CSI COUNTRY REPORT: MONTENEGRO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of Civil Society Index Shortened Assessment Tool (CSI-SAT) project that was implemented in Montenegro from October 2005 to October 2006. It provides comprehensive evidence on Montenegrin civil society to inform discussions among stakeholders, policy makers, politicians and the private sector regarding critical issues, in order to build a healthy and vibrant Montenegrin civil society. The report also aims to enable comparisons of civil society in Montenegro with neighbouring countries.

The report seeks to provide a comprehensive assessment of the current state of Montenegrin civil society, particularly the sector’s strengths and weaknesses. It is part of an international project coordinated by CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation in more than 50 countries around the world. It uses the Civil Society Index (CSI) tool, which is a comprehensive participatory needs assessment and action-planning tool for civil society actors at the country level. The CSI uses 74 indicators, grouped under four dimensions: structure, environment, values and impact, to score and assess the state of civil society. The indicators are both qualitative and quantitative and scored between 0 and 3. These are then averaged to give an overall score between 0 and 3 for the four above-mentioned dimensions of civil society and then plotted in a visual depiction of the state of civil society using a Diamond shape.

Civil society index Diamond for Montenegro is shown below (figure 1). The Diamond has dimension scores between 1.1 and 1.6, reflecting a relatively underdeveloped Montenegrin civil society that has a rather weak structure, operates in a slightly disabling environment, has somewhat limited impact on society and promotes and practices positive values to a moderate extent.
FIGURE 1: Civil society index Diamond for

Montenegro

The level of citizens’ participation in the CSO activities is low. Citizens give very little to charity, rarely volunteer and rarely participate in local community actions, which could help them coordinate their efforts to resolve some common problems. Bearing in mind the traditionalist trait in the Montenegrin society, citizens are focused on supporting their families and relatives, rather than supporting and engaging in associations. In addition, certain relevant social groups (such as the poor and rural people) are not involved in CSOs, which, in turn, are mainly concentrated in urban areas.

It is important to note that civil society support infrastructure aimed at strengthening civil society exists and is growing, mainly as a consequence of dedicated foreign aid programmes. However CSOs in Montenegro are not well connected and their alliances are generally unsuccessful in terms of achieving their proclaimed goals. Cooperation among civic associations is relatively rare. Financial issues are among the key problems facing civil society’s structure. Most organisations depend on foreign donors, who often pursue their own policy rather then respond to the needs in their distribution and allocation of resources. Most organisations even have difficulty with basic working conditions, being technically under-equipped. Human resources, on the other hand, seem to be adequate for achieving the goals set by CSOs.

The political, socio-cultural, legal and socio-economic frameworks in the environment dimension are not very favourable for the development of civil society in Montenegro. This dimension reflects the complexities of path dependency. Montenegro is a centralised state, whose administrative capacities are extremely limited. Citizens perceive corruption in the public sector to be very high. The general level of trust among citizens is low, as is social tolerance and public spiritedness.
The tax system is not conducive to civil society’s development. The nature and quality of the relationship between CSOs and the state are wrought with a mutual lack of trust. The state regards civil society mainly as a necessary evil. Consequently, dialogue between the state and civil society and financial support from the government to CSOs are relatively limited. In addition the private sector is indifferent to civil society and the issue of social responsibility of the economic actors is not part of the public agenda.

The values dimension is the strongest aspect of civil society in Montenegro, signifying the pronounced civic engagement of active civil society members. For example, civil society undertakes numerous initiatives to promote democracy, tolerance, non-violence and peace, as well as gender equality in society overall. However the financial transparency of CSOs is an important problem for the development of the entire sector. This contributes to the overall impression that there is occasional corruption within CSOs. Still, numerous CSOs are engaged in promoting transparency within society, though this is a value that CSOs themselves do not seem to embrace or practice. It is also worth noting that CSOs are not perceived to be significant actors contributing to the eradication of poverty, but they do have a reputation for, and record of, activities promoting and protecting the environment. Notwithstanding this, these activities need further development as they are still insufficiently visible in the public and lack widespread societal support.

Bearing in mind the limited resources of civil society as described in the structure dimension, as well as the generally unsupportive environment, it can be concluded that civil society under these conditions has a relatively high influence or impact. It seems that its values can be considered as a substitute for minimal resources and lack of a supportive environment. In general, CSOs have more significant impact on society as a whole than on the political issues. For example, civil society has limited influence on public policies and it takes no action with respect to influencing the national budget process. Its efforts to hold the government and private sector accountable are also limited. Civil society representatives are, however, capable of recognising key social problems and devising actions aimed at solving them. The level of citizens’ trust in CSOs is relatively low, even though higher than the one of state institutions. In Montenegro key civil society activities that are recognized and accepted are those concerning information and education of citizens, empowerment of marginalized groups and empowerment of women. As the government withdraws from certain social programmes, civil society is also emerging as a significant provider of social services. Providing services to marginalized groups is an important area where CSOs are able to fulfil their missions.

Civil society organisations are increasingly recognised as an important and legitimate actor by the Montenegrin public. While many CSOs still implement a donor-driven agenda, their activities are expanding and their programmes are increasing in quality. Beneficiaries of these programmes are important allies of civil society in its dialogue with the government. Despite these positive trends, the media pays relatively little and inadequate attention to CSOs. The media spreads information about their activities, but they rarely take an analytical approach to civil society issues.
The achievements of civil society are not rooted in widespread civic awareness, norms or the engagement of the citizens. Civil society has mainly developed with the generous assistance of foreign donors and through activities of those organisations, which predominantly employ highly motivated young people. Civil society’s further development will depend a great deal upon the general economic development in Montenegro and upon the creation of a middle class consisting of active citizens willing to support initiatives of common interest.