AN ASSESSMENT OF MACEDONIAN CIVIL SOCIETY:
15 YEARS OF TRANSITION
- A COUNTRY MOVING TOWARDS CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

CIVICUS Civil Society Index - An international action-research project coordinated by CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After 15 years of transition – a country moving towards citizen participation

The Civil Society Index (CSI) is an action research project assessing the state of civil society in countries around the world. The project is being simultaneously implemented in approximately 50 countries and is coordinated by the international civil society network CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation. The goals of the project, as formulated by CIVICUS, are to enhance the sustainability of civil society and to promote and strengthen its contribution to positive social change. In Macedonia, the CSI was coordinated by the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC).

The CSI employs 74 indicators, which are grouped in 25 subdimensions. These are then consolidated into four basic dimensions of civil society: structure, environment, values and impact. In Macedonia, these civil society indicators were studied using in-depth primary and secondary research, including: a representative population survey, regional stakeholder surveys and consultations as well as a media review.

A relevant actor throughout history

Civil society in Macedonia has played a role in the history of the country, particularly in the period of the national renaissance at the end of 19th century. A number of charity associations were functioning prior to World War II. The socialist modernisation of the country provided the basis for the emergence of many cultural, sport, welfare and professional organisations, though they were kept under the control of the Communist Party during the socialist period (1945-1990). Independence, which took place in 1990, and the ensuing transition were important triggers for civil society’s rebirth. Today, there are 5,769 citizen organisations in the country (2.85 per 1000 inhabitants).

Uniqueness of Civil Society in Macedonia

Macedonian civil society is quite unique, in at least two ways, in comparison to civil societies in neighbouring countries. First, its political orientation is substantially more progressive, since the re-emergence of civil society in the early 1990s was sponsored by progressive political forces, which distinguishes it from the regional trend, in which civil society was generally re-born as a more conservative anti-communist group of actors. The second difference is the legal definition of civil society as a “values-driven” sector. Unlike many civil societies in the region, Macedonia is largely content with a strongly normative approach of its legislation on civil society. This has influenced the way the NAG have gone about defining the concept of civil society for this report and then including and excluding certain organisations to put the concept into practice. Because the law withholds registration from organisations espousing racial discrimination, intolerance and violence, it also – crucially - defined the way civil society responded to social conflict, when it reached Macedonia.
Civil Society Diamond for Macedonia – Moderately Developed

The diagram, visualising the state of Macedonian civil society in the form of a diamond, shows that civil society in Macedonia is moderately well-developed. The practice and promotion of positive values are the strength of civil society and thus form the base for its achievements and impact. The environment is disabling to a certain extent, with a partially ineffective state and a deep lack of public trust and public spiritedness. This, in turn, negatively affects the structure of civil society, which can be described as moderate in size and imbalanced in composition.

The structure of civil society is moderate and not balanced
Civil society’s structure is characterized by its limited breadth and very limited depth of citizen participation in civil society. However, there is a relatively well-developed inter-relations and level of networking among a diverse range of civil society participants. The limited extent of citizen participation is clearly a consequence of the lack of social capital and other socio-cultural norms that would be conducive to civil society’s structure within Macedonian.

3C’s – Communication, coordination, cooperation
Civil society in Macedonia has a very strong focus on communication, coordination and cooperation. It is well organized with a strong support infrastructure and a significant level of networking among associations and within umbrella structures. Examples of of cross-sector alliances/coalitions of CSOs, such as the Civic Platform of Macedonia are also emerging. Yet, there is more to be done in the area of cooperation and with regard to the self-regulation of the civil society sector in Macedonia.

Limited citizen participation and urban-rural gap
While there is an increase in non-partisan political action of Macedonians, only a minority of citizens participate in civil society activities. This is likely a consequence of the low levels of public trust in institutions, generally and in civil society specifically. In its social composition, civil society is skewed and the poor, rural communities and ethnic communities, especially ethnic Albanian, are underrepresented. Accordingly, there is a high concentration of CSOs in the capital city and urban areas, with CSOs being almost absent in the rural areas.

Insufficient resources and lack of diversification
CSOs have insufficient financial resources to achieve their goals. A particular problem is the lack of diversification of financial sources and the strong dependence on international or foreign
sources. Since the next three years will be marked by a withdrawal of many foreign donors, civil society is likely to face a financial crisis in the years to come.

Civil society has a pool of well-qualified and committed people to draw on. The first two ministers for the environment were from the Ecologists’ Movement of Macedonia. However, aside from this example there was no major transfer of human resources to government or the private sector from civil society. This is partially due to the fact that civil society remains a more attractive employer than other sectors.

A somewhat disabling environment
Despite the progress in the field of basic rights and freedoms, the political context for civil society in Macedonia is quite unfavourable. The most limiting factors are the lack of rule of law, corruption, inefficiency of the state and the highly centralized nature of the state. Macedonia also experiences a deep lack of public trust among citizens and rather low levels of tolerance and public spiritedness, which are likely to be closely inter-related to the low effectiveness of public institutions.

Ad-hoc or mutually indifferent relations with other actors
Civil society’s role in public affairs is not fully recognised by the state, and while there are more examples of state-civil society dialogue, this does not translate into improved cooperation and support by the state. This situation is likely a consequence of the rather ineffective state. With regards to civil society-private sector relations, both sectors are mutually indifferent to each other and there is no dialogue or cooperation.

Values – the main assets of civil society
The main assets to civil society in Macedonia are its strong positive values. The strongest values are non-violence and gender equity, while the weakest is the practice and promotion of transparency.

Transparency and self-regulation, a weak spot
Transparency is lacking in civil society in Macedonian. A small number of organisations provide public access to their financial accounts and even fewer provide audited accounts. Only a few civil society activities exist to promote transparency and fight corruption, with the exception of the work of Transparency International Macedonia. This weakness also appears in civil society’s limited impact on the national budgeting process and in holding the state accountable. The internal lack of transparency closely relates to a lack of self-regulatory mechanisms. Although some efforts of self-regulation exist, there is no nationally accepted code of conduct.

Civil society’s public role - Women’s and disability issues as flagships
Whereas civil society’s policy and watchdog roles are not very well developed, its social role is quite significant. Empowering and informing citizens and especially empowering women and marginalised persons, are key areas of achievement. In these areas, civil society has also had some impact on public policies.

Environmental organisations were a flagship in the period from 1996 to 2001, when, due to these organisations’ advocacy work, environmental sustainability was successfully mainstreamed by

CIVICUS Civil Society Index Report for Macedonia: Executive Summary
the government. However, after this success the environmental movement became less active and visible and is currently searching for its new role.

**Importance of local social and foreign financial capital**

How are the results of civil society’s values, structure and impact related? The case of gender issues shows that a strong gender value is based on strong constituencies and networks, which, in turn result in the successful empowerment of women and in influencing public policies.

Thus, it seems that civil society’s achievements are based on local social and foreign financial capital. Local social capital comprises positive values, significant constituencies, strong human capital and good communication, coordination and cooperation among civil society actors.

At the same time, as the issues of gender, disability and human rights show, receiving adequate attention from foreign donors and as a result receiving substantive foreign financial support is a crucial for civil society’s impact.

**After 15 years of transition – a country moving towards citizen participation**

Civil society in Macedonia is currently nearing the end of its period of stabilisation. Built around strong values, civil society, even if based on limited citizen’s support, is rooted within some social groups (women, disability, youth) and performing and playing important roles. Civil society should build on this success and seek to expand citizen’s participation in its initiatives. Here, civil society will have to respond to two crucial social concerns – combating poverty (unemployment) and corruption.

Other issues to be addressed are: strengthening trust in public institutions and in civil society actors; rooting civil society in rural areas; strengthening corporate social responsibility: promoting public private partnerships and structured dialogue with the state and private sector; building social capital; developing strategies for resources mobilisation in the light of donors leaving the country.

**Becoming a leading force for poverty eradication**

Poverty eradication should move from the margins and become a focus for civil society, as well as society at large. Civil society should pay attention and research the cause-and-effect relations of poverty and reveal the social-economic injustices that are the results of poverty. This should be accompanied by moving from a social-humanitarian (charity as a status quo) approach to advocacy for tackling the root causes of the poverty. Special emphasis should be placed on the rural and sub-urban poverty.

**Improving openness and transparency as civil society’s contribution to fighting corruption**

Civil society should further strengthen its openness and transparency. This would be civil society’s contribution to fighting corruption and building a base for its policy and watchdog activities, such as influencing the national budgeting process and holding the state and private corporations accountable.

The CSI provided Macedonian civil society with an excellent opportunity for informed debate. The project has introduced and popularized the concept of civil society in Macedonia and has
contributed towards the establishment of new networks and joint activities. The CSI also laid the foundations for a common strategy for the development of civil society in Macedonia, in which all stakeholders, civil society actors, government, donors and the public will hopefully play their part.