



# "Investing in our common future", 21st-23rd of October, Constanta

## Conference Report

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## The Black Sea NGO Forum. History and objectives

The **Black Sea NGO Forum** was launched in **2008** by the Romanian Federation of Development NGOs (FOND) and its partners throughout the region with support from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation in the framework of the Black Sea Synergy. It has continued in 2009 in cooperation with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Commission and the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation.

In 2008, the first edition of the Forum gathered over 100 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine**, other **European Union** member states and important actors in the wider Black Sea Region. The second edition of the Forum was organized in Bucharest, on 29-31 October 2009. Over 180 participants from 21 countries attended the event.

The Forum aims at increasing the level of **dialogue and cooperation** among NGOs in the wider Black Sea region, as a means of **strengthening NGOs** and their capacity to influence regional and national policies.

Our **vision**, as civil society is that, historically, the Black Sea has been rather a cooperation medium than a barrier. Naturally it has allowed for communication and exchange (either cultural or economic). Non-governmental organizations in the region are very similar, in terms of origin, path and challenges they are facing. There are numerous **lessons learnt and expertise** which are worth sharing. Non-governmental organizations have the vocation to act jointly to bring **positive social change** for both their countries and for the region as a whole.

The accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union (EU) moved the border of the EU to the Black Sea, thus creating **new opportunities for cooperation**. Romania and Bulgaria have joined the 10 New Member States (NMS) of the EU in becoming donor countries and taking responsibilities within the external action of the EU. Similar historical context and problems have lead NMS to be particularly interested and able to share experience and expertise and to contribute with resources to supporting economic, social and political reform in neighbor countries in the wider Black Sea region.

The Black Sea NGO Forum is complementary to other regional initiatives (for instance the recently launched Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum). It looks for creating synergies,

avoiding overlapping activities and making full use of the civil society potential in the region. There are three main defining elements of this Forum, within the Black Sea Synergy framework:

- 1) The focus of the Black Sea NGO Forum is on **non-governmental organizations** as a particular transformative force throughout the region, bearers of democratic values and advocates of open societies, human and social rights, peace and solidarity throughout the region.
- 2) The Black Sea NGO Forum aims to bring together NGOs from **all the countries in the wider Black Sea region** (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine), as a forum for specialized regional dialogue and cooperation and with other non-governmental organizations and institutions active in the region.
- 3) The Forum brings around the same table **civil society, EU and international donors and officials from the region or involved in the region**, thus supporting capacity building for these actors in order to overcome current gaps in access to information and funds, as well as in implementation practices.





## **The Black Sea NGO Forum, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition: “Investing in our common future”**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Forum took place for the first on the Black Sea shore, in Constanta, Romania, between 21 and 23 October 2010. Over 140 participants from 20 countries attended the event, representing NGOs, public authorities, donor organizations and other international actors.

The objectives of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Forum have been: to share information and analysis on the status of civil society development in the region, to discuss common issues of concern, to share good practices, to identify potential partners and joint action ideas, to make recommendations to the NGO community, national and international actors.

The vision of the Forum is that civil society in the Black Sea area has the vocation to act jointly to bring positive social change for both their countries and for the region as a whole. Civil society convened for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in the framework of the Black Sea NGO Forum to make a “business proposal” to their national governments, to the international actors operating in the region and to their own citizens: there are enough examples of successful initiatives, expertise and human capital to guarantee that an investment in regional NGO cooperation will yield a good return. Investment in civil society initiatives is in fact an investment in the peaceful, democratic and prosperous future of the wider Black Sea region. The offer includes:

- Allowing for an educated and active youth to cooperate and move freely across borders, ensuring a competent and motivated leadership for the future;
- Finding joint solutions to the worrying environmental problems of the Black Sea and keeping the region alive and clean for the future generations;
- Working together at local and cross-border level to foster reconciliation, confidence building and to prevent conflicts;
- Creating innovative social enterprises to reduce poverty and to advance social inclusion, and fostering economic cooperation by means of business associations and think tanks in the economic field;
- Working to empower citizens and to involve them in decision-making at local and national level.

The program of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum included dedicated sessions on the following topics: Major political and economic developments in the region; NGO related

country developments; Democracy and Citizen Participation; Environment; Bridging divided communities; Youth; Sustainable economic development; Donors and international actors' perspectives on civil society developments in the region. A series of workshops aimed to enrich participants' knowledge and know-how in: Capacity building for NGOs, Networking and solidarity among NGOs in the region, New Media / Public campaigns, Cooperation with local authorities.

Study visits to local NGOs and a NGO Fair were organized in order for the participants to share directly experiences and establish direct contacts for potential projects.







## Opening remarks

**Anton Niculescu, State Secretary, The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

*The Black Sea NGO Forum is an opportunity to observe the challenges that exist in the region. Civil society has proved its capacity, mobilization and solidarity and there is a great potential for regional cooperation.*

*All the actors must collaborate – academia, the private sector, local community, media and the Government. In this area there is a lot of potential but also challenges. It is thus important to identify similarities, common needs and solutions and to work for common projects.*

*The forum is a special one as it is based on inclusiveness, accumulating expertise, networking, regional and local ownership. The best initiatives and projects come from civil society, local community and academia. It is in our interest to develop this kind of cooperation.*

**Nicolae Idu, Head of Representation, Representation of the European Commission in Romania**

*The Black Sea region became more important after Romania and Bulgaria's accession to the European Union.*

*The Black Sea Synergy is a European initiative for regional cooperation launched in 2008. The EU efforts through the Black Sea Synergy are complementary with other EU efforts and policies in this region (both bilateral and multilateral) – the European Neighborhood Policy, the European Eastern Partnership, the strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, the cross border cooperation .*

*On one hand there are many challenges in the region – one of the most important being the very number of countries and their diversity. On the other hand this has the potential to become an opportunity because diversity allows for exchange and for the creation of a space where the entire society can be active. In order to achieve more regional cooperation it is equally important to consolidate the trust between all the partners.*

## Review of major political and economic developments in the region

The region is still affected by the changes that took place after the Soviet period. On one hand the European Union became a model and an attraction pole in this way, on the other hand the Russian Federation has gradually reestablished itself as a power in the region.

Most recently Turkey has taken a new and more active role in the region asserting itself as a second major power in the Black Sea basin. The 3 major poles of power are Bruxelles, Moscow and Ankara and they will shape the new strategic map in the future.

What could the EU do for the Black Sea region is to dedicate effort for saving and guaranteeing the positions and development of the democratic communities and states and to define an efficient strategy for development of the post soviet countries. The EU has to choose between two options: (I) to help creating a friendly neighbourhood to the east; (II) to let the region on its own way. The second option could prove more expensive than the first one. (**Ognyan D. Minchev** - Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS) (Bulgaria))

Romania has been one of the stronger advocates of the importance of the Black Sea region. It has been difficult to convince institutions, international organizations and others actors to deal with the Black Sea as a region. Starting with 2008 the situation has changed and the Black Sea has entered the political agenda, both from the regional and global perspectives. The Black Sea does not have only a regional relevance but also a global one.

The EU treats the Black Sea region subject differently than NATO. The existing international institutions present different perspectives for the country in the region. While, for instance, for Romania the integration in NATO and UE was a way to guarantee the national integrity, it is possible that for countries such as the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine they represent something different.

In a period when national states seem to become again more and more important, the future of the Black Sea region has to be reevaluated. Some of the major challenges are the values, the cultural and the political identification which are often in opposition throughout the region. There is no strategy for this region. At present there is more interest in preserving the stability and security, in maintaining the status quo. (**Iulian Fota** - Presidential counselor for national security (Romania))

When speaking about European policies for the region it is important to bear in mind that each EU country is different in its way. The global economic crisis has had a great impact on this region. Some countries have had to adjust more carefully their foreign policies, such being the case of Russia, which is currently interested in anything that will strengthen its economy. Another affected country is Turkey, a country which has grown dramatically in

recent years. China has increased its presence in the region too.

The EU's level of interest in the Black Sea countries will depend on their development over time, on the positive changes which could be achieved through democratic and economic reforms. (**Jana Kobzova** - Russia & Wider Europe Programme co-ordinator, European Council on Foreign Relations)

From a socio-economic perspective the region is not very stable and homogeneous. Economic cooperation and exchange remain low among the countries in the region. The situation in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia illustrates some of the challenges in the region. What is common for all these countries? Economic situation in Azerbaijan and Georgia has improved in the last few years, unlike Armenia where it has become worse. The crisis showed the fragilities and vulnerabilities of their economy. The unemployment rate is very high (Armenia 28 %, Georgia 22%, and Azerbaijan 11%). Remittances are essential for most of the countries in the region and they have been severely affected by the economic crisis.

Regarding the societal challenges, there is a predominant low trust in institutions and a high level of corruption. The civic commitment and the impact of the civil society are very low. Civic rights are not known and understood by the majority of the people. The main role for NGOs should be to increase the awareness of the public about their rights and responsibilities. The nongovernmental sector is capable to contribute to increasing the internal social cohesion and to intensify the cooperation with neighbors regardless of the political agenda of national governments. (**Heghine Manasyan**, Country Director, Caucasus Research Resource Centers (Armenia))





## Country developments – perspectives of civil society organizations

Civil society in any country, particularly in the Eastern European countries, does not exist in a vacuum. There are specific political contexts in all the countries in the region, yet most of them have been going through similar transition experiences.

CSOs in **Armenia** still face major challenges: pressure and intimidation exerted over CSOs are symptoms of a drive for public control over civil society. Nevertheless, civil society proved that it is able to react immediately in order not to allow legislation to set limits for democracy and the activity of civil society. NGO sustainability (particularly financial sustainability) has not improved over the last two years.

As a response to the European Union initiative to support the establishment of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, in June was created a National Forum of Civil Society. The newly created national platform aims to strengthen civil society in Armenia and its ability to lobby at EU level. This is particularly important since although there are many consultative platforms on EU integration, they have not been very efficient and constant.

In **Azerbaijan** there are persistent pressures and abuses on the freedom expression. In some regions of the country NGOs face restrictions particularly during the election periods. The majority of NGOs are still depending of funding from international donors. NGOs are demonstrating a strong will to collaborate with international organizations, on adopting international best practices. They receive substantial technical assistance from donors. A Council of State Support to NGOs has been established to provide funding for NGO projects. NGOs also demonstrate important skills in building coalitions and in working on legislation initiatives. NGOs in Azerbaijan have the possibility to make suggestions and recommendations directly to the Parliament and they have proved there is capacity to influence the legislative process.

In **Georgia** after the Rose Revolution, expectations for fast democratization of the country were high among the society and international organizations. A number of reforms were carried out, which were especially successful in the economic field and reorganization process of the Government structures. There are certain achievements in the areas such as privatization, reduction of tariffs, pension reform, fight against corruption. However, at the same time, human rights situation has dramatically declined. The reform of judiciary may be regarded as one of the most unsuccessful reforms in the view of making progress.

There are efforts to question the legitimacy of the outcomes of the non-governmental sector activities, by calling them biased and politicized, and, at the same time, to undermine the level of trust exercised of the international community and donors towards the non-

governmental institutions, as well as to weaken the level of their stability and effectiveness. This tendency towards labeling CSOs as being associated to political parties is not beneficial for the establishment of an open and democratic society. The representation of the diversity of opinion in civil society is limited through their exclusion from public consultation.

There are many positive changes in the civil society sector in the **Republic of Moldova**. The National Participation Council is a new consultative body created at the initiative of the Government with the main goal to create a strategic inter-sector partnership and to identify the main strategic priorities for working together the civil society. Civil society tries to play a positive role in reconciliation and the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. Financial sustainability, inter-sector cooperation, transparency and accountability are issues currently on the agenda of the civil society in the country.

In **Russia** there are consultations between NGOs and public authorities regardless of how effective they prove to be in the end. The Government wants to control the NGOs' financial resources. NGOs do not operate in a very conducive environment and they generally lack sustainability. Although the system is reticent to NGOs' activities, there are still many strong organizations which have had positive results even without the Government' support. Yet Russia seems to show brighter prospects regarding the freedom of the press and other freedoms. During the election period civil society has been involved in monitoring. There are many social projects initiated by NGOs. The civil society is now stronger and is ready to face challenges, including dismantling of its forms of cooperation.

In **Ukraine** there are currently 63 000 officially registered NGOs. Ukraine has been affected by the economic and political crisis. These negatives developments have had an impact on NGOs. The main problem of the sector remains the financial sustainability as NGOs continue to be dependent of dwindling foreign funding while local resources cannot be mobilized sufficiently. NGO advocacy efforts brought some significant results. Cooperation between civil society and public authorities has improved and there are more opportunities for successful NGO advocacy initiatives.

**Turkey** does not have a post-soviet experience, yet Turkish civil society has gone through a significant era of transformation in the last decade and continues to do so. The turn of the millennium came with some catalyzing events for the sector, which resulted in an increase in civil society organizations (CSOs) quality and quantity, as well as importance in the public realm. Yet, civil society in Turkey is still in its nascent stages and presents more weaknesses than strengths.

Level of participation in civil society – be it through activism, membership, volunteering or donations – remains rather low in Turkey. Although there is a positive trend in membership

and volunteering rates in recent years, the majority of the population remains detached from civil society.

Insufficient human and financial resources, along with a lack of communication and cooperation are the greatest weaknesses of CSOs, presenting obstacles to mobilization. Governance and transparency levels are also rather weak, practiced by only a few large CSOs that enjoy international funding.

With the clarification and deepening of Turkey's EU integration process since 2001, governments have been eager to conform to EU demands; legislative reform packages involving amendments concerning civil society have passed; new and vast financial resources for civil society emerged; accompanied by new channels to affect policy making at the national and EU levels. In addition, laws and regulations continue to express vague language, increasing the discretionary powers of government authorities to decrease the autonomy of civil society. Finally, the state only seeks to dialogue with a small sub-set of CSOs on an ad hoc basis. There are still no defined or institutionalized terms and rules of engagement, and government funding to civil society is quite minimal.

The major source of funding for CSOs is not the local private sector or government, but rather international donors.

There are a number of best practices of NGO initiatives in Turkey which could successfully be promoted in other countries in the region: such as advocacy activities and mobilization of the private sector in support of NGO projects.

Despite an impressive dynamics of the non-governmental sector in **Romania** – there are registered nowadays in Romania more than 62,000 organizations, of which more than 21,000 are considered active organizations – the non-governmental organizations remain a quite little visible and known actor in the domestic public landscape. The basis of financial resources of the non-governmental sector remains fragile. The financial resources of 2/3 of the NGOs are low and very low, which limits their action capacity. Although the income sources of the non-governmental organizations have diversified, few of them receive support from the public authorities. The most important income sources for NGO remain those from abroad, that is, grants from the European Union and from foreign or international foundations.

The public trust in NGOs has a slow, however constant, ascending trend. Nevertheless the public participation proportion of citizens in the activities of NGOs remains low, due as well to the insufficient preoccupation lack of active policies amongst NGOs to attract new members and volunteers.

The European structural funds had the potential to create a positive impact on the NGO sector, opening new opportunities for innovation and development. But the delays in launching the calls for projects, the bureaucracy, the faulty pre-funding and reimbursement

mechanism lead to major difficulties for the non-governmental organizations funded by these programmes.



## Democracy and Citizen Participation

*Democracy and citizen participation* are elements on which depend very much the sustainability and the relevance of all future developments in the region. Citizen participation is a cornerstone of civil society development. In all reports and research on civil society in the region, citizen participation level results to be low and the ties between non-governmental organizations and citizens are considered rather weak, for historical, cultural, socio-economic and even political reasons.

The discussions in the session dedicated to “Democracy and Citizen Participation” was organized as an open-space format, having as a starting point the results of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index and other comparative findings from the region presented during the workshop “Developing Strategy for Civil Society in the Black Sea Region Workshop” organized by the Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV), in partnership with Counterpart Armenia and with the support of Black Sea Trust, within the context of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR), July 7-11 2010 in Istanbul. During the workshop in Istanbul, in terms of civic participation, there have been identified a series of commonalities, although on different scales, for all the countries in the region:

### *Strengths and Weaknesses:*

- The low level of civic participation is both a major weakness and obstacle for civil society development and democratic consolidation;
- Citizens that do engage with civil society do so rather frequently and extensively;
- Participation remains rather diverse;
- There is a strong tendency to volunteer and associate in informal ways;
- Civil society structuring is marked by elite domination and low levels of social capital (only in some countries).

### *Opportunities and Threats:*

- Diversity and depth of participation represent assets to build on;
- One of the main opportunities consists in an increasing involvement of youth, unaffected by the negative legacies of the Soviet period;



- The existing low levels of social capital and elitism of CSOs are considered to be major threats, potential to cause even more disconnect between the CSOs and general public.

The open space discussion during the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum, was organized around the major causes that the participants singled out as having a direct impact on the level of civic participation.

The participants identified four main causes of low citizen participation in the Black Sea region:

- a generalized level of low trust / low social capital in our societies (due mainly to historical and cultural reasons);
- a low level of trust in NGOs (very common in the region, as many NGOs are seen as external actors with a low impact in the society; there is a lack of information about what NGOs are doing);
- lack of downward accountability (general tendency to focus on responding to donors rather than communities' needs; NGOs are not very transparent with what they are doing)
- too much reliance on the (strong) State (a long tradition of centralized political system and decision-making on the allocation of resources in the region have generated a culture of dependency on the State and passivity from the citizens).

Strong government is both a reason and result of low civic participation in the region. In the region, a strong state is a reality often perceived and defined as rather a coercive entity that is threatening civil society space than a state that can enforce the rule of law within its borders.

Citizens in the region are not necessarily passive, they are active privately, but not publicly as we would want them to be. Strong state is often a major barrier, yet other causes can also explain this situation:

- lack of information and knowledge on the citizens part on their rights, capacity and instruments to influence decision-making;
- laws not clearly supportive to citizen participation (as law is generally the first step towards implementation);
- inability of governments and civil society to speak the same language;
- mistrust between civil society organizations and citizens.

Direct confrontation with the state is not always a way to increase public trust in civil society, particularly as states are generally stronger than civil society. Therefore, NGOs should

identify those areas where they can influence and have a real impact focus on delivering concrete results and, based on that, gain support and trust from the public.

*Recommendations:*

- A wider recognition (both internal and external) of NGOs not only in their capacity of service providers, pools of expertise and laboratories of new ideas, but also of their role of creating the social capital is needed. This role has to (re)become central to all programs dedicated to civil society and to all own NGO approaches. NGOs in the region operate within societies where there is a low level of public trust and consequently NGOs' central role is to empower and to increase social capital. This is not only a recommendation for donors who are designing programs, it is also a recommendation which should be included in any code of conduct of NGOs in the region;
- More attention and resources should be dedicated to the promotion of local community development, civic participation and civic education at all levels;
- More time and resources should be allocated by NGOs and donors to working with the citizens, with communities, trying to involve them in the decisions they make, whether it is about simple projects or larger programs;
- NGOs must become most transparent and more reliable. Self-regulation and higher standards should be mainstreamed;
- In the region NGOs live and operate in an unstable environment. For the NGOs to achieve the full potential of their initiatives and role there is a need for more predictability and stability. Support programs for NGOs should be designed and as long term-commitments;
- More focus on the impact evaluation and follow up on what is the impact of CSOs work at the end of the projects is necessary. Too often evaluations look at outputs and not at the medium and long-term impact;
- NGOs can play a more important role in raising awareness among the public about citizens' rights (with an important support from mass media);
- NGOs should improve their communication and should become more professional. Even where there are limited resources, the message can be tailored and directed so that it can reach the right audience and NGO work and purposes be understood;
- A volunteer service organized at regional level and a network of organizations involving volunteers should be created in the Black Sea region.

## Sustainable Economic Development

Civil society must be recognized as a positive and important factor in the economic development of the region. Civil society can influence reforms and economic policies, foster economic cooperation and contribute directly to economic development through social entrepreneurship (creation of jobs, social inclusion of vulnerable groups and income generation activities).

*Social economy* is a rather new concept in Romania and Bulgaria, compared to earliest developments in other EU member states and it has been growing under the influence of European social and cohesion policies. While in other countries in the region donors' programs have supported the development of social enterprises, in Romania and Bulgaria these forms of socially responsible entrepreneurship are increasingly being supported through the EU social policies and programs. The development of this sector and the lessons learnt in the process can provide useful ideas and policies for the other countries in the Black Sea region.

In Romania there have been attempts to adapt good practices of social integration to the local conditions. Social enterprises are an active form of integration of the young people with disabilities on the labor market, including the HIV infected people. A series of measures introduced by the state represent useful instruments for the social integration of people at risk within authorized protected units: state subsidies (allowances for hiring persons with disabilities), financial deductions, obligations for companies to have at least 4% of the employees persons with disabilities. As a result of these measures, in Romania there are 403 authorized protected units, part of which have been established and run by NGOs.

Although social economy represents a potential for NGOs sustainability, there are various challenges affecting the growth of the sector: regulating the concept of social economy, regulating the functioning of social enterprising, creating a special fund to support start-ups, creating facilities for the social economy structures, including other categories of people at risk beside the persons with disabilities.

*Business associations*, as expressions of civil society, represent voluntary partnerships of business and professional people working together to improve the quality of life of the community/industries. The objectives of all business association are to help business to grow, to increase job creation, to encourage enterprise and economic development. Consequently, business associations have a vocation to contribute to regional cooperation by fostering ties, influencing economic policies and good governance, creating opportunities for economic development and mutual understanding. Business associations can contribute to the establishment of public advocacy alliances and to raise the debate on issues that affect



private sector development.

In the region there are challenges affecting both democratization and the construction of an open economy: limited knowledge about advocacy, weak partnerships and reluctance to working together, limited trust in participatory democracy. Cooperation between business associations and think tanks has the potential to provide some of the solutions to these problems.

## Bridging divided communities<sup>1</sup>

*Bridging divided communities* represents only one of the solutions that bring peace to the countries with conflicts. Sharing the lessons learnt and good practices in crisis management and conflict prevention is important, yet in many cases the society is not strong enough to generate viable solutions as the enemy is from inside and communication is lacking. Regional cooperation is essential for overcoming barriers and for generating solutions in support of locally based efforts for reconciliation and conflict resolution.

CSOs from region working on conflict resolution and reconciliation met at the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum to explore lessons learnt from third-party experiences working on conflict; experiences, challenges and good practices in the Black Sea and to map initiatives and opportunities for future action.

### Lessons-learnt and recommendations for CSOs and donors in the field

- Conflict transformation intelligence is needed
- A broader view/perspective is essential
- Work with other levels, not just NGOs:
  - Media
  - Religious leaders
  - Business actors
- Human resources and personal contacts are important
- Donors should show more flexibility and capacity and support processes to engage on conflict issues
- Assess and manage communication and perceptions of stakeholders, as often information is lacking or is biased.
- Involve all conflict-affected actors - more and from different spheres - (and assess security risks for each such group) e.g.:
  - Women
  - Children – children with disabilities
  - Groups from unrecognized entities
  - IDPs
  - Ex-combatants

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the presentation by **Roxana Cristescu**, Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) (Finland)



- Understand representativeness of NGOs/groups: organize local meetings; involve informal local leaders as consultants and support; provide feedback to the community
- External actors can empower and build capacity to engage on conflict issues and peace building; nonetheless, **external actors cannot impose solutions**
- Build ownership of the process within society
- Internal political will is necessary but not sufficient
- Never work on an ad-hoc basis: always choose locally relevant:
  - Strategies
  - Participants
  - Actions
  - M&E
- Speaking with a common voice is important: existing peacebuilding regional cooperation are very useful initiatives:
  - Black Sea Peacebuilding Platform initiative
  - Black Sea Peacebuilding Network
  - Discussions have to be taken to higher level and in broader society
- Long-term commitment

Map of relevant initiatives in the following period:

- “Sorry Campaign” Georgia (Human Rights Center, Georgia)
- Human Rights organisation presence in Abkhazia offering technical assistance
- Eastern Partnership Cultural Programme
- Summer school for Black Sea young leaders in Armenia on peacebuilding and negotiations
- (IChD, Armenia)
- November Managua conference on civil society and development cooperation (TRIALOG, Austria)
- Raising awareness and education for tolerance towards disabled individuals / Summer camp for youth (with and without disabilities)
- November launch of Black Sea Peacebuilding Network (BSPN) website
- December Kiev regional meeting of BSPN
- IT support platform for NGOs (TechSoup, Romania)
- Investing in negotiations skills of public authorities on both banks of Nistru/Dniestr river (Institute for Public Policies, Republic of Moldova)
- Engagement in the region and providing support and expertise on peacebuilding and conflict transformation (PATRIR, Romania and Crisis Management Initiative, Finland)

## Environment

The major environmental problems of the Black Sea region are related to the global problems: climate change, energy, food, environmental contamination and, particularly waters problem.

In order to be successful, joint actions and projects at regional level should be concentrated around key problems where cohesion can guarantee effectiveness. Nonetheless, other specific topics are of a great concern to environmental civil society organizations: unsustainable development of new coastal territories, their capture and high rates of building in coastal zone without regard to the existing legislation and the very common sense. The problem of a plastic waste has turned from a local problem to a global one.

Civil society should work together in fields such as sustainable energy, organic agriculture, public information, awareness raising and environmental education.

Environmental NGOs should also ensure a professional approach, efficient control of time, funding and knowledge.

A more open and effective dialogue between NGOs and donors, including the European Commission, is needed. More transparent, effective and fair funding mechanisms for NGOs are required in order to overcome outlined barriers to development and formation of a strong civil society active in the field of environment.

NGOs in the region should strengthen their coordination around key dates for initiative and action:

- **the International Black Sea Action Day - 31 October:** In order to protect the Black Sea from pollution and other adverse effects, on April 21st 1992, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine signed the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution (Bucharest Convention) which was ratified by all signatories in 1994. For the effective implementation of the Bucharest Convention, its member states adopted the Black Sea Strategic Action Plan, on October 31st 1996, and hence, this date has since been celebrated as the "International Black Sea Action Day". International Black Sea Action Day comprises both national and regional activities designed to raise public awareness of the ongoing regional cooperation involved in protecting the Black Sea.
- **the Earth Day – 22 April:** the Earth Day is coordinated globally by the Earth Day Network and is celebrated in more than 175 countries every year. Earth Day Network members include NGOs, quasi-governmental agencies, local governments, activists, and others. Earth Day Network members focus on environmental education; local, national, and global policies; public environmental campaigns; and organizing



national and local earth day events to promote activism and environmental protection. The international network reaches over 19,000 organizations in 192 countries.

- **the International Danube Day – 29 June:** the Danube Day has been launched by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) in 2004 to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the DRPC. Through the joint effort of different organizations, the celebration of Danube Day throughout the Danube River Basin became an annual event, paying tribute the Danube and the rivers that flow into it.

## Youth Policies and Youth Cooperation

There is a real need to enforce youth policies in the Black Sea region and to provide more support to youth civil society organizations as one of the most effective ways to foster future regional cooperation. Investing in youth should be seen as the most effective way of investing in peaceful, prosperous and democratic future for the Black Sea region.

Youth policy is a cross-cutting policy. It is not enough to speak about sustainable development, regional conflicts, and environmental changes without including the young people, as all these issues affect first of all the young people. Young people should be included in the decision-making process, not only at governmental level, but also at CSO level, at regional and international level.

### **Recommendations:**

- Support for and strengthening of **the Eastern European Youth Cooperation**, a valuable network of youth NGOs in the Black sea region and a link to the European Youth Forum (YFJ);
- Promotion of good practices / innovative projects aiming to fully capture the potential of youth initiatives [ e.g.: the Youth Bank model]
- As youth dimension is rather discrete in governments and international policies and programs for the region, more research and information exchange on youth problems is needed; support for networking and sharing of best practices in the region at the level of young people is essential;
- As 2011 is the European Year of Volunteering, this could provide an excellent opportunity to establish a Black Sea Volunteering Forum, strengthening the cooperation and coordination among youth NGOs and other NGOs working with volunteers;
- The Black Sea cooperation of youth NGOs should be used to support programs and to fundraise for good practices identified at regional level.

### **Good practices**

#### **The Eastern European Youth Cooperation (EEYC)**

*The Eastern European Youth Cooperation* originates in 2002, when the National Youth Councils (NYC) from Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus started a closer cooperation. Later on, other NYCs from the Black Sea region joined the cooperation and an official cooperation agreement was



signed between the NYCs of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. Thus on November 8, 2005 the Eastern European Youth Cooperation (EEYC) was established. Since then it has successfully run over 30 common activities in the countries covered by its membership, involving over 450 active young people from the region and more than 100 youth organizations.

The work of the EEYC has been carried out mainly through:

- a) internal working meetings (planning meetings, strategic meetings, evaluation meetings etc.) which involve NYCs as such;
- b) activities orientated for the development of member organizations. This kind of activities were focused on youth organizations, members of the NYC of their country and consisted in trainings, seminars, contact making forums, experience exchange activities, planning meetings for common projects, ToTs etc.

Moreover, one of the EEYC's goals is to bring its contribution to the development of youth policies in region. It has succeeded to promote its representatives in different bodies at European level, thus advocating on European agenda for important issues for youth in Eastern Europe. Having a good communication within European Youth Forum, the EEYC has been able to promote its candidates for the Board of the European Youth Forum, in the Advisory Council of Council of Europe, in various groups close to the UN institution, in working groups on youth issues at European level.

The EEYC is the largest network of youth organization within the Black Sea region, allowing several hundreds of youth NGOs to benefit of different international activities and opportunities, and to influence youth policies in the region.

*(Source: Alexandru Coica - National Youth Council, Republic of Moldova)*

## **YouthBank**

*YouthBank* is a mechanism focused on the idea of involving young people in community development and decision making process. YouthBank is a unique way of involving young people in grant-making within their local community. The funding collected and distributed by young people involved in the YouthBanks initiatives supports projects designed and run by young people that address issues and concerns relevant to them and their community.

YouthBank is not just about giving out grants, it is a personal development programme, which will build young people's self-esteem and confidence and provide them with an opportunity to learn new skills in leadership, team-work, decision-making, problem-solving, communication, negotiation, report-writing, presentation skills, event management, interview skills and lots, etc.

At present, under various forms and stages of organization, YouthBanks exist in several countries in the Black Sea region ( Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Romania and Russia)



The experience from Armenia suggests that YouhBanks can generate positive evolutions at regional level: besides strengthening active citizenship, community work, philanthropy and personal development, this model can be applied for conflict transformation: future leaders working across border for peace and stability.

(Source: <http://www.youthbank.org>; Timur Onica, East European Foundation - YouthBank Republic of Moldova; Gayane Mkrtchyan, Eurasia Partnership Foundation - YouthBank Armenia)



## Perspectives of donors and international actors in the region

- There is an overwhelming interest for regional cooperation among Black Sea NGOs. The recently launched **Black Sea Basin Joint Operational Programme** revealed what potential there is. At the 1st call for proposals launched in 2009, for a total budget of less than Euro 5 mil. There were received 173 applications requesting around Euro 70 mil. Almost half of the applications came from non-profit organizations. [[www.blacksea-cbc.net](http://www.blacksea-cbc.net) ]
- There is no **strategy for regional cooperation** among NGOs which might influence donors' allocation of resources. On the other hand, there are no political regional cooperation strategies either which could generate more coordination among NGOs for consultation and advocacy purposes. The Black Sea NGO Forum has the vocation to become a platform where joint strategies can be launched. Coordination among NGOs in the region is possible, and the Black Sea NGO Forum has already provided the space for recent joint initiatives (e.g. the Black Sea Peacebuilding Network (BSPN) or the promising Eastern European Youth Cooperation (EEYC)). It can be concluded that there is a mutual expectations from donors and CSOs for the creation of regional strategies. The European Parliament current initiative on the EU Strategy for the Black Sea, to be presented in the Parliament in December 2010, can contribute to more CS involvement in strategizing for the region.
- The future of existing donors in the region is uncertain. In the context of the economic crisis and of domestic political changes in EU member states, bilateral donors are likely to scale down, if not phase out completely their programs in the region [e.g. MATRA Programme of Netherlands]. This is likely to affect negatively the development of civil society in the region which, for strong reasons, remain highly dependent on foreign funding.
- A constant and unique actor supporting regional cooperation remains the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (BST). Operating as a public-private partnership over a 10-year period, BST promotes regional cooperation and good governance in the Wider Black Sea region; accountable, transparent, and open governments; strong, effective civic sectors; and independent and professional media. The broad goals of the Black Sea Trust are four-fold: to rebuild trust in public institutions; to affirm the value of citizen participation in the democratic process; to strengthen a critical set of institutions that lie at the nexus of state and society and to foster regional, cross-border ties in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Its successful approach in



bringing up excellent regional cooperation initiatives represents a model for other donors. [<http://www.gmfus.org/blacksea> ]

- The added value of CS cooperation in the region lays on: common problems and context in which civil society exist (post-communism; origins and challenges that civil society faces in its role as major driving force for modernization, democratization and reforms) which allow for a natural transfer of expertise, good practices and effective solutions from one country to the other; the Black Sea relevance for economic reasons (particularly energy and transportation) can be compared to other models of sea regional cooperation (the Baltic Sea region or Mediterranean region) that generated more success; issues which can only be solved through regional cooperation (e.g. environment, conflict resolution); while major obstacles against regional cooperation have historical and geo-political roots, civil society is the most important actor to mitigate differences, build confidence and promote innovative bottom-up solutions.



## The Black Sea NGO Award for Excellency in promoting regional cooperation in the Black Sea region

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Forum, the winner of the first edition of *Black Sea NGO Award for Excellency in promoting regional cooperation in the Black Sea region* was announced and celebrated.

*The Black Sea NGO Award for Excellency in promoting regional cooperation in the Black Sea region* is a joint initiative of **the Representation of the European Commission in Romania and the Federation of Nongovernmental Development Organizations from Romania (FOND)** which aims to become a tradition for the region.

The goal of the award is to enhance the profile of the Black Sea Synergy and its role in proposing a regional, cooperative approach in the region as well as the multilateral dimension of EU external policies.

The initiative aims to promote regional NGO cooperation in the Black Sea region, to promote concrete good practices of NGO cooperation in the region among and for NGOs and to raise the general public's awareness of existing initiatives of NGO cooperation in the Black Sea region.

The selection of this year's winner of the award looked particularly for innovative projects, with an European value added as well as a multiplier effect.

The selection committee reviewed 24 excellent nominations for 22 organizations from the region with activities promoting regional cooperation in various fields (such as youth, environment, culture, democratization, promotion of EU policies and values):

Armenia	Azerbaijan	Bulgaria	Georgia	Republic of Moldova	Romania	Ukraine	Turkey
3	2	2	2	4	2	5	2

The winner of this year's edition of the Black Sea NGO Award for Excellency in promoting regional cooperation in the Black Sea region was designated **the Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS)** (an independent, non-partisan and non-profit think tank, based in Sofia, Bulgaria) for the initiative *"The Black Sea Young Reformers Fellowship"*.

The Black Sea Young Reformers Fellowship aims to bring together reform-oriented, decision-makers of tomorrow in order to discuss common challenges and opportunities in the Black Sea region.

The generous idea of the initiative is to bring together reform-oriented, decision-makers of tomorrow in order to discuss common challenges and opportunities in the Black Sea region, to promote dialogue among young policy-makers, civil servants and civil society activists from the region.

*“One of the most urgent problems facing political cooperation in the Black Sea Region is the lack of a common, unifying identity. The Black Sea Young Reformers Fellowship offers the potential to forge partnerships among this heterogeneous group of policy specialists. At its core, our main effort is to provide an arena for discussion, networking and promotion of ideas that will encourage openness and dialogue in the Black Sea region”.*

Among the many other excellent examples of regional cooperation lead by civil society organizations, two other projects have also caught the eyes:

- The **Eastern European Youth Cooperation**, a joint idea bringing together the National Youth Councils from the Black Sea region. One representative of the Youth Councils will be invited to take part in the Black Sea NGO Fellowship program this year and will spend one month in Romania working together with and learning from Romanian organizations active in advocacy and policy work.
- The nomination for the **Georgian Art and Culture Centre** from Georgia has emphasized this organization's efforts to promote regional cooperation, awareness and understanding through culture.

**H.E. Mr. Niculae Idu**, on behalf of the **Representation of the European Commission** to Bucharest, had the honor of offering the award to **Mr. Ognyan Minchev**, executive director of the **Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS)**.





### List of the participants:

Last Name	First Name	Organisation	Country
Danielyants	Veronika	Analytical Centre on Globalization and Regional Cooperation	Armenia
Manasyan	Heghine	Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Caucasus Research Resource Center	Armenia
Mkrtchyan	Gayane	Eurasia Partnership Foundation	Armenia
Navasardian	Boris	Yerevan Press Club	Armenia
Sargsyan	Monika	International Center for Human Development	Armenia
Tadevosyan	Mane	Counterpart International/Armenia	Armenia
Yeghoyan	Eduard	National Youth Council of Armenia	Armenia
Tanase	Andra	TRIALOG	Austria
Aslanli	Kenan	Public Finance Monitoring Center	Azerbaijan
Bayramov	Galib	Economic Research Center	Azerbaijan
Farid	Malikov	Azerbaijan-Turkey Business Association	Azerbaijan
Huseynova	Vusala	National Assambly of Youth Organizations of Republic Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan
Ismayilov	Zohrab	Public Association for Assistance to Free Economy	Azerbaijan
Mehriban	Rahimli	OSI Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan
Novruzov	Rovshan	Ganja children foundation	Azerbaijan
Hukasava	Ellada	National Council of Youth and Children's Public Associations of Belarus "RADA"	Belarus
Rahojsha	Usevalad	New Eurasia Establishment	Belarus
Teclu	Codrat Alin	Université de Liège	Belgium
Alexandrov	Alexander	Bulgarian NGO "Morski sadbi"	Bulgaria
Marinov	Kalin	Economic Policy Institute	Bulgaria
Ognyan	Minchev	Institute for Regional and International Studies	Bulgaria
Rangelova	Vesselka	Embassy of Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Veder	Alya	Bulgarian Platform for International Development	Bulgaria
Cristescu	Roxana	CMI	Finland

Jaarva	Meeri Maria	CMI	Finland
Mabilotte	Cecile	Comite PECO	France
Bolkvadze	Tamar	Danish Refugee Council Representation in Georgia	Georgia
Stepanian	Arnold	Public Movement "Multinational Georgia"	Georgia
Tkhelidze	Nodar	Caucasus Environmental NGO Network	Georgia
Tsagareishvili	Nino	Human Rights Center	Georgia
Tsulaia	Manana	Biological Farming Association "Elkana"	Georgia
Tsulaia	Nino	National council of Youth organizations of Georgia	Georgia
Mohrs	Falko	European Youth Forum/ World Organization of the Scout Movement	Germany
Erős	Barbara	DemNet	Hungary
Miezaine	Zinta	"Workshop of solution"	Latvia
Kounine	Dimitry	Dutch Platform Europe (Part of Dutch NGO Platform)/EPAN working group of Concord	Norway
Askjem	Solveig	ICSW	Norway
Acălugăriței	Lina	Anti - Discrimination Coalition	Republic of Moldova
Borodina	Liudmila	НП базовый центр реабилитации и консультирования "ОСОРЦ"	Republic of Moldova
Ciobanu	Vlada	Foreign Policy Association	Republic of Moldova
Coica	Alexandru	National Youth Council of Moldova	Republic of Moldova
Cruc	Olesea	Institute for Development and Social Initiatives "Viitorul"	Republic of Moldova
Girjau	Ludmila	Focus.dh	Republic of Moldova
Gorbaten	Larisa	Тираспольская ассоциация семей Детей Инвалидов	Republic of Moldova
Gordila	Olga	Promo - Lex	Republic of Moldova
Hurmuzachi	Iurie	National Federation of Agricultural Producers from Moldova "AGROinform"	Republic of Moldova
Marchkova	Aliona	Social Informational Center "Apriori"	Republic of Moldova
Mihalaș	Eduard	Coaliția pentru promovarea legii și activităților de voluntariat	Republic of Moldova
Mocanu	Diana	Centru Parteneriat pentru Egalitate	Republic of Moldova

Munteanu	Iuliana	Junior Achievement Moldova	Republic of Moldova
Neicovcen	Sergiu	CONTACT	Republic of Moldova
Onica	Timur	East Europe Foundation - Moldova	Republic of Moldova
Panainte	Polina	IPP	Republic of Moldova
Turcanu	Oxana	Centrul de resurse "Tinerisi liberi"	Republic of Moldova
Vacaru	Angela	Academy for Educational Development	Republic of Moldova
Aelenei	Ana	BST	Romania
Achitei	Angela	Fundatia "Alaturi de Voi"	Romania
Alexandru	Monica	secretar III, DASD, Ministerul Afacerilor Externe	Romania
Apostu	Eduard	Star of Hope	Romania
Baroean	Doru	secretar III, DEEAC, Ministerul Afacerilor Externe	Romania
Barzan	Cosmin	Centrul pentru Resurse Civice - Constanta	Romania
Budescu	Natalia		Romania
Burada	Valentin	FDSC	Romania
Calinescu	Petrut	Around the Black Sea	Romania
Ciolei	Marilena	Turism EuroClub	Romania
Cotu - Dumitrache	Alina	secretar III, DPPP, Ministerul Afacerilor Externe	Romania
Craciun	Andrei	Salvati Copiii Iasi	Romania
Cunningham	Mark	BST	Romania
Enache	Mariana	ASOCIATIA "MARIA-CRISTIANA"-SPRIJIN PENTRU COPIII DIN ROMANIA	Romania
Fota	Iulian	Presedintia Romaniei	Romania
Gheorghe	Cosetta	Asociatia Meridiane Socio-Culturale	Romania
Greco	Andreea	Persona Association for Creative Education	Romania
Grigore	Aurelia	FDSC	Romania
Giuglea	Loredana	World Vision Constanta	Romania
Hristea	Traian	director, DPPP, Ministerul Afacerilor Externe	Romania
Ion	Claudia	Fundatia PACT	Romania
Iliescu	Iuliana	Asociatia PRO Democratia	Romania
Ionescu	Camelia	WWF Danube Carpathian Programme Romania	Romania
Jalba	Nona	AGERPRES	Romania
Marin	Daniela Andreea	Center for Institutional Analysis and Development – Eleutheria	Romania

Marinescu	Ane-Marie	World Vision Foundation, Constanta	Romania
Micescu	Viorel	Centras	Romania
Mihailov	Radu	Fundatia Rotary - Constanta	Romania
Mosneagu	Ana Maria	E-CIVIS	Romania
Munteanu	Cristian	Asociatia Meridiane Socio-Culturale	Romania
Nedelea	Cerasela	Asociatia Meridiane Socio-Culturale	Romania
Neneciu	Oana	Centrul de Politici Durabile Ecopolis	Romania
Nitescu	Norma	Netherlands Embassy	Romania
Ozon	Sorin	Around the Black Sea	Romania
Panainte	Sergiu	Soros Foundation Romania	Romania
Pascal	Despina	Advocacy Academy Timisoara	Romania
Pedersen	Claudia	World Vision Foundation Romania	Romania
Perju	Oana	FOND Romania	Romania
Petrescu	Junde	Fundatia PACT	Romania
Pirvulescu	Corina	CTR	Romania
Popa	Luiza	Fondul International Marea Neagra - Marea Caspica	Romania
Popa	Raisa	Fondul International Marea Neagra - Marea Caspica	Romania
Popa	Ruxandra	Tech Soup Romania	Romania
Prodan	Calin	ataşat, DPPP , Ministerul Afacerilor Externe	Romania
Rada	Iuliana	FDSC	Romania
Apostu	Eduard	Star of Hope	Romania
Robu	Albert	DCDP, Ministerul Afacerilor Externe	Romania
Rusu	Adela	FOND Romania	Romania
Simbotin	Raluca	Asociatia Liderii Mileniului Trei	Romania
Simon	Corina	Patrir	Romania
Sorescu	Andreea	FDSC	Romania
Tencariu	Iulia	FSM Iasi	Romania
Ticu	Cristian	FDSC	Romania
Traistaru	Gabriel	Europuls	Romania
Tudorache	Andreea	ARTFusion	Romania
Zaharia	Adriana	FOND Romania	Romania
Balinisteanu	Simona	Corpul Voluntarilor Garzii Nationale de Mediu	Romania
Cretu	Andreea	Corpul Voluntarilor Garzii Nationale de Mediu	Romania

Matulescu	Mihaela	Corpul Voluntarilor Garzii Nationale de Mediu	Romania
Neacsu	Mihai	Asociatia Romana pentru Dezvoltare Durabila	Romania
Mihalache	Dan	Asociatia Romana pentru Dezvoltare Durabila	Romania
Sergiu	Grigore	Asociatia Romana pentru Dezvoltare Durabila	Romania
Admisieva	Petimat	Inter-regional Public Organization "Centers for psychological and social support "Denal"	Russia
Dubovitskaya	Irina	Krasnodar Regional Non-Profit Organization of the Russian Universities Alumni	Russia
Shakirova	Sofiya	Center for Network Initiatives' Support	Russia
Shibanova	Lilia	Regional Civic Organization for Defence of Voters' Rights "GOLOS"	Russia
Zhedyaev	Oleg	Autonomous nongovernmental organization Karachai-Cherkessk Centre for Public Development «Civil Strategy»The Public Assembly (Parliament) of Karachai-Cherkessk Republic (The Northern Caucasus, Russia)	Russia
Birden Corbacioglu	Emine Rana	Tohum Autism Foundations	Turkey
Kutay	Kugay	GOLA Culture, Arts and Ecology	Turkey
Meydanoglu	Zeynep	Third Sector Foundation of Turkey	Turkey
Sanar	Yurdatapan	Freedom of Expression Association (FEA)	Turkey
Topaloğlu	Sevilay Refika	GOLA Culture, Arts and Ecology	Turkey
Unluhisarcikli	Ozgur	GMF Ankara	Turkey
Kobzova	Jana	European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)	UK
Rattenbury	Ben	EUCLID Network	UK
Bezsonova	Lyudmyla	ICF "Ukrainian Women's Fund"	Ukraine
Dyba	Iryna	Open Society Foundation	Ukraine
Liakh	Viktor	East Europe Foundation	Ukraine
Ovcharuk	Andrii	GURT Resource Centre	Ukraine
Pustynnik	Tetiana	GIFTED NATION	Ukraine
Pylate	Timothy	Eurasia Foundation - Ukraine	Ukraine
Rubel	Oleg	Black Sea Branch of Ukrainian Environmental Academy of science	Ukraine
Israemer	Richard	National Endowment for Democracy (NED)	USA
Rohozinska	Joanna	NED	USA
Kraemer	Richard	NED	USA



Traut	Bobbie	NED	USA
Ciprus	Vesna	UNDP	
Dedonatis	Mariano	Civicus	