



Black Sea NGO Forum, the 9th edition

31st of October – 2nd of November 2016, Varna, Bulgaria

CONTEXT

HISTORY

The first edition of the **Black Sea NGO Forum** was organised in 2008 as a unique regional event by the **Romanian NGDO Platform (FOND)**, with the support of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Representation of the European Commission and the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation. The event was initiated within the framework of the **Black Sea Synergy**, a European policy launched at the initiative of *Romania, Bulgaria and Greece* with the purpose of consolidating regional cooperation at the Black Sea.

The Black Sea NGO Forum aims to create an **open space for debate, mutual knowledge and understanding, communication and cooperation among civil society representatives, governments, international organizations and donors active in the Black Sea region**, with a focus on sharing good practices in various domains and success stories of regional cooperation.

Since its first edition, the Forum has been a driver of change in the region, reuniting **more than 900 participants** from civil society organisations (CSOs) working in various activity areas, international and multilateral organisations, international and regional donors, experts and government representatives from **11 countries**: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine, Romania and Russia.

TOWARDS A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

THE STRATEGIC PROCESS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY REGIONAL COOPERATION AT THE BLACK SEA

The process of creating a Strategic Framework for Civil Society (CS) Cooperation in the Black Sea Region started in 2011 with the elaboration of an [Impact study of the first 4 editions of the Black Sea NGO Forum](#) (launched in 2013). One of the needs highlighted by participants was to build **a common sustainable framework** for civil society cooperation with **clearly defined thematic and cross-cutting priorities**. This would in turn increase civil society capacity to address local needs, contribute to national and regional development efforts, cooperate on thematic issues and engage in policy influencing.

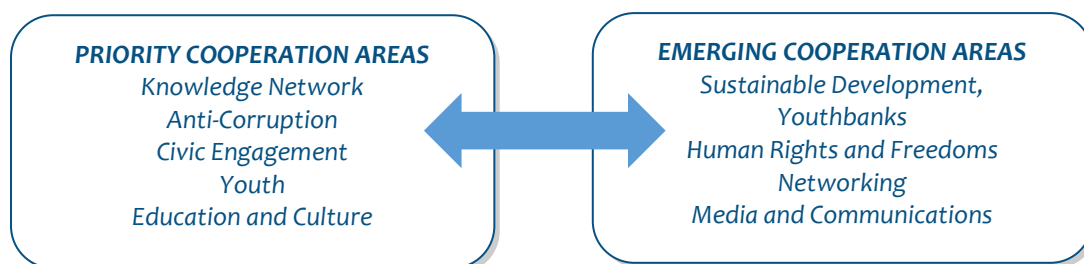
The process for creating the Strategic Framework for Civil Society Cooperation in the Black Sea Region was officially launched at the **7th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum (8th – 10th of December 2014, Kyiv, Ukraine)**, by shaping, together with the participants, an overview of the needs and challenges of CSOs in the region for having an enabling environment, a cross-cutting issue affecting all the Black Sea countries.

As a follow-up activity, in 2015, the conclusions of the regional consultation were developed into **a more in-depth desk and field research**, with the goal of having an overview of the national and

regional contexts in which civil society from the Black Sea Region operates, as well as offering a set of recommendations regarding the most important cooperation areas that should be included in a strategic framework for civil society cooperation in the region. The research was conducted in 8 Black Sea countries¹ by experts *Tanja Hafner Ademi* and *Milka Ivanovska* from the Balkan Civil Society Development Network, with the support of the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND.

According to the conclusions of the [Report Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development in the Black Sea Region: Towards a Regional Strategy for Cooperation](#), participants recommended that the Forum focused on two main directions: **promoting an enabling environment for civil society in the region and developing horizontal cooperation in specific thematic areas**. Moreover, they praised the Forum for being an impartial mechanism for facilitating regional cooperation between CSOs, donors and domestic governments.

Based on these recommendations, a facilitated consultation process was launched during the 8th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum (2nd – 3rd of November 2015, Tbilisi, Georgia), in order to identify and prioritise the most important thematic cooperation areas to be included in the final Strategic Framework for civil society cooperation in the Black Sea Region. In the end, **five priority cooperation areas** and **five emerging ones** were identified and endorsed by vote. Moreover, 10 corresponding **Black Sea NGO Forum Working Groups** were created to support thematic cooperation on each specific priority.



THE 9th EDITION OF THE BLACK SEA NGO FORUM

OBJECTIVE

The 2016 edition focused on the **implementation of the „Strategic Framework of the Civil Society Cooperation in the Black Sea Region”,** according to its two main directions: **fostering regional cooperation** according to thematic priorities and **promoting an enabling environment for the civil society organisations in the region**.

¹ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Russia and Turkey.

In this sense, the results achieved through the follow-up activities carried out in between editions were presented, and a dedicated session for the Black Sea NGO Forum Working Groups was organised, with the purpose of helping them refine their thematic priorities, design their action plans and attract new members. Moreover, the event offered participants the opportunity to interact with European and regional stakeholders, as well as international and regional donors.

THE FOLLOW-UP REPORT ON ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CSOS IN THE REGION

Taking into consideration that enabling environment for CSOs is a cross-cutting priority of the Strategic Framework, a **follow-up research of the 2015 „Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development in the Black Sea Region” Report** was conducted by *Angela Grămadă* (FOND Research Associate).

The initial findings, presented during the 9th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum, underlined the **worrying trend of a shrinking space for CSOs and the rise of non-democratic practices in the region** that limit the fundamental freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression. In this context, **CSOs face additional challenges related to:** the lack of a common vision for the development of civil society in the region, scarcity of financial resources available for CSOs that encourage competition rather than cooperation, limited administrative capacity and human resources, often politicised state support and foreign support not always adapted to the local needs.

REGIONAL THEMATIC MEETINGS

As a follow-up activity of the 2015 edition of the Forum, the Black Sea NGO Forum Working Groups were offered the opportunity to organise thematic regional meetings to further develop their activities. During the period September – October 2016, **5 regional thematic meetings** were organised with the support of the European Commission and their results were presented at the 9th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum.



Each of the five regional thematic meetings focused on: understanding the particularities of the social and political landscape in the countries involved; identifying the main policy areas in which cooperation can be reached; setting main priority areas for joint action; sharing best practices in the region; agreeing on future project ideas and developing common strategies.



BLACK SEA NGO FORUM WORKING GROUPS' SESSION

As a support for the Black Sea NGO Forum Working Groups, an **interactive and inclusive consultation process** was organised as part the 2016 edition of the Forum, with the purpose of refining the thematic priorities, attracting new members and developing action plans for the next period.

In this sense, the participants had the task of :

- Identifying the main priorities of each Working Group, taking into account the regional trends in the Black Sea area and the shrinking civil society space;
- Proposing a list of goals and follow-up activities that are to be implemented in 2017 by each Working Group in part;
- Identifying the role of the Black Sea NGO Forum in supporting these activities, with a view to consolidate regional cooperation.

During this edition 8 Black Sea NGO Forum WGs were actively engaged in Working Groups' dedicated sessions, as follows:

WORKING GROUP	COORDINATOR
<i>Anti-corruption</i>	Diana Ranga-Enachi, IDIS Viitorul, Republic of Moldova
<i>Civic Engagement</i>	Adrian Băluțel, Moldovan National Platform of the EaP Civil Society Forum, Republic of Moldova
<i>Education and Culture</i>	Zviad Eliziani, International Business Development and Investment Promotion Center, Georgia
<i>Human Rights and Freedoms</i>	Hovsep Khurshudyan, "Free Citizen" Civic Initiatives Support Center, Armenia
<i>Knowledge Networks</i>	Aslan Yavuz Şir, Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi (Center for Eurasian Research, Turkey Heghine Manasyan, Caucasus Research Resource Center, Armenia Ventzislav Kirkov, Bulgarian Platform for International Development, Bulgaria
<i>Sustainable Development</i>	Liuba Ceban, Altruism Association, Republic of Moldova
<i>Youth</i>	Patricia Couți, National Youth Council, Romania
<i>Youthbank</i>	Ștefan Cibian, Romanian Association for International Cooperation and Development – ARCADIA Gayane Mkrtchyan, Eurasia Partnership Foundation Armenia