and citizens are defined as partners and/or target groups and participants (development, employment, entrepreneurship development strategies, improving the position of persons with disabilities, improving gender equality, etc.) and to resolve the lack of funding for CSOs. A model that could eliminate the existing shortcomings (lack of professional knowledge and lack of funds) would represent a form of institutional innovation in the form of a **foundation for civil society development** modelled on the Croatian model of the National Foundation, viewed primarily through the purpose, or role, of the foundation itself - providing professional and financial support to programs that encourage the sustainability of the non-profit/civil sector. CSOs gathered around the platform could initiate discussions with relevant institutions to ensure support for the work of this foundation, considering the constitutional responsibilities and specificities of each level - the state of BiH, the entities and the Brčko District of BiH. It is important to ensure that CSOs have ownership of this process, while the organisational and legal model of CSO foundations should be considered in cooperation with relevant institutions and bodies dealing with cooperation with the civil sector.

One of the important roles of this foundation could be to provide expert support for participation in reform processes related to EU integration, including ensuring financing of an organised model of CSO activity in the European integration process. In addition, the foundation could play an important role in ensuring the necessary (missing) co-financing for CSO projects when applying for EU calls.

It is recommended that the EU Delegation to BiH and other institutions take into account the recommendations from this analysis, as well as other initiatives coming from competent CSOs, when directing programs and projects for civil society development, and support the development of existing and creation of new models of cooperation and consultations of civil society in the European integration process, including the idea of establishing a foundation.

- **Strengthen the capacity of CSOs, with a special focus on building expertise on negotiation chapters, i.e. topics**

The European integration process depends largely on the ability of key actors in the country to develop and implement policies that will bring it closer to the EU. The research has highlighted the limited capacity and lack of expertise of CSOs, especially knowledge about the EU integration process. The lack of expertise can only be addressed if CSOs focus their activities on specific areas.

CSOs should take more opportunities to participate in trainings organised by DEI, which are related to the European integration process. The development of CSO expertise and that of other civil society actors that should participate in the process should be focused on specific topics, i.e. chapters, relying on existing resource centres in BiH and other opportunities. To strengthen the capacities of CSOs, it is important to strengthen regional cooperation through which the transfer of knowledge and experience on specific topics related to EU integration could be ensured.

The inclusion of quality external inputs if of particular importance for improving the quality of the public policy-making process. This includes, among other things, the involvement of the academic community and other experts, as well as strengthening cooperation with the business sector.

When creating capacity building programs, it is necessary to consider the needs of CSOs in smaller and underdeveloped local communities and make their participation in these programs as accessible as possible.

- **Conduct thematic campaigns to promote the importance of European integration in an innovative and tailored manner**

The importance of European integration and the benefits of EU accession should be promoted among the wider public in BiH. It is recommended that when implementing campaigns, terminology that is clear and understandable to the wider public should be used, with content on EU integration presented in an interesting and youth-friendly way. Designing and implementing such campaigns requires the engagement of not only institutions but also civil society, primarily CSOs that are dedicated to working on EU integration or certain, specific topics in this area. The best effects could be achieved through the above-described necessary increase in the level and quality of cooperation between the authorities and CSOs, as well as stronger networking, i.e. greater synergy among CSOs themselves.

Given the pervasive trend of anti-NGO campaigns in each of the countries observed, it is necessary to work on improving the image of the NGO sector in the public. It is important to promote the role of

CSOs as partners in creating conditions for a better quality of life for citizens in various areas, to remove dilemmas about this sector. It is necessary to strengthen cooperation with the media.

We consider it useful to finally refer to the wide range of roles that civil society can play in achieving sustainable development, which have been highlighted by the World Economic Forum. According to the 2013 report "The Future Role of Civil Society", roles and relationships with other actors can be classified into 10 broad categories that can still be considered relevant today based on insight into available sources and recent research:[74]

1. Watchdog	Holding institutions to account, promoting transparency and accountability
2. Advocate	Raising awareness of societal issues and challenges and advocating for change
3. Service Provider	Delivering services to meet societal needs such as education, health, food and security; implementing disaster management, preparedness and emergency response.
4. Expert	Bringing unique knowledge and experience to shaping policy and strategy and identifying and building solutions.
5. Capacity builder	Providing education, training and other of capacity building.
6. Incubation	Developing solutions that may require a long gestation or payback period
7. Representative	Giving power to the voice of the marginalized or under-represented
8. Citizenship champion	Encouraging citizen engagement and supporting citizens' rights.
9. Solidarity supporter	Promoting fundamental and universal values
10. Definer of standards	Creating norms that shape market and state activity

In the context of EU accession, we consider it important to refer to the DG NEAR Guidelines for EU support to civil society in the enlargement region for the period 2021-2027, viewed through three

[74] Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statehood, "Safeguarding Inclusivity and the Role of Civil Society in Conflict-Affected States: Lessons from the New Deal for Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals," Working Paper for the World Bank Forum on Fragility, Conflict and Violence, March 2016. https://www.cspps.org/publications/safeguarding-inclusivity-and-role-civil-society-conflict-affected-states-lessons-new

overarching outcomes, as elements that enable civil society to perform its function in all thematic areas of action, as follows:

Specific Goal 1: An enabling environment established for implementing civil society activities	**Specific objective 2:** Strengthened cooperation and partnership between CSOs and public sector institutions	**Specific objective 3:** Increased capacities and resilience of CSOs to implement their activities more effectively

More information on the elements of support to civil society is available at the link: https://tacso.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/EU-Guidelines-for-Support-to-Civil-Society-in-the-Enlargement-region-2021-2027-BOS-_Final-version.pdf.

X. ANNEXES

A. List of contact persons and partners with whom cooperation was carried out

Name of institution/organization	Contact persons / email
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Agency of Local Democracy, Mostar	Dzenana Dedic ldamostar@aldaintranet.org
Center for the Promotion of Civil Society, Sarajevo	Aida Daguda Aida.Daguda@cpcd.ba
Helsinki Citizens' Parliament, Banja Luka	Dragana Dardic ddardic@hcabl.org
Centers of Civic Initiatives, Tuzla	Mahir Poljic mahir@ccibh.org
Centar za razvoj civilnog društva, Doboj	Esad Bećirović crcdbih@gmail.com
REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA	
Metamorphosis Foundation	Danche@metamorphosis.org.mk Danche@metamorphosis.org.mk
Center for Research and Analysis - NOVUS Strumica	Marija Bandulova Taseva (MarijaTaseva) m.bandulovataseva@associationnovus.org Gjorgi Milushev g.milushev@associationnovus.org
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA	
Center for European Policies	Jovana Knezevic Jovanovic jovana.knezevic@cep.org.rs Jelena Miletić jelena.miletic@cep.org.rs
Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights YU-COM	Jovana Ready jovana.spremo@yucom.org.rs
Local Democracy Center	Stanka Parać Damjanović stanka.parac@aldaintranet.org

Name of institution/organization	Contact persons / email
REPUBLIC OF MONTENEGRO	
Center for the Development of Non-Governmental Organizations CRNVO	Zorana Markovic zorana.markovic@crnvo.me
Center for Democracy and Human Rights - CEDEM	Nevenka Vuksanovic info@cedem.me
Local Democracy Agency	Kerim Medjedovic ald@t-com.me
Center for Civic Education	Zvezdana Kovac zvezdana@cgo-cce.org
REPUBLIC OF CROATIA	
Institute for Political Ecology	Vedran Horvat vedran@ipe.hr
CROSOL	Kristijan Kovacic kristijan.kovacic@crosol.hr Branka Juran branka.juran@crosol.hr

B. List of mapped organizations (preliminary)

Organization name	City	Contact
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA		
Center for the Promotion of Civil Society, Sarajevo	Sarajevo	Web: https://civilnodrustvo.ba/ Address: Marka Marulića 2/III, Sarajevo Phone: 033 644-810 Email: info@cpcd.ba
Agency of Local Democracy, Mostar	Mostar	Web: https://www.ldamostar.org/ Address: Fra Ambre Miletića 30, Mostar Phone: +387 (0)36 333-830 Email: ldamostar@aldaintranet.org
Centers of Civic Initiatives, Tuzla	Tuzla	Web: https://www.cci.ba/pages/1/28/11.html Address: Ludviga Kube 7, Tuzla Phone: 035/247-741 E-mail: ccituzla@bih.net.ba

Organization name	City	Contact
Association of Citizens Why not?	Sarajevo	Website: https://zastone.ba/ Address: Gabriele Moreno Locatelli 21, Sarajevo Phone: +38733618461 Email: info@zastone.ba
Helsinki Citizens' Parliament (HPG), Banja Luka	Banja Luka	Website: https://hcabl.org/ Address: Srpska 5, Banja Luka Phone: +387 65 615 535 Email: hcabl@blic.net
Banja Luka Center for Human Rights	Banja Luka	Website: https://www.blchr.org/ Email: info@blchr.org
Coalition of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities "KOLOSI"	Bijeljina	E-mail: kolosibijeljina@gmail.com
REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA		
Metamorphosis Foundation	Skopje	Web: https://metamorphosis.org.mk/en/ E-mail: info@metamorphosis.org.mk and bardhyl@metamorphosis.org
Center for Research and Analysis - NOVUS	Strumica	Web: https://associationnovus.org/ E-mail: zdruzenienovus@gmail.com
Initiative for European Perspective	Skopje	Website: https://iep.mk/ Email: contact@iep.mk
Center for Research and Policy Making	Skopje	Website: https://crpm.org.mk/ Email: crpm@crpm.org.mk
European Movement in the Republic of Macedonia (EMRM)	Skopje	Website: https://europeanmovement.org.mk/pochetna/ E-mail: secretariat@europeanmovement.org.mk
REPUBLIC OF MONTENEGRO		
Center for the Development of Non-Governmental Organizations CRNVO	Podgorica	Web: https://euresursnicentar.me/lokija-kontakti/ Email: crnvo@crnvo.me
Center for Democracy and Human Rights - CEDEM	Podgorica	Website: https://www.cedem.me/ Email: info@cedem.me
Local Democracy Agency LDA	Niksic	Website: https://aldnk.me/ Email: ald@t-com.me
Center for Civic Education	Podgorica	Website: https://cgo-cce.org/

Organization name	City	Contact
		Email: info@cgo-cce.org
NGO Multimedial Montene-gro (MMNE)	White Field	Website: https://mmne.me/ Email: nvommne@gmail.com
REPUBLIC OF CROATIA		
Institute for Political Ecology	Zagreb	Website: https://ipe.hr/ E-mail: ipe@ipe.hr and vedran@ipe.hr
CROSOL	Zagreb	Website: https://crosol.hr/hr/ Email: crosol@crosol.hr Email: info@crosol.hr
National Foundation for the Development of Civil Society	Zagreb	Web: https://zaklada.civilnodrustvo.hr/ E-mail: zaklada@civilnodrustvo.hr
Human Rights House	Zagreb	Web: https://www.kucaljudskihprava.hr/ E-mail: kontakt@kucaljudskihprava.hr
Green action	Zagreb	Web: https://zelena-akcija.hr/hr E-mail: za@zelena-akcija.hr

The following organizations were also contacted:

Serbia:

Belgrade Open School https://www.bos.rs/

Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights (YUCOM) https://yucom.org.rs/

Croatia:

Ceraneo - Center for the Development of Non-Profit Organizations https://ceraneo.hr/

Gong https://gong.hr/

Odraz https://www.odraz.hr/

North Macedonia:

EUROTHINK – Center for European Strategies https://eurothink.mk/en/

European Policy Institute https://epi.org.mk/?lang=en

Montenegro:

Center for Democratic Transition https://www.cdtmn.org/

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