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INDEPENDENT ACTORS IN DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Building Bridges between Civil Society and Party Political Actors in the Western Balkans – The Perspective of Political Foundations

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Executive Summary

One of the major challenges for consolidating democratic societies in the Western Balkans is to overcome the persisting gap between civil society and party political actors. Establishing mutual trust and a culture of cooperation in order to shape policies, political campaigns and concrete initiatives for the well-being of society is a complex and long-term goal. This paper aims to lay the groundwork for future debate by highlighting some thought-provoking aspects. It points out that there is a strong need for further capacity-building and awareness-raising, as well as for a change of mind-set on both sides. As one of the main actors in supporting democracy, the European Union (EU) has significant leverage in the region.

Nevertheless, the observation made by this paper is that the EU has only made partial use of the potential of its instruments and programmes in order to contribute to building bridges between civil society and party political actors in the Western Balkans.

Given the unique working methods of Political Foundations, they are in a position to encourage approximation and mutual acknowledgement between the two actors. This paper therefore presents case studies and examples of their work and underlines the benefits of establishing dialogue between civil society and party political actors. On this basis, it proposes some recommendations for EU policy-makers, party political actors and civil society in the region.

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) is one of the most influential supporters of the democratic transition process in the Western Balkans region,¹ providing this support through various bilateral and regional initiatives and projects. Civil society organisations (CSOs)² have become leading partners for projects and programmes implemented by the EU in the region. Through the EU-Enlargement process, many candidate countries benefit from the support provided to enforce and consolidate CSOs, such as Croatia for example. A vital civil society landscape has been established, in which CSOs are active and reach out to a broad range of areas.

However, a long-lasting and comprehensive transition towards sustainable democracy in the Western Balkans can only be achieved if constructive dialogue and consultations that bring together a wide variety of actors can take place in a regular, transparent and well-regulated manner. Mutual exchanges between party political actors³ and CSOs – in an environment that allows working collectively on national reforms and policy formulation – can enhance trust and national policy debates, improve citizens' acceptance of policy outcomes and establish a competitive democratic political system with a common long-term vision for democratic societies.⁴

In the Western Balkans there is often a lack of constructive dialogue or effective cooperation between CSOs and party political actors.³ Mutual mistrust and shortcomings on both sides prevail,

hampering reforms and progress. Moreover, a lack of transparent and institutionalised consultation processes in preparing and formulating public policy is one of the major obstacles for constructive dialogue. Only a strong, active, and critical civil society together with reliable, transparent and accountable political institutions can allow for a maximal benefit to society.

Using the Western Balkans as an example, this paper examines various aspects that lead to the persistent gap between the political and the civil society spheres. Some thought-provoking aspects arise, aimed at raising awareness of the divide between political party actors and civil society. The objective is to stimulate discussion both within the European Institutions (with regards to the design of instruments and aid facilities) and with external actors in the Western Balkans. The paper suggests that the EU should focus more on enhancing constructive dialogue between party political actors and civil society in the design of its policies and programmes. It presents possibilities for the EU to play a more vital role as a bridge-builder, by drawing on the experience of the work of Political Foundations.⁵

A list of recommendations is drawn up at the end of the paper, intended for the EU, party political members and civil society actors from the region. This list aims to summarise certain ideas and reflections elaborated within the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP).

1 Under the term “Western Balkans”, the EU subsumes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999.

2 Following the EU's recent definition of CSOs (Multiannual Indicative Programme for the Thematic Programme “Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities” for the period 2014-2020) they include: “non-governmental organisations, organisations representing indigenous peoples, organisations representing national and/or ethnic minorities, diaspora organisations, migrants' organisations in partner countries, local traders' associations and citizens' groups, cooperatives, employers' associations and trade unions (social partners), organisations representing economic and social interests, organisations fighting corruption and fraud and promoting good governance, civil rights organisations and organisations combating discrimination, local organisations (including networks) involved in decentralised regional cooperation and integration, consumer organisations, women's and youth organisations, environmental, teaching, cultural, research and scientific organisations, universities, churches and religious associations and communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations, the media and any non-governmental associations and independent foundations, including independent political foundations, likely to contribute to the implementation of the objectives of the DCI Regulation.” (Multiannual Indicative Programme for the Thematic Programme “Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities” for the period 2014-2020, C(2014) 4865 final, 15.7.2014, p. 4).

3 The term “party political actors” subsumes: actors from ruling political parties and political parties in opposition, governments, public institutions such as state agencies and state and local administrations directed by respective political party (or coalition) programmes and policies. In a democratic political system political parties are the most prominent political actors with a mandate to represent citizens' views in an ideological and partisan sense.

4 Brechtje Kemp, IDEA, nIMD, Oslo Center, *Political Party Dialogue: A Facilitator's Guide*, 2013, p. 133.

5 For more information on the mandate and work of Political Foundations, see profile paper: Development Cooperation between State and Society, ENoP, 2014, <http://www.enop.eu/en/working-groups/development-assistance>

1. A deep divide between Civil Society and Party Political Actors in the Western Balkans

Civil Society Organisations and party political actors both play essential roles in a democratic system: while CSOs represent societal group interests, draw public attention to shortcomings and the needs of society, launch civic initiatives, contribute to decision-making processes, hold party political actors to account and thereby influence politics, political parties are responsible for directly shaping the political process – whether in government or in opposition. In an ideal scenario, both sides would perform along the lines of their particular mandates, act in a constructive and transparent way and regularly consult the expertise of the respective other in order to come up with effective and representative policy proposals.

In reality, decision-making and policy formulation is one-sided and not entirely transparent. The consultation of CSOs and other societal actors is mostly very limited, with political projects often pushed forward in a non-transparent way. As a result, they are labelled as “elite projects” far from representing the interests of citizens.⁶

CSOs in the Western Balkans face many obstacles. In most cases, they must carry out their work in non-supportive environments (administrative, juridical, legal, financial, and political). Financing for CSO activities is very scarce and only a privileged few have the capacities to develop project proposals in order to acquire funds through EU grants and other public or private sources. Meanwhile, there has been a marked development in an autonomous “Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) industry”, specialised in drawing sustenance from foreign donors.⁷ Furthermore, the shortcomings of governments in providing well-organised, transparent, multi-stakeholder consultation processes to prepare and formulate public policy is a major obstacle for CSOs in making meaningful contributions and providing the benefit of their expertise.

On the other hand, CSOs in the Western Balkans often lack the requisite professional competencies or skills to interact with party

political actors. Their campaigns can be unimaginative, consisting mainly of awareness-raising through lectures and public performances, resulting in low levels of outreach and influence as regards societal and political processes. In order to become more involved in public policy and political decision-making, CSOs must enhance their capacities and professionalism, so as to approach political actors proactively and feed in their standpoints despite the lack of official consultation meetings.

Citizens in Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Serbia view political parties as the most corrupt out of twelve public institutions assessed.⁸ Indeed, political parties in the Western Balkans are rarely typical programmatic parties in the Western European sense⁹: instead of assuming their responsibilities to shape society in accordance with normative principles, translating citizens’ interest into concrete politics, finding democratic compromise and serving long-term interests for the whole of society, many party political actors tend to abuse their powers for the purpose of private acquisition or serving clientelistic networks. Corruption and nepotism are prevalent within the political system and internal party structures lack transparency and accountability. Very little politics goes on within the parties, and party members act as indentured clients to their protectors within parties. The total size of party-membership is difficult to estimate, due to a lack of transparency and the fact that a person can hold membership of different parties. In addition, party leaders are usually in very strong positions and rarely counteracted by other party members.

It can be observed that in candidate and potential-candidate countries, party political actors easily switch from one political ideology and conviction to another, be this for tactical, personal, or other reasons. Ruling political parties often monopolise public discourse, as NGOs, trade unions and other CSO actors do not have the professional capacities to reach an audience broad enough to influence discussions on certain topics in society. Furthermore, the line between CSO and party political actors is often blurred: while CSO leaders run for political positions, politicians establish new CSOs mainly serving their own financial benefits.¹⁰ In order to support an enabling environment for creating

6 Skrabalo, Marina, The Greens/European Free Alliance, Transparency in retrospect: preliminary lessons from Croatia’s EU accession process. Discussion paper commissioned by the Greens/EFA in the European Parliament, 2012, Zagreb.

7 Cf: Michael Ehrke: “Social-democratic parties in Central and Southeast Europe: Organizations based on political convictions or management agencies for the government?”, IPA February 2010, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/07059.pdf>

8 See: Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer (2013), http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/lack_of_public_trust_in_political_parties_undermining_democracy_in_the_balk

9 See: McDevitt, Andrew: ‘Buying Influence: Money and Elections in the Balkans’, Transparency International, 2013. http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/pub/buying_influence_money_and_elections_in_the_balkans

10 A practice which can be widely observed in Western Balkan countries is that members of political parties, once having won elections, create so-called GoNGOs. Through their false NGO, they apply for projects financed by the State, e.g. the Ministry for Youth and Sport, and despite their lack of expertise in the particular fields, are provided with large amounts of money. These NGOs are created to siphon state budgets as well as EU funds (e.g. from the Youth in Action Programme) for the profit of certain political parties and the party members involved. For further reading on the subject, see: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/birn-summer-school/party-ties-help-ngos-win-key-serbian-ministerial-deals>
<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/eu-cash-enriches-macedonia-s-shady-youth-ngos>

sustainable mechanisms of consultation and dialogue, this type of double standard and abuse of power needs to be eradicated in the long-run.

The root causes of the conflicting relationship between party political actors and CSOs are extremely complex. The issue should not be simplified or treated as one-sided. Tackling the challenge

requires long-term measures on many different levels, targeting and involving various actors and requiring degrees of willingness on both sides. Positive developments are occurring in all countries of the Western Balkans, with the following list of best practice examples giving a snapshot of promising projects and institutions in the region:

BEST PRACTICES in the Western Balkans

***SRĐ JE NAŠ*, Civil Initiative, Croatia**

Established in 2010, the Croatian civil initiative *Srdj Je Naš* aims to preserve Dubrovnik's cultural and natural heritage, public spaces and the right of citizens to participate in decision-making processes. Among others, the initiative lobbied successfully against a proposal to build a golf resort near Dubrovnik. Together with other Croatian NGOs, *Srdj Je Naš* succeeded in overturning a law allowing this construction, thereby creating the conditions for the first bottom-up referendum.

EU accession process, Croatia

The EU accession process of Croatia has positively demonstrated how to strengthen civil society. Created in 2003, the *National Foundation for Civil Society Development* strives to achieve active citizenship in the development of a modern, democratic and inclusive society in the Republic of Croatia. Over the years it has proved effective in strengthening the organisational/financial capacities of CSOs, while at the same time becoming more independent from state funding.

Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, Serbia

The aim of the *Belgrade Centre for Security Policy* is to gain the confidence of the government and security institutions. While not always successful, concrete results have been achieved through constructive and to-the-point criticisms, as well as by working patiently with the institutions.

Centre for Civic Education, Montenegro

The Centre for Civic Education is a CSO partner of the Montenegrin government that maintains its independence and distance while remaining an influential partner in drafting policies.

A mode of mutual acknowledgement and fruitful coexistence is possible. This is often a very narrow and delicate path for dialogue and cooperation, which itself demands different approaches and careful context analysis of societal and political structures.

Political Foundations adopt this approach, involving actors from all sectors of society with the aim of creating a change of mindset and helping to establish trust.

2. The role of the European Union

The EU has been committed to supporting civil society for many years, as an empowered and capacitated civil society can positively influence the emergence of a democratic political culture.¹¹

The most relevant EU programme for supporting reforms in candidate and potential candidate countries for the Western Balkans to fulfil the Copenhagen Criteria is the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA).¹² Through IPA II (2014-2020), the EU commits itself to supporting political reform, in particular by strengthening democracy and its institutions.¹³ With an increased budget of €11.7 billion (€11.5 billion for the period 2007-2013) the EU finances the support of public administration, rule of law, sustainable economy, citizens, agriculture and sustainable development.¹⁴ The Civil Society Facility (CSF)¹⁵ plays a virtual role in creating an “enabling environment for CSOs” and supports capacity building programmes for CSOs,¹⁶ among others.

The European Commission has also placed great emphasis on involving CSOs in the process of drafting its annual Progress Reports on (potential) candidate countries: local CSOs as well as international NGOs are invited to contribute to the consultation process and thus have the opportunity to comment from a civil society point of view on achievements and shortcomings in the transformation process of their country. The same is true for EC consultations on specific issues related to the enlargement process. The “Guidelines on CSO support in enlargement countries”¹⁷ initiated by the Commission indicate the need for a “conducive environment” which includes the legal, judicial and administrative sectors.

In addition, the European Economic and Social Committee focuses on contacts with CSOs from the economic sector, but also encourages relations with CSOs from all sectors in meetings of the Civil Society Forum for the Western Balkans. The 2012 Forum in Zagreb

dealt with the media, freedom of expression and rural development. Another Forum is due to take place in Belgrade in 2015 to discuss the rights of minorities, gender issues and the role of civil society in fighting corruption. There are also scheduled joint consultative committees with Turkey, Montenegro and Macedonia to address social and trade union rights and gender issues.

Overall, EU financial assistance tends to be granted only to those CSOs whose advocacy goals are in line with the current EU priorities as set out in their annual work programmes or multi-annual strategies. However, this funding approach risks being counterproductive in terms of the sustainability of CSOs, as it forces them to change and realign their focus of activities for each project period, often making long-term planning highly difficult.

IPA II is not the only funding instrument available to the Western Balkans: the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), with a principal focus on human rights and democratic transition, plays an important role when pushing forward democratic developments in the region. The EIDHR 2014-2020, with a new objective of “support to democracy”, provides “support to participatory and representative democracy” as well as “to inclusive political participation and representation, through the expansion of the political space”.¹⁸ It is thereby the first instrument specifically targeting the political sphere; nonetheless, support to party political actors and explicitly political parties is still excluded as a funding principle from EIDHR and other EU instruments.

In short, the EU has recognised the important role of an active and enabled civil society for the reform process in these countries, translating this into its enlargement policy approach and diverse programmes as outlined above. This has not only raised awareness, but also improved public acknowledgement, and thus to a certain extent the role and influence of CSOs in the political process in the countries concerned. Nonetheless, neither the policies nor the programmes or projects of the EU sufficiently take into ac-

11 See: “The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe’s engagement with Civil Society in external relations”, European Commission, COM (2012) 492 final, 12.09.2012, and “EU support to sustainable change in transition countries”, European Commission, JOIN (2012) 27 final, 03.10.2012, Brussels, website: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/development-policies/documents/communication_transition_en.pdf

12 The first specific programmes were launched already in the context of CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation) in 2001.

13 It promotes human rights, respect of minorities and the rule of law as well as basic education for the implementation of the EU *acquis*, and supports freedom of expression and free participation of citizens in public life and setting the political agenda.

14 IPA II regulations: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/financial_assistance/ipa/2014/231-2014_ipa-2-reg.pdf

15 Already when it was established in 2008, the CSF aimed to enhance the situation of civil society in those countries in order to allow them to operate freely and effectively, hold government to account, engage in policy and decision-making processes, build the capacity of CSOs to prepare them to engage in advocacy and governance as well as to improve interaction between local grass-roots organisations and established CSOs.

16 Under IPA I (2007-2013), the CSF received €163.5 million: €76.86 from the multi-beneficiary IPA programmes and €86.91 million from the national IPA programme. For the period 2011-2013, the CSF had a budget of €40 million. The aim under IPA II is to allocate more than 2% of the total budget. At this stage, it is tentatively planned to allocate €100 million from regional budgets (under the MCSP) while the remaining funds would be allocated by national programmes with a similar proportion to IPA I (i.e. up to €115 million).

17 DG Enlargement, Guidelines for EU support to civil society in enlargement countries, 2014-2020,

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/civil_society/doc_guidelines_cs_support.pdf

Multi-annual Indicative Programme EIDHR 2014-2020, Concept Note, available online at: <http://www.eidhr.eu/files/dmfile/2013-12-02EIDHRdraftConceptNoteMIP.pdf>

18 Multi-annual Indicative Programme EIDHR 2014-2020, Concept Note, available online at: <http://www.eidhr.eu/files/dmfile/2013-12-02EIDHRdraftConceptNoteMIP.pdf>

count the crucial task of bridging the gap between CSOs and party political actors. In the long-run, the EU should try to involve both actors and contribute towards establishing regular political dialogues.

The next Chapter outlines the role and function of political foundations in this endeavour. Their working methods and projects can provide helpful examples of how to build bridges and instigate long-term change.

3. Bridging the gap between Civil Society and Party Political actors: the work of Political Foundations in the Western Balkans

In a pluralistic political system, both party political actors and CSOs assume particular roles and mandates. They do not exist in a vacuum, but rather are systematically interlinked and their productivity and positive effects dependent on each other.

The aim of bringing both actors closer together is a long-term challenge and needs to be tackled in a differentiated way. Political Foundations working in the region aim at enhancing the development of reliable, accountable political parties based on values and party programmes, respecting transparency and democratic rule as key factors in a democratic system.¹⁹ Distinct from businesses, human rights organisations and other NGOs, Political Foundations play a crucial role as mediators between these two spheres.²⁰ Their work not only concentrates on capacity-building and training in order to improve both sides' effectiveness and professionalism, but also on building confidence and providing platforms for constructive dialogue. Their proximity to political parties in EU member states allows them access to decision-makers at all levels. Furthermore, having long-term partnerships and offering enduring support to a variety of actors makes them a trust-worthy partner for both civil society and party political actors.

Before strategies, instruments and target groups are chosen, Political Foundations working in the candidate and potential-candidate countries undertake a careful context analysis of the different societal and political structures present. Depending on the situation in the country, it may be necessary to support civil society groups, work with national parliaments or public administrations, build up the internal capacity of political parties, enhance a free and fair media, etc. The main instruments are political dialogue, political cooperation and civic education.²¹

The work of Political Foundations in the Western Balkans will be exemplified through the following categories:

1. Training activities for Political Parties.
2. Capacity-building for Civil Society.
3. Capacity-building and confidence-building between Party Political actors and Civil Society.
4. Support to Public Institutions.
5. Serving as a model: Establishing young Political Foundations.

3.1 Training activities for Political Parties

One area of work of Political Foundations is organising training sessions for (future) political leaders in EU candidate and potential-candidate countries. One of the aims of these training sessions is to provide examples of ways of interacting constructively with citizens and CSOs. Other areas of training touch upon questions of internal democracy: party leaders are instructed on how to internally guarantee democratic principles during the entire democratic cycle (membership development, financial administration, etc.).²² Designed mainly in a peer-to-peer fashion,²³ the trainings also aim to enhance participants' practical experience on how to democratically structure and run political parties, how to run an election campaign and how to establish a political party programme based on democratic values.

¹⁹ Political foundations are close to, but independent from, political parties. They share certain common values, but in terms of their activities, financing and decision-making, political foundations remain independent.

²⁰ For further information on the mandate and work of Political Foundations cf: Ernst Hillebrandt/Uwe Optenhögel: "Mediatoren in einer entgrenzten Welt-zur außenpolitischen Rolle der politischen Stiftungen", IPG, 2/2001; Werner Böhrer: "Die Rolle der politischen Stiftungen in der deutschen Entwicklungspolitik", KAS-AI, 06/05; p. 4-14; Alexander Mohr: "The German Political Foundations as Actors of Democracy Assistance", Dissertation 2010, published by Boca Raton.

²¹ ENoP Profile Paper: Political Foundations: Development Cooperation between State and Society, March 2014.

²² See: Internal party democracy in Kosovo, KAS, 2012: http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_32753-1522-1-30.pdf?130116163357, Centre for Research and Policy Making

²³ See ENoP Policy Paper: Supporting political parties – food for thought for European actors, June 2013.

Regional Project: “Promising politicians”

The Max-van-der-Stoel-Stichting (FMS) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) have been running this regional capacity-building programme for young politicians since 2001. Entitled “Promising Politicians”, the project addresses young politicians from the Western Balkans who are engaged in parties dedicated to young people interested in social-democratic values. Every year a group of around thirty young people (aged under 30) are trained in different seminars during the year - held in the region as well as in Brussels - on topics related to social democracy and EU-Integration.

The aim of this very well-received programme is to improve awareness and capacities among future party leaders for accountable and reliable party work, and to enable them to have an understanding of what role a party should have in society. Besides this, the regional programme also has a trust and confidence-building element: these trainings contribute to establishing a regional network of working relations as well as reinforcing regional cooperation and reconciliation on an informal political level. A number of former participants in these trainings are now in important political positions and continue to nurture this fruitful cooperation.

“European Values in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Compass for Political Cooperation”, Bosnia and Herzegovina

In April 2014, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) organised a conference entitled “European Values in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Compass for Political Cooperation” in Sarajevo. This event focused on the possibility of creating a common agenda for the European People’s Party (EPP)-affiliated and like-minded parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as on proposals for implementing relevant EU reforms.

On the occasion of this conference, a joint declaration on common values and goals was ratified by the chairmen of the EPP-affiliated and like-minded parties. The document is the result of a workshop organised by the Foundation at the end of October 2013, with the declaration text based on the EPP’s party platform and focusing on the following areas:

- commitment of EPP-affiliated and like-minded partner parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina to EU and EPP values;
- respect for national identity and preserving Bosnia and Herzegovina’s cultural diversity;
- concept of social market economy; commitment to the rule of law and to the creation of a functional judicial system;
- desire to implement the principles and objectives of the declaration with the assistance of the European Union, and to achieve values-based cooperation.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) /Kosovo: Party political support

In collaboration with the Eduardo Frei Stichting and other local partners (e.g. Educational Institute Pavel Shatev) KAS FYROM organised several activities for party members and officials from parties of the centre-right in FYROM. The objective of these trainings was to prepare various elections – for example of local government – and improve party political programmes by informing participants about the legal requirements and procedures of the respective elections. Furthermore, the trainings aimed to provide advice on improving political communication within the party, as well as on media and public relations with an outreach to citizens.

3.2 Capacity-Building for Civil Society

In order to channel the demands and interests of citizens into the political process, civil society organisations need to have political credibility, the knowledge and capacity to lobby and advocate for

their positions, and the internal competencies to democratically and transparently run an organisation, including sound financial management.

Serbia: Civil Society contributions to the Serbia 2014 Progress Report, Chapter 27: Environment and Climate Change

Since 2005 the European Commission has been publishing annual reports on Serbia's progress towards the EU. Each report evaluates key political and economic criteria. In times when fighting organised crime, corruption, and setting up democratic institutions are seen as priorities, little time and effort was invested in environment and climate change. Chapter 27 on Environment and Climate Change is one of the most challenging, as it stands for one third of the total EU legislation that needs to be transposed and implemented. This report was jointly prepared by seven Civil Society Organisations from Serbia, with assistance from the Climate Action Network Europe and the Heinrich Böell Foundation Southeastern Europe. The report outlines the readiness to be actively involved in the negotiation process and details the expertise and capacities of Civil Society Organisations to ensure the best possible outcomes.

FYROM: Enhancing the capacities of Trade Unions

In FYROM, the FES – together with the Macedonian partner Think-Tank Progress Institute for Social Democracy, an Academy for project-writing – was established to build the capacities of trade unions on writing applications and managing projects. Participants complete project proposals and applications which are then developed and written during various modules, after which trade unions are also eligible to apply for international funding for advocacy and development work.

3.3 Capacity-building and confidence-building between Party Political actors and Civil Society

As this paper argues, it is not sufficient to only target either “one” or the “other” side. An overall comprehensive approach to democracy support is needed, one providing platforms for dialogue and

exchange. This includes alliance and bridge-building programmes between the different actors in the political and societal sphere, but also concrete training and awareness-raising programmes.

FYROM and Kosovo: Political and Intercultural Dialogue – From Conflict to Common Interest

The Kalevi Sorsa Foundation, the Skopje office of FES and the Progress Institute for Social Democracy have organised several workshops for mixed groups of young activists from political parties and NGOs in FYROM and Kosovo. These workshops were part of the project “Political and Intercultural Dialogue – From Conflict to Common Interest”. With the aim of strengthening democracy, the workshops targeted the aspect of empowerment and encouraged activists from political parties and NGOs to cooperate with each other and develop common activities. A high multiplier effect could be achieved and study circles have been set up.

Croatia: Establish dialogue between party political members and civil society

Between 2006 and 2014, discussing the EU accession process, HBS Croatia and partner organisations aimed to bring together different perspectives on EU legislation around one table. Political members from different party families had been invited to interact with Civil Society Organisations, to present their opinions and positions and to debate different aspects of EU accession such as the impacts of EU legislation on nature and environmental protection or on gender equality and non-discrimination principles. This was conducted through diverse instruments such as regular expert talks, public round-table discussions, conferences, study trips and visiting programmes, but also through regular exchanges between civil society actors in Croatia and parliamentary political representatives from Brussels and other member states.

Serbia: Regional Democratic School for representatives of political parties and CSO activists

KAS, Belgrade Open School (BOŠ) and Eduardo Frei Foundation regularly organise a one-week educational programme for selected young political leaders (from centre-right and moderate-right parties) and CSO activists in Serbia. The aim of the programme is to inform participants about the values of these party families and provide training in the field of contemporary political practice and theory. The lectures focus on basic concepts of domestic and foreign policies, democratic political institutions, economic and social policy and the process of European integration. The added value of this project is the facilitation of network creation, the fostering of mutual cooperation and the promotion of common values and consensus.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Awareness-raising for LGBT rights

This is an EU project funded under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), implemented by Heinrich Böll Stiftung Bosnia and Herzegovina in partnership with the Sarajevo Open Centre and Cure Foundation, aimed at raising awareness of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transsexual) peoples’ rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In BiH, discrimination, stigmatisation and even violence against LGBT people is rampant. The project brought together CSO actors and civil servants working at Ministries of Interior such as Health, Education and Jurisdiction, in order to safeguard basic human rights such as the right to work, freedom of opinion and the right of assembly for LGBT people. For the first time, police officials were included in trainings on LGBT rights in BiH.

3.4 Support to Public Institutions

Public institutions can be change agents or veto players in the democratic transition process. Crucial public institutions consist of national parliaments – including their administrative bodies – governmental offices/units/departments, ministries, agencies, advisory bodies, Ombudsman, and the national juridical system. They all play a vital role for the well-functioning of democratic

systems and are in many ways points of reference for Civil Society Organisations, either in the political decision-making process or regarding questions on the well-being of civil society within a country. For example, when initiating new policy initiatives, these institutions often have to establish a cooperation mechanism with Civil Society Organisations.²⁴

Serbia: Public security reforms

The Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung supported the development of public security reform in Serbia (training for border and traffic police), public administration (training of the Serbian Government's human resources management service, training on multi-ethnic dialogue for municipal administrations) and support to the Serbian Government's Office for European Integration on the process of harmonising Serbian legislation with the *acquis communautaire*.

Serbia: Lectures on the EU Accession process of Serbia

Since 2005, FES Serbia has been organising lectures for civil servants, NGO activists and trade union leaders pertaining to the Accession process of Serbia into the EU. Until Serbia gained Candidate Country status in 2011, these lectures and trainings covered general topics on the EU, such as EU Law and Legislative Procedures. The partners in the lectures were the Belgrade Open School (BOŠ) and Serbia's European Integration Office (SEIO). After 2011 and Serbia becoming a Candidate Country, the nature of the lectures became more specialised and focused on particular chapters for public civil servants from relevant ministries. For example, several trainings on Chapter 15 (Energy) were provided for selected civil servants from the Ministry of Energy and lectures on Chapter 19 (Social Policy & Employment) included civil servants from the Ministry of Social Policy and Labour, as well as representatives of Trade Unions. Since this programme was launched in 2005, a total of 49 trainings have been held with 1231 participants. Since 2013, when Croatia became a member of the EU, trainings have been held nearly exclusively by Croatian public civil servants who were involved in the EU accession process in their home country.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Support to State-level and entity Parliaments

KAS has been implementing a parliamentary support programme for the past four years. The aim was to strengthen the capacities of State-level Parliament (in particular the House of Representatives) and supporting the set-up of an ad hoc commission to develop a transparent and inclusive process for the implementation of the Sejdic-Fincic verdict. KAS supported the Commission by offering expertise and raising awareness about the role of the Parliament in the development of a compromise solution. Furthermore, KAS aimed to enhance cooperation between the entity Parliaments of Republica Srpska (RS) and the Federation BiH. During the last three years, KAS has organised meetings between parliamentarians of RS and FBiH (from all relevant factions) in cooperation with the Parliament of Saxony in Germany. In doing so, KAS assisted in defining the role of the entity Parliaments as a driving political force and legislative initiator. Additionally, KAS initiated a scholarship programme for young people, giving them the opportunity to complete an internship in the BiH Parliamentary Assembly.

²⁴ See TACSO report: Keeping up the momentum: Improving Cooperation Between Public Institutions and Civil Society in the Western Balkans and Turkey, October 2012, <http://www.opengovguide.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Report-Keeping-up-the-Momentum.pdf>

3.5 Serving as a model: establishing young Political Foundations

The number of independently-acting Political Foundations ideologically affiliated to political parties is limited in acceding countries. Numerous think-tanks depend on Foreign Ministries or State-related organisations such as the Academies of Sciences in the Western Balkan countries or Turkey, in which activities

depend on political impulse and public financial support. Securing political research or education independently from ruling governments is barely possible and only a handful of independent Political Foundations can therefore be listed.

Regional Project: Supporting the creation of Think-Tanks in the Western Balkans

During the past few years, FES has intensively fostered the establishment of think-tanks/analytical institutes in the countries of the Western Balkans. These think-tanks have been commissioned to conduct political analyses and consultancy for the respective government of the country. The idea is to raise capacity on the NGO/think-tank side and improve mutual appreciation between NGOs (think-tanks) and party political actors. Good examples are provided by a couple of studies focusing on “Youth (un)employment”, which were commissioned by FES in different Western Balkans countries and were of great use for their governments, thereby contributing towards improving mutual respect and understanding.

Serbia: Establishment of the International and Security Affairs Centre (ISAC Fund)

Through the support of numerous European (among others, FES, HBS, KAS) and American political and private foundations, the International and Security Affairs Centre (ISAC Fund) was founded in 2006 and has since dealt with Serbia’s foreign policy, especially towards Euro-Atlantic integration and Serbia’s relations with Russia. ISAC promotes and serves the transformation of Serbia towards EU and Euro-Atlantic membership by addressing the challenges facing the country and the region, influencing policy and decision-making through research, policy proposals, political analysis and forecasts and specialist education, with the ultimate aim of attaining a more prosperous future for current and upcoming generations.

Regional Project: Establishing social democratic political foundations

Apart from supporting the establishment of politically independent think-tanks, during the 1990s FES supported (partly together with Max-Van-der-Stoel-Stichting, Olof Palme International Center and Fondation Jean-Jaurès) the creation of political foundations dedicated to social democracy in the Western Balkans. Meanwhile, they provide political analyses, trainings, capacity-building and so on, thus establishing a confidence-building link between civil society and the political elite in respective countries. Examples are: “Novo Drustvo” in Croatia or “Progress Institute” in FYROM.

Recommendations

The constructive interplay of the political and the civil society spheres is a basic pillar of democracy, touching on issues such as freedom of expression, democratic participation, accountability and transparency. However, ensuring political dialogue between party political actors and civil society actors is a highly delicate and complex challenge which needs to be addressed in different ways on different societal levels. As a basis for further reflection and thinking, this policy paper has outlined an issue which is widely known but rarely addressed by decision-makers.

On the example of the Western Balkans region, this paper gives some food-for-thought for both policy-makers and CSO actors in a European and a regional context. The following recommendations address:

1. European Institutions
2. Party Political Actors in the Western Balkans
3. CSOs in the Western Balkans

1. Recommendations to the European Institutions:

- acknowledge and support trust-building and dialogue between political party actors and CSOs in the Western Balkans through various channels and by including various stakeholders at different levels, as an essential element for strengthening democratic pluralistic societies;
- support training activities for both political and civil society actors, aiming to enhance their level of professionalism (e.g. through the Civil Society Facility);
- draw on the experience and capacities of Political Foundations as bridge-builders between political parties and civil society;
- take the accession process as a best-practice example for transparent policy negotiations, including civil society and citizens at all stages. Croatian civil society development can serve as an exemplary process for the region;
- ensure long-term funding for diverse CSO actors and continued support in EU grant application procedures and modalities;
- focus on the more political spectrum of civil society;
- continue providing support to public institutions through programmes in the framework of the accession process (twinning programmes, TAIEX), which can contribute to encouraging public institutions to engage in participatory policy making with civil society;
- support governments in the region in developing strategies aimed at establishing the appropriate legal and political environment in beneficiary countries to enable the efficient work of CSOs. This should be monitored by the annual progress reports of the European Commission.

2. Recommendations to Party Political actors in the Western Balkans:

- provide an enabling environment – including legal, administrative, financial, judicial and political aspects of civil society – to enfold and articulate not only the needs of citizens, but also the ability to actively engage into the political process;
- acknowledge that only by including all stakeholders in shaping political decisions can the outcome be to the benefit of society as a whole;
- foster a culture of structured political debate by including the expertise and knowledge of CSOs.

3. Recommendations to CSOs in the Western Balkans:

- launch or join national and international networks, platforms and umbrella organisations that allow the exchange of information, transfer of knowledge and best practices and benefit from synergies. Make particular use of capacity-building for junior members, for example via scholarships;
- when the conditions allow, feel encouraged to be a partner in decision-making processes and contribute constructively to the political empowerment of citizens;
- inform the government of any problems you may be facing in procedures and suggest potential improvements to the regulation.

The European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP) is the representative platform of currently 64 political foundations from 25 countries. ENoP unites member foundations from six party families (ALDE, EPP, S&D, ECR, Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL). Political Foundations have been active players in the field of democracy support for several decades. On the one hand, they contribute to effective development and democratisation policies by implementing projects on the ground; on the other hand, they develop policy ideas and contribute to agenda-setting in the national and EU context. Since its establishment in 2006, accompanied by an inaugural speech by President Barroso, ENoP has become a trusted partner of EU institutions and an important actor in the field of democracy support. The network currently enjoys the financial support of the EC in the framework of the co-funded project “Building a bridge towards socio-political stakeholders for an effective EU development assistance – enhanced dialogue with and within the European Network of Political Foundations”.

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