Who We Are

The Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA) brings together national associations from around the world. Created in 2004, it aims at strengthening national umbrella organisations, fostering greater co-operation across national and regional boundaries to pursue mutual interests.

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THE CONDITIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN SERBIA

WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGE FACED BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY IN 2014/2015?

Comparative monitoring and analysing show that the legislation and policy framework is in place regarding exercise of the rights of freedom, expression, assembly and association. Legislation provides for freedom of speech without state interference, freedom of assembly without discrimination and hindering conditions, and for accessible, timely and inexpensive registration of CSOs with adequate limitations as defined in the Anti-discrimination Law and the Constitution. The Constitution and relevant laws provide all guarantees of freedom of opinion and expression, but when exercising freedom of expression and freedom of the media (i.e. censorship, prohibiting certain TV shows), media, CSOs and their representatives are facing violations of these two basic rights. Legal framework for financial viability and sustainability CSOs is still not favourable and in line with EU standards.

In 2014 there is no progress regarding transparent state funding. The legal framework still does not provide funding for the implementation of public policies, identified in policy documents, for which CSOs are identified as key actors in implementation. Funding criteria is not always clear and published in advance. There is no evaluation of achieved outputs/outcomes, no possibility for prepayments and multi-annual contracts.

Additionally, compared with 2013, there is no changes in the quality of legal environment that still do not stimulate or facilitate volunteering and employment in CSOs particularly. The Law on Volunteering is over-codified and makes it difficult for CSOs in Serbia to engage volunteers in their work.

Civic education is still an elective course, but the choice of taking this class still depends on the preferences of parents and the potential initiative of young adolescents (ages 15-18). What is especially troublesome is the fact that there is no course on the university level that covers civic activism (raising questions, starting campaigns, and solving issues), so that kind of knowledge can be achieved through the role of practitioner/volunteer in some CSO or by studying foreign literature on the topic, which also falls into the area of informal education.

Although compared to 2013 we can summarize general progress regarding legislative for recognising the importance of CSOs in improving good governance through CSOs inclusion in decision making processes, number of laws, bylaws, strategies and policy reforms effectively consulted with CSOs is still very small.
The Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society still is the main institutional mechanism for the support of developing the dialogue between the Government and CSOs through offering support to its institutions in understanding and recognizing the role of CSOs in policy-shaping and decision-making processes. However, they are often used as the only channel of communication between the two sectors, which makes its work and role more difficult. All this indicates a need for developing a mechanism for direct, meaningful and timely inclusion of CSOs in policy-shaping and decision-making processes. One of the major challenges that ought to be overcome relates to the fact that CSOs are included only in the final phases of writing drafts of laws and policies, in the stage which leaves little room for changes, and even then without receiving enough information in advance and feedback on what was included in the final proposal. It is important to notice that during 2014 the National Parliament continued the practice of adopting laws by emergency procedure without a public debate. From its constitution in April 2014 the National Parliament has, from its constitution in April until end of 2014, adopted 41 laws after public debates were held, and a total of 105 adopted in an urgent procedure, without maintaining adequate and timely public debates This kind of work of the highest legislative organ seriously violates the principle of civil democracy proclaimed by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, as well as a whole number of regulations that manage the work of the National Parliament of Serbia.

WHAT WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ACHIEVED BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY IN 2014/2015?

An important factor influencing the work of civil society organizations in 2014, both through direct influence to activities and organizations’ capacities and on the framework in which CSOs operate, were strong floods in May 2014. These exceptional circumstances have set new standards, not only for the civil society, but for different state structures on local and national level. Civil society showed its potentials, volunteer resources, capacity for fast and efficient response, strategic thinking in the field, and partnership with the state. In some cases, it can freely be stated that local authorities delegated a part of their operations to local CSOs, due to its inability for personal efficient consolidation and lack of coordination with national authorities. CSOs activities were significant particularly for most vulnerable groups (Roma, children, persons with disabilities, mothers with small kids). More than 200 local and national CSOs were engaged in activities of support in flooded areas, most of them in Obrenovac, totally flooded town very near Belgrade.

CSOs activities regarding floods can be divided in 3 pillars: Helping Citizens to Help (Urgent efforts), Coordinating activities (Support to local CSOs work, Coordination meetings throughout the country to
ensure better impact, Participation of civil society of Serbia in the international humanitarian meetings), Helping Institutions to Help (Advocating for changes on national and international levels).

As the result of CSOs initiatives, in February 2014 the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Republic of Serbia began a widespread consultation process toward making the National Strategy for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development in the Republic of Serbia. The initial conference titled "Get Involved – what kind of a civil society do you want?! Civil society in Serbia 2018" gathered 300 civil society representatives who participated in the creation of the framework for the content of a future Strategy, by applying the Open space methodology. During this process the civil society representatives defined 15 priority subjects that ought to be found in the document. In September 2014 the Office published a call for interested representatives of civil society organizations to participate in the consultation process of making the National Strategy and the Action Plan for a civil society enabling environment 2014-2018. During October, consultation meetings were organized in ten cities around the Republic of Serbia in which representatives of civil society organizations could give their comments and suggestions on the first working text of the Strategy, as well as suggestions about the activities and measures. Also, there was an open opportunity for sending comments, suggestions and proposals for the working text of the Strategy through an online form. Adoption of the Strategy and the Action plan still is in progress. However, this is one of the great achievements of civil sector in Serbia, and the widest consultation process.

Also, thanks to CSOs initiative, in August 2014, Government adopted the Guidelines for inclusion of civil society organisations in the regulation adoption process. Even with all existing gaps identified by CSOs, this document is a baseline for the starting of systematical inclusion of CSOs in decision making processes and for the establishing concrete mechanism for direct communication between ministries and CSOs.

WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITY OR CHALLENGE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY THAT YOU FORSEE IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

In 2015, general challenge will be in further providing framework for recognising role and importance of CSOs by Government. In the conditions of complex political situation where political majority is formed from the conservative structures that supported politics of Slobodan Milosevic, there is lack of awareness on importance of citizenship and democracy. Legislation that provides for freedom of speech without state interference, freedom of assembly without discrimination and hindering conditions, and for accessible, timely and inexpensive registration of CSOs adopted before 2014, and
by different political actors. As we noticed, we can recognise some problems in the field of full implementation of human rights. Also, all other issue noticed in the section 1 still are unsolved.

Additionally, we also noticed abuses of freedom of assembly, done by structures very close to Government and political parties. New CSOs are forming in order to be included in processes of regulations adoption and for distribution of state funding. We can notice this as an attempt of creation parallel civil society and will be one of the most significant challenges in next period. This is very important issue, because, all other CSOs, with expertise in some areas or with direct beneficiaries are not in equal position with these organisations. In these occasions, we cannot speak about real citizen’s participation.

Regarding this, during December 2014, several CSOs led by Civic Initiatives, YUCOM, CRNPS, CRTA, Policy Center and Helsinki Committee for Human Rights pressed a criminal charge against unknown persons because of the numerous irregularities that occurred during the disputed tender for provision of social protection services. Also, request for reconsideration of political responsibility of the Minister for Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Mr. Alexander Vulin was submitted to the Government of the Republic of Serbia. The request for dismissal of minister Vulin was so far supported by approximately 150 citizens’ associations. Also, appeal for the repetition of the tender is among requests too, as is the request for the disclosure of names of committee members who participated in the evaluation of proposals. CI and other organisations will continue to monitor the work of the Ministry and Minister Vulin and follow procedures for criminal charges in this case.

Additionally, in this moment, the Government Office for cooperation with civil society is without chairperson. Executive director, Ms Ivana Cirkovic resigned and until this moment we don’t have an information who will be her successor. The role of the Office was crucial in adoption of Guidelines and the process of adoption the National Strategy. The new elected person will be responsible for further Government course toward CSOs.

Based on achievements during 2014, CSOs will continue activities related to floods. The most significant challenges will be in following areas:

- **Coordination of Flood Recovery Efforts by CSOs** - The coordination must be provide on the local and national level, securing that there is no repeat and that all of victims' needs are met.

- **Assuring Transparency and Accountability of the Government** - Crucial efforts will be invested in securing transparency of the government’s investments in floods recovery. Appropriate targeting of the endangered groups and non-corruption will be the important challenge.
- **Providing Services to the Most Vulnerable Groups** - Services of CSOs will be crucial in that regard, as the state is having problem to accommodate their needs even in non-extraordinary situation. Having mind the needs of the most vulnerable groups will be of outmost importance.

For the most of CSOs with national focus, the participation in the processes of European integration will be one of the important activities in following years - from the point of monitoring state policies as well as advocacy for law changes. They participate in monitoring the analytical overview of legislation (screenings) in 35 negotiation chapters, following via web stream the meetings of explanatory screenings, participating in the preparation of bilateral screenings for individual negotiation chapters, and participating in informative meetings about the bilateral screenings for individual chapters. Until now, for each of the negotiation chapters meetings are being organized of working group representatives with civil society organizations – participants in the explanatory screenings.

**THE SITUATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY’S RESOURCING**

ARE RESOURCING CONDITIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY GETTING BETTER OR WORSE?

Financial sustainability of CSOs remains the weakest, as they depend heavily on the international donor community. Organizations have begun to diversify their funding sources in an effort to counteract the withdrawal of international donor funding, which would otherwise cause the NGO sector to contract.

The lack of domestic support has left NGOs dependent on foreign funding, though access is increasingly more difficult. While the limited core of remaining donors is considered loyal, their budgets are shrinking every year. Though donors no longer provide funding for basic commodities, NGOs are still in need of office equipment, particularly as their old, donated computers become outdated. Legal software is expensive for NGOs, more so for large organizations that must buy software packages for each computer. Small organizations outside of the capital lack consistent, reliable access to technologies such as the internet and email.

The donor assistance to Serbia, as well as other countries of the Western Balkans is almost exclusively framed in terms of support for the EU integration process. Donor intervention in the region should be understood as a political effort at helping those countries on their European path rather than a long-term developmental project. In this context, civil society development is not a
priority on the donor agenda. CSOs are generally perceived as means for achieving specific ends, such as the promotion of EU norms and values. From donors’ perspective, a project-based civil society that can rapidly respond to their ever-changing needs is an ideal instrument for pursuing their mission.

**In addition, cooperation between NGOs and the business community is minimal**, mostly due to lack of awareness among the NGOs about the possible benefits from cross-sector partnership with business sector and companies’ lack of knowledge on the role and work of NGOs ic community development.

**Corporate philanthropy, remains obstructed by unfavorable tax laws and a stagnant economy.** Individual and corporate giving is slowly increasing, especially for humanitarian, cultural and sports activities. Numerous companies are beginning to develop corporate social responsibility strategies as a marketing tool. NGOs are unaware of the general principles of corporate responsibility and therefore, do not apply the pressure necessary to increase corporate philanthropy. Definition of public benefit purposes for which tax relief is allowed is still not harmonized in relevant laws. 5% of gross income is not calculated as taxable income for corporations, but still no tax relief for individuals and no tax allocations for public benefit purposes. Income from CSOs mission-related economic activity is tax free only up to app. 3,300 EUR.

Some NGOs are taking steps to build constituencies, though their success has been limited. Most organizations remain donor-driven; even the more well-established organizations compete for funding in areas in which they have no experience. Funding trends are impacting the ability of NGO to maintain a permanent staff.

**IS CIVIL SOCIETY EXPLORING NEW STRATEGIES TO DIVERSIFY RESOURCING AND ARE ANY OF THESE PROVING SUCCESSFUL?**

In order to create new **Visibility and Sustainability Strategy**, Civic Initiatives conducted a research on citizens’ attitudes and knowledge on the work of NGOs in general, so as their knowledge and attitudes towards the Civic Initiatives. The goal of the research was to determine new mechanisms on how to approach the citizens and inform them on the organization’s activities and achievements, engage citizens in organizations’ actions and programs, build constituency, develop mechanisms for individual and corporate fundraising and obtain long term sustainability.

The research was meant to provide data for creating various approach strategies towards citizens, companies, different age groups, or groups with various level of education in order to determine
appropriate channels of communication and approaches.

The research was implemented by IPSOS.

The data that the Civic Initiatives used to develop its **Visibility and Sustainability Strategy** are:

- One third of citizens heard of the Civic Initiatives, while almost each fifth citizen Heard of its founder, Mr. Miljenko Dereta

- Even though only 1% of citizens mentioned Civic Initiatives (without reminders), the organization is among the top 5 organizations that the citizens could name correctly when asked to name any NGO that they could remember of

- Civic Initiatives are best known among middle generations (30 to 60 years of age) and among citizens with higher education

- The most known areas of work of the organization are “assisting the citizens to participate in decision-making processes and human rights protection”

- According to the citizens interviewed, Civic Initiatives should focus mostly on improving the social protection services

- Significant percentage of citizens (41%) showed readiness to engage in the Civic Initiatives’ activities if the organization would work on the issues the citizens find important

- When asked how they would support Civic Initiatives if the organization would work on the issues relevant to them, the citizens replied (selecting one of the offered choices):
  - I would donate 100 dinars a month do support the organization’s work, if that financial donation would be legally and transparently processed (18%)
  - I would volunteer at the organization, in accordance with my skills (15%)
  - I would volunteer regardless of my skills (15%)
  - I would not get engaged in any way (59%)

On the basis of the data gathered and in order to obtain visibility and long term sustainability in changed environment of the donor community, CI will develop **different approaches, types of messages, appeals and channels of communication**, depending on the **social characteristics of the audience** (women, young people, businesses, influential persons, large social network groups, etc.).
- CI will create outreach strategies to present its programs to various groups that are most interested in different segments of CI's work and ask for support (volunteering, donations, promotion, etc.).

- CI will pay special attention to create a transparent mechanism that presents the allocation of resources provided by the citizens (volunteering, financial donations, promotion, etc.).

ARE YOU SEEING A MOVE AWAY FROM GRANT FUNDING (AS PROVIDED BY DONORS AND GOVERNMENTS) TO OTHER METHODS OF SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY?

Most donor representatives in the Western Balkans are critical of civil society for being overly dependent on, and oriented towards, donor support. CSOs are generally considered to be ‘donor driven’ insofar as their work is substantially shaped by the availability of foreign funding. Many organisations are deemed to operate as consultancies, designing projects in response to the Call for Proposals issued by donors rather than according to local needs.

From the other side, the legal framework for transparent state funding still does not provide funding for the implementation of public policies, identified in policy documents, for which CSOs are identified as key actors in implementation. Funding criteria is not always clear and published in advance. There is no evaluation of achieved outputs/outcomes, no possibility for prepayments and multi-annual contracts.

One of the possible ways for funding CSOs is providing services, especially in the area of social protection. Even though the Law on Social Protection (2011) recognizes CSOs as potential service providers, which is novelty compared to the previous law and has a more significant influence on their work, the current application of the Law has shown that neither the CSOs nor the service beneficiaries, nor other organizations from the system of social protection (centers for social care above all) are not acquainted with all novelties and possibilities that this Law predicts nor do they apply it completely.

Bearing in mind all mentioned above, we will summarize some possible methods for further diversifying CSOs resourcing. Some of them have already applied by certain CSOs. All these methods will be included in the CI Visibility and Sustainability Strategy and will be applied during next years.

COMMITTED GIVING
Committed giving means long-term financial contributions on a regular basis (e.g. monthly) from individual donors, based on a formal agreement. This is often done via direct debit, credit card or standing order, where the same amount is donated every month, quarter or year. In return for their regular support, committed givers are entitled to a clearly defined service package. Committed givers have a higher lifetime value (i.e.: they give more for longer) than donors who give sporadically. Committed giving provides long-term sustainable income.

The nature of regular giving means that, usually, income from your committed givers is spread across the months so you have a good cash flow and very few peaks and troughs of income. A small amount – the amount is usually a few EUR – on a regular basis from a larger number of donors means that the impact of any donor leaving the scheme is minimized.

Committed giving includes products such as cause or project sponsorship. This type of giving have already applied by Trag foundation and the Center four youth integration.

**Club of Friends** is the product offered most frequently for keep committed donors and applied by UNICEF Serbia.

Civic Initiatives already made an agreement with Banca Intesa to provide the organization with an online mechanism for donations that will be used in this regard. Currently, this type of support is applied by Divac foundation.

**MAJOR DONORS & HIGH NET WORTH INDIVIDUALS (HNWI)**

A high net worth individual, also known by the abbreviation ‘HNWI’, denotes a person who has access to a large amount of wealth and more importantly, a significant number of liquid assets. A term originally used by the financial services industry, there is no precise definition of how wealthy a HNWI must be, but in fundraising terms, a sizeable or ‘extraordinary’ donation should not have a detrimental impact on the overall finances of a HNWI and in turn, adversely affect their current lifestyle and spending habits. This system is applied by Trag foundation and the Center for youth integration.

They are often extremely well-connected, move in influential business and/or social circles and have access to key figures in the public domain, such as politicians, celebrities and board members of global corporations. In the case of CI, these persons might be members of international donor and NGO community working in or out of Serbia.

Furthermore, a HNWI is often a ‘global citizen’ and in this respect, may not have a permanent residence, preferring to maintain several homes in various locations, which they will use depending
on their travel schedule. Depending on their background, HNWIs can often be incredibly private individuals and introductions are usually made through a mutual contact, work colleague or someone in their sphere of influence (CI donors and international supporters might broker these meetings).

**MAJOR DONORS**

A major donor is a HNWI who agrees to support an organization, or charitable cause, through a sizeable donation. They will usually have a close personal connection to the organization/cause and will have regular contact through ‘one to one’ meetings, highly tailored communications and invitations to special events and dinners.

In terms of classifying a major donation, the size can vary depending on the organization and what they consider to be a significant gift; for example, in smaller organizations in Europe, gifts of €2,000 to €3,000 per annum are often viewed as major donations, but in larger organizations, a gift of €10,000 to €20,000 per annum, and above, would be classified as a major donation – this would be the case with CI.

In terms of both securing new donors and retaining existing ones, strong relationship management skills are essential. Every major donor should be treated differently and each approach should be highly tailored to that individual and their specific interests and needs.

**CORPORATE PARTNERS**

Corporate donors are companies that provide funding to support CI activities, typically from a corporate budget or from employee donations. The transaction with CI would mainly be financial and typically would involve standard services from CI such as yearly reports on progress, issuing joint press releases or making presentations for the employees.

Corporate partners are companies with whom an organization would develop an on-going working relationship, which involves combining resources and competencies and working towards achieving agreed objectives. Often a corporate partnership involves multiple stakeholders such as employees, customers, consumers or business partners.

**FUNDRAISING WEBSITE**

CSOs website can be used as the center of all online fundraising activities. People come from different sites and have different needs. The main message of fundraising website will be: "Help us, donate!" – clearly state causes and specific goals.
CROWD FUNDING

This is a practice of funding a project or venture by raising many small amounts of money from a large number of people, typically via the Internet. Most valuable effects:

- crowd funding could be used as a model for pre-selling / project financing
- crowd funding can put urgency to something that is not an emergency (ACT NOW!)
- organization gets list of crowd supporters > converting these one-off donors to CG should be quite easy because these contacts are "hot"

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

Since 2003, online social networking sites have experienced explosive growth, becoming a major phenomenon in the new millennium. Online social networking allows people to connect and share information and ideas with others via the Internet. Online social networking has also become a popular work tool among CSOs. Organizations are increasingly embracing social networks in order to, among other things, promote awareness, recruit followers, and raise money.

 Millions of people, especially the young and the socially active, are now online and the number of people joining social networking websites increases every day. With increasing numbers of people on these websites, there is a greater chance for CI as well as for other CSOs to effectively recruit people this way.
Snapshot of civil society in Serbia: Questionnaire to AGNA members