



Black Sea NGO Forum, 8th edition

2nd - 3rd of November 2015, Tbilisi, Georgia

CONTEXT

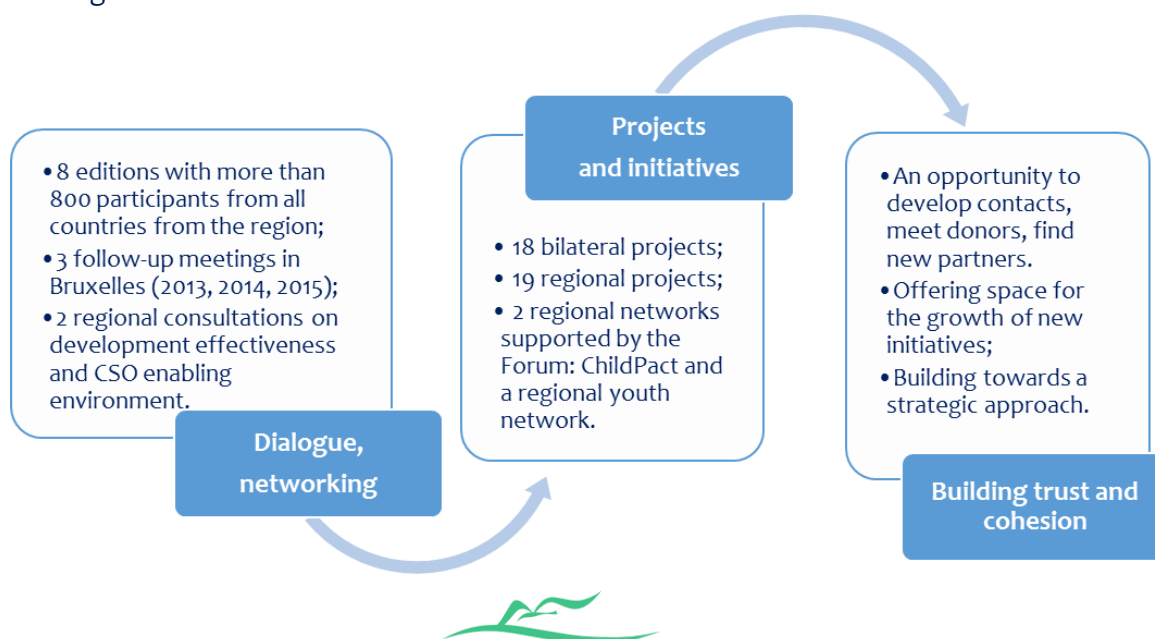
HISTORY

Black Sea NGO Forum was first 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 and international organizations active in the wider 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 800 participants** from CSOs working in various activity areas, international and multilateral organisations, international donors, experts and government representatives from the region: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine, Romania and Russia.

Over the years, the Forum has explored together with **participants a diversity of themes of regional interest** (democracy & human rights; local development; youth; children rights; environment; social economy; citizen participation; policy influencing and advocacy; financial sustainability), encouraged **multi-stakeholder dialogue** and **sharing of best practices and creation partnerships**, supported **fellowships** in the region, organised **study visits to CSOs** and offered **awards to CSOs** for excellence in promoting regional cooperation. All these activities contributed to **building trust and confidence**, identifying common challenges and opportunities and addressing them together.



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

STRATEGIC PROCESS

The road to creating a Strategic Framework for Civil Society (CS) Cooperation in the wider Black Sea Region **began in 2011** with the elaboration of an impact study of the first 4 editions of the Black Sea NGO Forum (launched in June 2013 at a follow-up event organized at the European Parliament), where participants expressed the need for having a common sustainable cooperation framework, that would offer the base for a solid cooperation among CSOs on clearly defined thematic and cross-cutting priorities that in turn will increase civil society capacity to address local needs, contribute to development efforts, cooperate on thematic issues and engage in policy influencing.

In **June 2014**, a Strategic Meeting was organised in Brussels at the Permanent Representation of Romania to the EU on the future of the Black Sea NGO Forum in fostering regional cooperation. Following the discussions, the process for creating a Strategic Framework for Civil Society (CS) Cooperation in the Black Sea Region **was launched at the 7th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum** (8th – 10th of December 2014, Kyiv, Ukraine), which **focused on enabling environment for civil society, as a cross-cutting issue for CSOs in the region**. A first step in the strategic process was to organise a **regional multi-stakeholder consultation** in order to identify the common needs and challenges for having an enabling environment for civil society in the region.

As a result, participants made the following **main recommendations**:

- Monitoring civil society enabling environment in the Black Sea Region;
- Encouraging the creation of regional thematic coalitions;
- Encouraging dialogue between CSOs and donors;
- Stimulating communication and interaction between CSOs in the region throughout the year;
- Supporting capacity building for CSOs and the transfer of know-how and best practices among CSOs across the region.

The next step was to develop the results of the regional consultation on enabling environment for civil society into a more substantial research that would provide a more in-depth perspective on the existing challenges and potential solutions, and potentially serve as a periodical assessment instrument that will allow for the strategic framework to adapt to the existing context.

Therefore, in the period May-July 2015, a **desk and field research was conducted** by two experts from the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (Ms. Tanja Hafner Ademi and Ms. Milka Ivanovska) with the support of the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND. The research was conducted in **8 Black Sea countries**¹ and analysed **4 areas and 10 core dimensions** related to: basic legal guarantees of freedoms, the framework for CSOs' viability & sustainability, public institutions/state – CSOs relationships and donor CSO-relationship, looking at both the legal dispositions and aspects of the state of play in practice.

Moreover, a second aim of the research was to **gather proposals from participants on the main cooperation areas** that should be included in a future strategic framework for civil society cooperation, as well as **recommendations on the role of the Black Sea NGO Forum** in supporting the elaboration and implementation of such a strategic framework.

According to the participants, the **key regional challenges** on enabling environment for CSOs are: restrictions of freedom of association and peaceful assembly in some Black Sea countries; burdensome reporting requirements; biased/ politicized state funding; absence of systematic tax/fiscal framework for CSOs; not very stimulating volunteering regulatory frameworks; absence

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

of comprehensive and mandatory legal framework for CSO involvement in policy-making in many Black Sea countries; involvement of CSOs only in politically non-sensitive issues; partial access to public information; barriers to access foreign funding in some Black Sea countries; most foreign funding is project-based, and not core-funding.

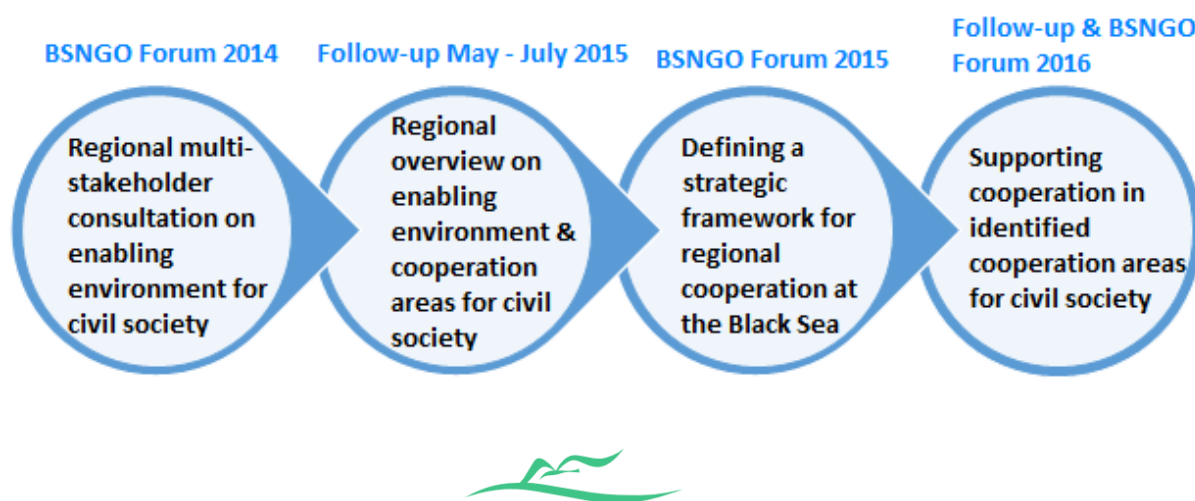
In terms of strategic priorities, participants highlighted that **the most important cooperation areas** that should be included in a future strategic framework are related to:

- Matters concerning enabling environment for civil society development in the region;
- Horizontal cooperation in specific thematic areas.

The Black Sea NGO Forum, perceived and appreciated as **an impartial mechanism for facilitating regional cooperation** between CSOs, donors and domestic governments, is expected to perform the following **key roles**:

- Further structuring of the Forum;
- Information-sharing (website, alerts, CS factsheets, meetings);
- Advocacy for regional funding for joint initiatives;
- Research, exchange and facilitation on enabling environment issues and thematic network cooperation (hub of hubs).

The conclusions of the [Report Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development in the Black Sea Region](#) were presented during the **working meeting held on 9th of September 2015** in Brussels with the aim of initiating a debate with the main European stakeholders on the most important cooperation areas for civil society in the Black Sea region and the role of the Black Sea NGO Forum, as part of the preparations for the Black Sea NGO Forum 2015.



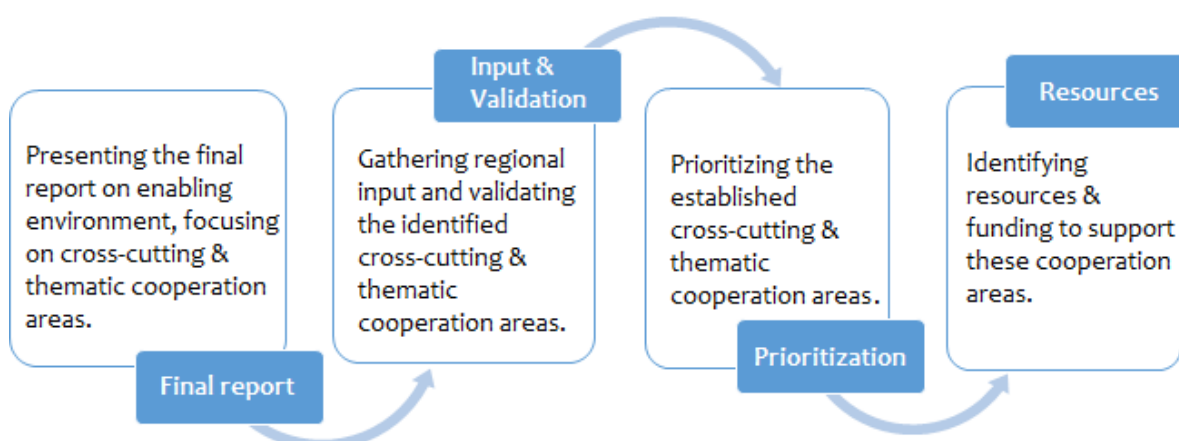
THE 8TH EDITION OF THE BLACK SEA NGO FORUM

OBJECTIVE

The **Black Sea NGO Forum 8th edition** continued the previous edition's discussions, aiming to finalize a strategic framework with thematic and cross-cutting cooperation areas for civil society at the Black Sea that will consolidate regional cooperation and provide focus and sustainability to regional initiatives on the one hand and on the other to transform civil society from a beneficiary into a partner in development at political level.

Main approach for the 8th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum

In order to identify and prioritize the most important cooperation areas for civil society in the Black Sea region, a **facilitated participatory process** was organized during the Forum, based upon the participants' valuable input and expertise.



The consultation process on the main thematic cooperation areas for civil society was facilitated by Mr. Ken Phillips, international consultant and partner at Organization Futures, based upon the following guiding points:

- Identifying key challenges in the identified thematic cooperation areas;
- Proposing concrete regional initiatives/ projects/ programmes in the identified cooperation areas that can help address the key challenges mentioned;
- Identifying ways through which the Black Sea NGO Forum can support regional cooperation in the identified thematic cooperation areas.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The consultation process was prepared by conducting beforehand **A PREPARATORY ONLINE SURVEY FOR THE OPEN SESSION**. As a support for filling in the survey and also preparing for the open session, a document „*Starting point for a Strategic Framework for the Black Sea NGO Forum*” was elaborated and sent in advance to all participants.

The online survey² had 6 sections:

1. What are the greatest barriers to achieving regional cooperating among CSOs?	4. What do you want to see from the Black Sea NGO Forum?
2. What initiatives can you commit to support?	5. Guidance. Please give us an example of success in one of the thematic areas indicated in question 4 above
3. How do you intend to do so?	6. Contact details

Top initiatives participants are willing to support: Networking and collaboration among CSOs in the region; Education and awareness raising; CSOs capacity building and sharing of best practices

² <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2GLSWP8>

and knowledge; Community mobilization and civic engagement in decision making; Developing regional joint/ multi-stakeholders projects/initiatives and Youth participation.

In fostering regional cooperation and providing support to CSOs, **the Black Sea NGO Forum should assume the following roles:** acting as an open platform for sharing know-how & best practice exchange; facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue; facilitating the cooperation process by supporting thematic working groups; offering capacity building support; acting as a hub of resources; monitoring the state of enabling environment for CSOs; and awareness raising on matters of regional interest.

The complete results of the Preparatory Online Survey were gathered in a report and presented to all participants before starting the discussions in the Parallel Working Groups.

RESULTS: 10 Working Groups established

Top 5 priority cooperation areas for CSOs	TOPIC	LEADER	VOTES
	1. Knowledge Network	Richard Girogosian, Armenia, Regional Studies Center	33
	2. Anti-Corruption	Sergey Gerasymchuk, Ukraine, Ukrainian Association of Management Consultants	20
	3. Citizen Participation & Volunteering	Mykhailo Zhernakov, Ukraine, Ukrainian Legal Foundation, Reanimation Package of Reforms	20
	4. Youth	Natalia Ermicioi, Romania, International Relations Department, European Youth Capital 2015	18
	5. Education and Culture	Hovsep Khurshudyan, Armenia, "Free Citizen" Civic Initiatives' Support Center NGO	18

Emerging cooperation areas for CSOs	TOPIC	LEADER	VOTES
	1. Sustainable Development	Natalia Budescu, Romania, The Association for Cross-Border Cooperation "Lower Danube Euroregion"	17
	2. YouthBank	Stefan Cibian, Romania, The Romanian Association for International Development and Cooperation-ARCADIA	16
	3. Human rights & freedoms	Nazim Tural, Turkey, Society & Legal Studies Foundation	15
	4. Networking	Antonita Fonari, Republic of Moldova, National Council of	14

	NGOs of Moldova/ National Council of Participation National Council of NGOs from Moldova	
5. Media & Communication	Arsen Kharatyan, Armenia , Eurasia Partnership Foundation	8

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES FOR THE NEXT PERIOD

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Taking into consideration our participants' recommendations, the following activities are envisioned for the next period:

- ❖ **Finalizing the strategic framework:** updating the document “A starting point for a strategic framework with thematic and cross-cutting cooperation areas for civil society at the Black Sea” with the participants’ feedback and sending the strategic framework to all participants for endorsement;
- ❖ Facilitating, supporting and monitoring the activity of the Working Groups (WGs);
- ❖ Organising **2-3 regional meetings of the Working Groups;**
- ❖ Organising a follow-up event – First meeting of the **Advisory Group for the Black Sea NGO Forum;**
- ❖ Continuing to **monitor** the state of **enabling environment for CSOs in the region**, carrying out **research** on the specific enabling environment dimensions (legal framework, policy influencing, donor – CSOs relationship) with a focus on exchanging best practices, and organising a thematic regional meeting in order to facilitate the **exchange of best practices** between CSOs on enabling environment issues.

