

The Balkan Civil society Development Network is cordially inviting you to the

Regional workshop

“Joint action for promoting civic space and a more resilient civil society”

Belgrade, 30-31 May 2022

As the pandemic heightened the crisis of democracy in the Balkans, and the effects of the Ukraine war are yet to be seen in the region, it is evident that our societies face a turning point for their democratic development. The role of the civil society in driving positive change is now important more than ever, but in order to maintain and strengthen its role in our region, civil society has to find new ways of working and responding to the numerous challenges amplified by the economic and social recession.

By now, we are all aware that cracking civic space is a trend, and populists use the same methods around the globe, but our role is to demonstrate that civic space cannot be closed if we open up to new models, methods, partnerships so that no voice is left behind. We must defend the civic space by mobilizing citizens support and civic engagement, and investing in partnerships and coalitions with stakeholders other than the usual for achieving common goals. While aware of the challenges, we move forward in connecting, testing, and exploring new opportunities.

The regional workshop aims to show the state of affairs in the Western Balkans, the good and bad examples of where we are in terms of civic space, but also discuss wider, global trends, challenges, and opportunities. The event aims to bring together various stakeholders including CSOs and CSO networks, donors, international organizations, civic activists, journalists and other actors to discuss innovative and responsive advocacy approaches for increasing the role of civil society at national, regional and EU level in dealing with the challenges brought about by the recent crises.

AGENDA

DAY 1

11:30 – 11:45 Registration

11:45 – 12:00 Opening remarks

12:00 – 13:30 The state of civil society in the Western Balkans: Monitoring Matrix Regional Report '21

LUNCH BREAK 13:30 – 14:15

14:15 – 15:30 Support to civil society in crises: Donors' perspectives

15:30 – 16:30 Working group discussion: Building donor-community relations

DAY 2

09:30 – 11:00 Exploring new civic spaces (panel + working groups)

11:00 – 12:30 Addressing the challenges (panel + working groups)

LUNCH BREAK 12:30 – 13:30

13:30 – 14:45 How to overcome closing of civic space together?

14:45 – 15:00 Closing remarks

DETAILED AGENDA

DAY 1

11:30 – 11:45 Welcome and registration

11:45 – 12:00

Opening remarks (Anja Bosilkova-Antovska, BCSDN)

Setting the tone (Maja Stojanovic, Civic Initiatives, Executive Director- *Fostering regional cooperation and policy responses in time of crises*)

12:00 – 13:30

Panel I – Current CSO affairs: Presentation of the Monitoring Matrix Regional Report 2021

Within our efforts to create and sustain an enabling environment for civil society through the Balkans regions, we are consecutively monitoring its state in the current contexts. What are the key findings and recommendations from this year's monitoring in the WB6? Were new challenges introduced to the CSO community related to the legal framework or its implementation in practice and how to overcome them?

- BCSDN presentation of regional findings and recommendations
- Blitz country issues
- Discussion + Q&A

LUNCH BREAK 13:30 – 14:15

14:15 – 15:30

Panel II - Support to civil society in crises: Donors' perspectives, flexibility and ability to adapt

The civil society ecosystem has never gone under a more in-depth adaptability process than in the past three years, and the donors' community is a significant part of this ecosystem. Did the donor`s priorities change in the past years, especially due to the recent crises (COVID-19 and Ukraine war)? How much have these two major developments affected the donors' strategies and approaches to supporting the civil society in our region? What about their impact in the long term? What are the expected challenges for WB civil society?

Moderator: Aleksandar Krzalovski, MCIC

- Balkan Trust for Democracy, Ms. Natasa Petrovic
- USAID, Ms. Jelena Avramović
- NED, Ms. Tanja Dramac Jiries
- DG NEAR, Mr. Daniele Alois
- SDC Serbia , Ms. Melina Papageorgiou

15:30 – 16:30

Working group discussion – Building donor-community relations

To create sustainable impact and long-lasting enabling environment, we must focus on building mutually beneficial relations, prone to growth. What are some of the aspects of the CSO`s work that the donor community might need a better insight into to enable better understanding of the needs? How do we envisage mutual, but ownership of the processes? Can we build common ground on the question of donor dependence?

Moderator: Civic Initiatives Representative

DAY 2

09:30 – 11:00

Panel III + Working groups: Exploring new civic spaces

As civic spaces shrink in their physical form, they work their way through the cyberspace. The current global process of digital transformation is a 'megatrend', influencing how people work, communicate, are governed. If a decade ago citizens uprisings were communicated and coordinated via twitter, today we are witnessing much more cultivated models of civic engagement through the internet. What are the new trends and have the new trends reached the Balkans? Are we more (dis)connected now than ever? What other ways of connecting offline are there, from local to regional, in order to challenge how we practice democracy and allow for open spaces and open institutions?

Moderator: Taulant Hoxha, KCSF

- Zelen Human Grad: Gorjan Jovanovski, *Grassroots participation, direct democracy, digital community*
- Gradimo Mostar, Mr. Damjan Damjan Jugović
- BNLD, Ms. Stanka Parac, *Citizen participation in the Western Balkans*
- Partners for Democratic Change Serbia, Uros Misljenovic: *Engagement of WB CSOs in the shaping and implementation of the Digital Agenda*

11:00 – 12:30

Panel IV + Working groups: Addressing the challenges

What are the trends and tactics for cracking civic spaces or threatening basic rights and freedoms? In which forms the challenges (dis)appear and how do they manifest through the region? Do we have a pattern regarding the tactics for cracking the civic spaces? What shall we keep our focus on in the period that comes? How is the Ukraine war and the Russian propaganda affecting the region?

Moderator: Zorana Markovic, CRNVO

- Civic Initiatives, Ms. Tara Petrović, Serbia: *SLAPPs /Attacks on activists/Smear campaigns*
- Steps, Mr. Marko Oljaca: *Far-right narratives/movements, hate speech*
- Liberties, Balázs Dénes, Executive Director: *EU trends of cracking civic space*
- CURE Foundation, Medina Mujić, BiH: *Russian influence, destabilization*

LUNCH BREAK 12:30 – 13:30

13:30 – 15:00

Panel V: How to overcome closing of civic space together?

If CSOs are to fulfil a range of important public interest roles, an enabling operating environment for both online and offline is a necessary precondition for civil society to flourish. But CSOs are only one part of the civil society environment, along with activists, journalists, donors, corporate workers and officials, that have different but equally important roles in promoting the civic space. How shall we act together to ensure

functional civic spaces and allow for innovation to take place? What are the different paths that come together in opening civic spaces?

Moderator: Anja Bosilkova-Antovska, BCSDN

- Mr. Andrew Firmin, CIVICUS: *Global level advocacy and solidarity*
- Mr. Richard Allen, TACSO: *Networking and supporting the sectoral infrastructure*
- Ms. Ana Zbona, Business and Human Rights Resource Center: *Cooperation with businesses sector*
- Ms. Tamara Filipovic, Safejournalists.net: *The importance of accountable communications and the link with citizens*
- Ms. Sonja Stojanovic Gajic: *The impact of activism*

Discussion and concluding remarks