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## BLACK SEA NGO FORUM

THE 15<sup>TH</sup> EDITION

### The Black Sea Region under Pressure From Multiple Crisis to Sustainable and Democratic Development

21-22 November 2022



Black Sea NGO Forum, the 15th edition

*„The Black Sea Region under Pressure. From Multiple Crisis to Sustainable and Democratic Development”*

*21 - 22 November 2022, Bucharest, hybrid format*

- FINAL REPORT -

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## Sustainable and Democratic Development – still a priority for the Black Sea NGO Forum

The Black Sea NGO Forum is a flagship regional event, organised by the Romanian NGDO Platform (FOND) since 2008 in accordance with the objectives of the Black Sea Synergy European Policy. Its main objectives are to increase the level of dialogue and cooperation among NGOs in the wider Black Sea Region, strengthen NGOs' capacities to influence regional and national policies, and increase the number and quality of regional partnerships and projects on thematic priorities.

The 15th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum was organized by the Romanian NGDO Platform - FOND, with the financial support of the European Union, in the context of the „**Building CSO Capacity for Regional Cooperation within the Black Sea Region**” project<sup>1</sup> (January 2022 – December 2022), and was cofinanced by the Romanian Agency for International Development Cooperation.

The Forum focuses on sharing good practices in various domains and success stories of regional cooperation. Since its first edition, the Black Sea NGO Forum enabled an open space for debate, sharing mutual knowledge and understanding, communication and cooperation among civil society representatives, governments, international organisations and donors active in the Black Sea region.

During its 15 editions, the Black Sea NGO Forum has developed into a significant driver of development cooperation in the region, reuniting participants from different Black Sea Region countries. The Forum has enabled participants to share expertise and best practices on a variety of themes of regional interest (democracy & human rights; local development; youth; children rights; environment; sustainable development, citizen participation, social entrepreneurship, etc.), encouraged multi-stakeholder dialogue and facilitated partnerships, thus, contributing to building trust and joint projects, identifying common challenges and opportunities and addressing them together.

The main objective of the 15th edition of the BSNGOF was to highlight the role and involvement of civil society in crisis management response and humanitarian assistance in the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. In this context, FOND presented the results of the sub-granting program addressed mainly to Ukrainian NGOs, as well as those of the "SOS Ukraine" campaign, through which FOND raised and awarded funds to several Ukrainian NGOs to support the civilians in need.

More information about the Black Sea NGO Forum can be found [here](#).

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<sup>1</sup> In 2019, the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND started implementing the project “**Building CSO Capacity for Regional Cooperation within the Black Sea Region**” with the financial support of the European Union for the period 2019 – 2021. The new Black Sea NGO Forum project „**Building CSO Capacity for Regional Cooperation within the Black Sea Region**” is implemented by the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND and funded by the European Union, for the period January 2022 – December 2022. The project aims at increasing stability and prosperity in the Black Sea Region by strengthening regional cooperation among CSOs in the region in the context of sustainable development and societal resilience.



In addition, the BSNNGOF participants were invited to reflect on the strategic priorities of the Forum in the new post-pandemic and post-war context. In this context, the participants were invited to reflect on what the new priorities, objectives and strategies dedicated to the Black Sea region should look like in a transformed regional context, affected by different crisis (Covid-19 pandemic, humanitarian crisis generated by the war in Ukraine, etc.). As organisers of the Black Sea NGO Forum, FOND intended to extract elements for a new vision or policy perspective on the Black Sea Region, including active civil societies' recommendations, promoting cooperation and interaction between partners with different resources and potential, and the opportunities that multiple partnerships can offer for democratic development. The recommendations and suggestions defined by the participants will be considered for the internal reform and the amendment of the Strategic Framework of the Forum for the next years.

Also, during this year annual reunion we resumed the discussions about the innovation agenda of the European Union and highlighted the role of social entrepreneurship as a source of financial well-being for socially vulnerable groups and as a solution to social problems.

## Day 1: 21st of November

### Welcoming remarks

*"In the last few years, we have focused a lot on the challenges and left behind what we can contribute. We want to collaborate among different stakeholders, show the Black Sea region's potential, and enable civil society actors. We need a Strategic Framework to bring the available resources together. The network part - formed by civil society organizations - must be intentional and effective in cross-sectoral partnerships to address sustainability and peace... .*

*Civil society organizations are about people and communities. Although they met many people, we should emphasize local communities and all types of people in the region. It is about our experience with the region and what we can change."*

**Mr Ștefan Cibian, PhD, President, the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND**

### Keynote speech

*"The Black Sea NGO Forum was born as a result of the partnership between the Ministry and the Romanian civil society in 2008, under the umbrella of the Black Sea Synergy. The initiative it is an important part of Romania's foreign policy.*

*Recently, the Black Sea has become an area of confrontation due to Russia's attacks on Ukraine. Romania called on Russia to stop attacks on civilians. At the same time, we opened for Ukraine. The ongoing war comes with a series of great consequences. Countries have to have their integrity respected. Thus, we now speak of new forms of peace and security throughout the area.*

*The annual reunion of the Black Sea NGO Forum is an opportunity to thank civil society as their help and action during this crisis did not go unnoticed. We must build and strengthen our partnerships in the region and stimulate dialogue."*

**Mr Iulian Fota, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, Government of Romania**

## Plenary Session I

### Regional Reconstruction through Partnerships: From a Post-Pandemic and Post-War Context to Robust Partnerships for Democratic Development

#### Objectives:

- To highlight the contribution of civil society to meaningful democracy and democratic development that create benefits for people;
- To present ways of engaging in intersectoral partnerships with the government, private sector, civil society, and other citizens in addressing local needs through the best solution;
- To present best practices from the EU and the Black Sea Region in implementing reforms and policies that lead to the democratization of societies;
- To highlight the key challenges to democratization in the region.

**Moderator:** *Mr Sergiu Panainte*, Interim Director, Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, a project of German Marshall Fund

#### Speakers:

- ✚ **Mr Dimitrios Tryantaphyllou**, Director, Center for International and European Studies (CIES), Kadir Has University, Türkiye
- ✚ **Mr Sorin Ioniță**, Director, Expert-Forum, Romania
- ✚ **Ms Svitlana Kuts**, Director, Institute of Professional Fundraising, Ukraine
- ✚ **Ms Gayane Mkrtchyan**, Program Director, Eurasia Partnership Foundation (online, via ZOOM Platform), Armenia
- ✚ **Ms Marija Vishinova**, Communication Officer, Balkan Civil Society Development Network, North Macedonia

#### Key points:

- The unjust war in Ukraine is challenging everyone in the region. The dilemma is what to do from now on?
- The Black Sea NGO countries are facing a pandemic environment, war and acute energy crisis at the moment.
- The pandemic affected CSOs resilience and all stakeholders have to find creative solutions to overcome challenges.
- Civil society has not yet found its place at the discussion table.

The pandemic affected civil society as a sector. CSOs are acting now in a pandemic environment and at the same time in a war context, which also affects the energy sector. Dimitrios Tryantaphyllou believes that the civil society sector has to deal with a compound crisis simultaneously. In his intervention, he mentioned several challenges for different categories of people for whom the minimum net income is insufficient. All these elements emphasize the compound crisis we have to deal with. The EU considers the role of civil society essential in overcoming the crisis. It is regarded as a key player. The conclusion was that the pandemic affected CSO resilience, but the sector is still looking for creative solutions to the

challenges and does not sufficiently understand his own role and status in discussions with government authorities.

In this compound crisis, democracies are at risk. And the main question addressed by CSOs: how can civil society contribute in this environment to the resilience of the main democratic institutions?

In the same session, Ms Svitlana Kuts presented the situation of Ukrainian society as one of the key forces is the power of the Ukrainian people to resist aggression. According to Ms Kuts, from 2009 - 2018, Ukraine placed in spot 101 regarding philanthropic actions. In 2022, 86% of Ukrainians donated. 68% of the donations to NGOs:

*"Around 33% of the population volunteered in 2022. They are not volunteers in the typical Western pattern. They are doing more than donating their time and doing some tasks. In Ukraine, they are giving 100% of their time to help Ukraine. People get into groups that work to support the Ukrainian army and people who need evacuations and medical assistance. At the time of the research, in August, there were 75.000 people involved in volunteering in Ukraine. The volunteers are around 25-45 years old on average. 66% of them worked in delivery and provided manual or physical support. 12% represents fundraising. 31% in informational work."*

In his turn, Mr Sorin Ioniță, Director, Expert-Forum, draw the participants' attention to the importance of defining a region and civil society.

*"The definition of a region - if we look at a map, we were a fragmented region (Black Sea Region), and we probably still are. Culturally and linguistically. There are two exceptions, the Western Balkans and the countries that were part of Yugoslavia. We need to learn more about our region's identity and how history is restored. We need to work and create a region. We need to reinvest and learn about our neighbours."*

Sorin Ionita also mentioned that when he joined civil society - the sector was a very unproblematic concept. It was known as the globalist network. It went hand in hand with liberalization, joining the European Union, and opening the borders. At some point, something changed. A fragmentation occurred.

Ms Gayane Mkrtchyan, Program Director, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, that joined the reunion online, presented the trend of development of the Armenian civil society. In her opinion, the civil society in Armenia very quickly realized how the pandemic affected civil society, and the people's freedom, even if populism is on the rise and it is easy to shift the direction of the people and society today. It is so easy to fall into the trap of conspiracy theories and fake news that prevailed during the pandemic. Civil society was trying to follow the sources of information and statistics. Another crisis broke out: the problem of trust. A more democratic government replaced the former government. At the same time, Armenian civil society is still asking herself:

*"How do we continue promoting values of peace when the demonstration of power in force becomes one of the greatest tools?"*

Armenia has one of the strongest civil societies in the region due to the freedom of speech not being limited. The values promoted came under attack recently. For example, they work on studying the culture of violence, on anti-discrimination legislation. They try to teach the residents, young people, on this matter. But there still are challenges to be approached. Civil society needs to go further and requires a lot of perspectives.

Ms Marija Vishinova, Communication Officer, Balkan Civil Society Development Network, continued the discussion about challenges faced by Balkan countries. In her opinion, freedom of expression is obstructed in the region, and there is a clear division between the countries. There are verbal and physical attacks and fines issued. The countries aren't in line with the EU directives and regulations, although some national strategies exist.

Another trend in the Western Balkans is the lack of CSOs - government consultations. A positive example is Montenegro, where CSOs are taking part. An important issue is also the public funding. Most CSOs are donor-dependent.

The CSOs are asking the European Commission to consider their positions, as regarding reforming processes, CSOs are united at regional and national levels. The Western Balkans CSOs are helping the Ukrainians in the war. CSOs are important for both peace and war situations.

## Plenary Session II

### The future of cooperation in the Black Sea region. How does the crisis in Ukraine change the policies of the European Union and other regional actors?

#### Objectives:

- To reflect on a European Union policy for the Black Sea Region and the vision of different EU institutions to promote further cooperation in the region;
- To highlight the strategy adopted by other regional stakeholders active in the region (BSEC, civil society actors, etc.);
- To identify other relevant regional discussion platforms in the Black Sea region.

**Moderator:** Mr Ștefan Cibian, President, the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND

#### Speakers:

- ✚ **Mr Michael Rupp**, Principal Administrator, DG NEAR - Eastern Partnership, C.1. Teamleader Georgia and the Black Sea Synergy (online, via ZOOM Platform)
- ✚ **H.E. Amb. Dimitrios Rallis**, Deputy Secretary General, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation
- ✚ **H.E. Amb. Alexandru Victor Micula**, Ambassador of Romania in Ukraine (online, via ZOOM platform)
- ✚ **Ms Daniela Maria Dobre**, General Director of Romanian Agency for International Development Cooperation – RoAid
- ✚ **Ms Anna Repullo Grau**, Policy Officer, Eastern Partnership and Black Sea Regional Cooperation EEAS.EURCA.1

#### Key points:

- Promoting close contact, good neighbouring relations, and human rights, are the keys to successfully addressing and overcoming this crisis.

- It is impossible to cooperate in the Black sea region as long as one of the participants breaches international law.
- We must think about what the future will look like after the war.
- The new economic framework for cooperation in the Black Sea region should be connected to democratic values.

This plenary session started with a strong confirmation that the Black Sea region belongs to the European family. Mr Michael Rupp, Principal Administrator, DG NEAR - Eastern Partnership, C.1. Team leader Georgia and the Black Sea Synergy (online, via ZOOM Platform), highlighted the importance of civil society in implementing the objectives of the Black Sea Synergy as a European policy. He also mentioned the relevance of supporting and promoting civil society organizations and the role played by CSOs in EU policies.

The Black Sea NGO Forum facilitates communication and cooperation between the government, CSOs and donors. The EU has a holistic approach to the Forum, supporting various projects and processes.

Now, the EU has engaged in the region by supporting Ukraine in the war. But the challenge is thinking about ways to promote further ties once the war ends and strengthen EU connectivity with the Black Sea. In this sense, CSOs have to help the EU and foster connectivity. The EU counts on civil society support.

HE Amb. Dimitrios Rallis, Deputy Secretary General, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, mentioned in his intervention that the crisis and its impact on the region and of the people make everyone realize that promoting close contact, good neighbouring relations, human rights are the keys to successfully addressing and overcoming this crisis. Promoting regional dialogue and cooperation is one of the most important things, and it is also the mission of international organizations in the Black Sea region. BSEC became one of the most prominent in promoting regional cooperation. For 30 years, it gathered people from all member states and became vital in promoting dialogue, as there is no alternative.

Another important objective is to address the connectivity in the energy sector, and implement all sustainable development goals, materialize in practice. For that, BSEC is connected with the sectoral dialogue partners, besides other CSOs, which help strengthen the cooperation and sustainability of the activities.

HE Amb. Alexandru Victor Micula, Ambassador of Romania in Ukraine (online, via the ZOOM platform), continued the discussion started in the first plenary session with his thoughts about one region that shares different cultures and different economies that have complementarities. These differences and complementarities can be used for economic development. Unfortunately, some leaders that decided to build autocracies used these differences to develop misperceptions of their neighbours. The Black Sea region partners should avoid slides towards autocratic or totalitarian regimes.

The Black Sea region's cooperation is affected by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. This makes it impossible to cooperate in the Black Sea region as long as Russia breaches international law, making it impossible to have normal economic cooperation in the region. The stakeholders should focus their efforts on projects dedicated to the future and consider what the future will look like after the war. This also includes plans for reconstructing Ukraine and helping them modernize their state.

But all of this would be possible if the projects were connected with democratic values.

Ms Daniela Maria Dobre, General Director of the Romanian Agency for International Development Cooperation – RoAid, mentioned the deepening of bilateral and multilateral cooperation as a solution for the region. The Russian aggression changed the agendas - this is a reality.

The Ministry of Foreign affairs coordinated the policy for development cooperation and humanitarian aid at the national level. In this sense, RoAid is the agency responsible for implementing projects in the field and monitors policy implementation at the national level.

Ms Anna Repullo Grau, Policy Officer, Eastern Partnership and Black Sea Regional Cooperation EEAS.EURCA.1 continued with highlighting the importance of cooperation among partners as the best way to keep the results achieved so far. There is an interest in continuing the policy (for the Black Sea region) and the partnership. It is important at the moment to be flexible and adjust the objectives and priorities. But for a future revival of the activities, all involved countries need peace and security to restore the region.

### Plenary Session III

#### The New European Union Innovation Agenda. Priorities for 2021 – 2027

##### Objectives:

- To highlight the new priorities in innovation and research in the Horizon Europe Programme and energy transition;
- To identify the profile of the actors that can contribute to the implementation of the strategic outcomes of the EU innovation program;
- To present the opportunities for the stakeholders from the Black Sea region community – civil society actors, academia, research institutions;
- To reflect on how new technologies and digitalization can address the most pressing societal challenges.

**Moderator: Mr Victor Guzun**, International Negotiations Lecturer, former public servant and Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to Estonia

##### Speakers:

- ✚ **Mr Viorel Peca**, HoU Transition and Business Acceleration Services European Innovation Council (online, via ZOOM Platform)
- ✚ **Ms Bianca Muntean**, Co-Founder& Coordonator, Transilvania Digital Innovation Hub (online, via ZOOM Platform)
- ✚ **Mr. Radu Puchiu**, CEO H.appyCities and Director, Technology & Society Public Policy Program, Aspen Institute Romania (online, via ZOOM Platform)
- ✚ **Ms Anda Bologa**, Affiliated Expert, Europuls – Centre of European Expertise (online, via ZOOM Platform)

##### Key points

- The human dimension in innovation is huge.
- The digital transformation is 90% human information.

- Anyone can learn from the experience of other states in implementing and promoting innovation and digitization strategies;
- Digitization and innovation must be accompanied by programs that provide online security education to face cyber security challenges.

Mr Viorel Peca, representing the HoU Transition and Business Acceleration Services European Innovation Council, stated in his intervention that innovation is essential for development. He believes a nation's capacity depends on its capability to innovate.

Innovation provides a comparative advantage for economies. The benefits are based on actions taken to implement know-how, which differentiates one from others. Also, communication between stakeholders interested in promoting innovation as a key to development is an opportunity for this region. The EU Commission will continue to support its innovation agenda.

Ms Bianca Muntean, Co-Founder & Coordinator of Transilvania Digital Innovation Hub, mentioned that the European Commission calls Romania a modest innovator.

At the moment, Transilvania Digital Innovation Hub has around 20 employees. Working directly with the European Commission, they can offer access to new opportunities. They are coordinating a consortium with partners from Bulgaria and Estonia. They are trying to be closer to Romanian IT companies and are looking for positive changes. The strategy is to identify the main stakeholders in the region and create opportunities to sit at the same table. Adding common value propositions is something that is currently working. They are bringing universities, public administration and companies. Another goal is to contribute to the regional ecosystem and supporting small and medium enterprises. But there are some obstacles. And the legislation part is one of the main barriers.

Mr. Radu Puchiu, CEO HappyCities and Director of the Technology & Society Public Policy Program at Aspen Institute Romania explained that Aspen Institute Romania is looking at the impact of technology in society. The common goal is related to translating innovation to people and getting everybody on board.

Innovation provides development to the people. But it also creates disparities and gaps in what is happening in society if the society is not prepared to benefit from it. The quest towards development is to think about how we help real people using this innovation or how we connect innovation with people's lives. Aspen Institute follows a series of conversations between civil society organisations, companies, and governments.

Ms Anda Bologa, Affiliated Expert, Europuls – Centre of European Expertise, believes that the focus should be on the human element, human talent. She also mentioned the experience of the USA in this regard and how the Universities are well-prepared and equipped to promote innovation. In the USA is enabled the strategy of giving resources to students and creating technological hubs.

Students are more flexible and provide more space for creativity. They retain the information and are more open towards this matter.

## Plenary Session IV

### The Black Sea NGO Forum Reform: A Strategic Approach to the New Regional Context

#### Objectives:

- To organize an open debate with the participation of the beneficiaries of the Black Sea NGO Forum to collect proposals and suggestions for amending the Strategic Framework;
- To consult the participants of the Forum regarding the strategic priorities of the Forum, taking into account the political, security, and economic context of the Black Sea region and the transformations of policies dedicated to regulating civil society in different countries in the region.

**Facilitator:** Ms Cristina Rigman, Strategist & Experience Designer

#### The Strategic Framework has two main Objectives:

1. Supporting the creation of formal and informal thematic NGO networks;
2. Promoting and supporting an enabling environment for civil society and the Black Sea region, with a focus on building the resilience of civil society.

The main objective that should bring future generations together is to support peace in the region. The Black Sea unites people and their interests. Each country has its agenda, so the Forum needs to find a common approach for different challenges as a platform for people from other countries. For that to be possible, the participants should discuss further objectives within the platform but use at the same time what they already have achieved under the umbrella of the Forum. The basic function of the Forum is to offer access to the Black Sea Synergy content and policy discussions. The BSNGOF has thematic networks that can bring together NGOs with the same profile, which creates space for the exchange of ideas and creates premises for a sustainable mechanism for interaction and learning. Working together offers the participants the possibility to have a common voice in civil society for sustainable and democratic development. The beneficiaries of the thematic platforms (Working Groups) should reflect on what regional cooperation means and how sustainability can be achieved. Regional cooperation is a useful tool to solve common challenges by using available resources. We have to assess the region's common challenges and transform these networks/Working Groups into efficient mechanisms that are equipped with communication tools. That will ensure an ongoing process of looking into the region. To achieve this specific objective, the participants should focus their attention on monitoring the environment, report about its problems afterwards, and the third thing is to join the discussion about possible solutions with all the involved countries and how should we navigate better through these dimensions to better address the needs of our communities, to become resilient?

Resilience is an internal element that needs a lot of resources and tools. Communication, digitalization and innovation are the base to ensure additional space for the development of the internal structures of the Forum – Working Groups, Advisory Group and National Focal Point Network. Not all working groups are active at the moment. Some objective factors brought us to this reality. But, the working groups cannot be replaced as they offer the opportunity to organize the CSOs to find a common goal for cooperation. The solution is to reorganize the existing working groups, as we will never return to the realities faced several years ago (fewer resources, more crises, fewer human resources). At this point, the main discussion should approach the added value that brings the Forum for its participants, how we adjust our expectations and manage them, what we want from the network, how we can contribute, and what we get out of it.

Day 1: 22nd of November

### Plenary Session IV

#### The Ukrainian Crisis and its Impact on Civil Society Development in the Black Sea region. The Sub-Granting Scheme of the Black Sea NGO Forum and SOS Ukraine Campaign

##### Objectives:

- To highlight the medium and long-term effects of the refugee crisis and its impact on the actors involved in the humanitarian assistance mechanisms;
- To present models of support for civil society in Ukraine, such as the SOS Ukraine campaign;
- To present the contribution of the Black Sea NGO Forum in addressing the refugee crisis in Ukraine - results obtained by the beneficiaries of the Sub Granting scheme
- To highlight models of good practices generated by public-private partnerships.

**Moderator:** Ms Natalia Budescu, Director, Association for Cross Border Cooperation "Lower Danube Euroregion", Global Project Association

##### Speakers:

- ✚ Mr Pablo Zapata, UNHCR Representative
- ✚ Ms Mariana Ianachevici, Chief Executive Officer, The Association for Child and Family Empowerment „AVE Copiii”, the Republic of Moldova
- ✚ Ms Nadija Afanasieva, Executive Director, Ukrainian Institute for International Politics (online, via ZOOM Platform), Ukraine
- ✚ Ms Natusa Aphkhazava, Director of Batumi Branch/Legal Expert, Civil Society Institute Georgia, Georgia
- ✚ Ms Iris Alexe, Director, Novapolis Association, Romania
- ✚ Ms Camelia Crișan, Chief Executive Officer, Bistrița Progress Foundation, Romania

##### Key points:

- The main issue was about the support and integration of Ukrainian people in need;
- Authorities used anti-Covid-19 plans to help refugees;
- When the war started the NGOs had to consider their mission and whether they should be involved in humanitarian crisis or return to their previous activities;
- Regional networks are important platforms to spread relevant information about approaching crisis.

Many international organizations have been involved in a humanitarian aid campaign for Ukrainian refugees this year. Among them is UNHCR, which also has been active in Ukraine since 2014. The main issue was about the integration of people in need. The crisis put everybody on the first call: NGOs, governments, and the population. The borders were full of organizations with different mandates, trying to offer as much as possible. In Romania, the first challenge was trying to make sense of the system and coordinate with the authorities. There were some issues from the beginning. The first was to reach out to their partners; the second was to provide legal advice and recommendations. There was a negative

response to trying to expand the programmes. The first phase of expansion left a profound impression on civil society, which lacked resources. In their turn, the Romanian authorities continued to use the Covid 19 plans and used them to coordinate this crisis as well.

NGOs had to consider their mission and whether they should continue with the humanitarian crisis or return to their previous activities. Many NGOs came to the refugees' rescue even though they had no prior experience or it was not their mission. Some NGOs decided to continue, but it was the issue of funds.

Mr Pablo Zapata, the UNHCR representative, confirmed that UNHCR is preparing long-term response plans.

In her turn, Ms Natalia Budescu confirmed that the CSOs in Romania need a capacity-building process to help them build tools and a strategy.

Ms Mariana Ianachevici, Chief Executive Officer, The Association for Child and Family Empowerment "AVE Copiii" is one of the oldest NGOs promoting children's rights in Moldova. Ms Ianachevici focused on the large number of refugees from Ukraine through the Republic of Moldova.

The number of people who decided to remain in Moldova was from the beginning very big.

This refugee flow was ambiguous. The border police registered 803 children who entered the country unaccompanied or separated. The legislation of Moldova is different regarding the separation of children. The biggest problem of the NGO was the need for a single system of refugee registration in the country. Each community should know how many people enter and how many children.

The NGO did a short assessment to assess the needs. In 24 districts, they found 10989 children. Some adults do not want to be registered, even for aid, so they are not counted in the statistics.

The emergency response offered by AVE Copiii:

- Child protection;
- Case management of the most vulnerable;
- Collecting and systematizing the data to create a database;
- Create child-friendly spaces;
- Facilitating access to school - vouchers for school supplies, computers, language courses, etc.;
- Capacity-building for local professionals - social workers, border police, education specialists etc.

Challenges:

- Winter will bring a new wave of refugees due to a lack of essential services;
- Lack of resources and community exhaustion;
- The cost of electricity, gas and firewood increased;
- The capacities of specialists at the local level are insufficient for qualitative case management of refugee children as well as the local ones;



- Schooling of refugees is conditioned.

Ms Nadija Afanasieva, Executive Director of the Ukrainian Institute for International Politics, explained that UIIP works internationally on different projects related to Ukraine's European integration. 2022 was challenging to understand how to move forward and support their activities. The main activity was the EUSDR Forum organized on another territory due to security reasons.

From the first hours of the war, UIIP created a communication hub. They started receiving the main questions regarding support for the NGO and collecting info from the EU connected to refugee support.

They build communication and partnerships in all types of forums and activities with CSOs. CSOs and expert communities can now pass the message and fight propaganda that is still strong, as Russia is promoting the idea that Ukraine is guilty of gas prices and the war abroad. The messages are distributed even in Moldova by the pro-Russian mass media.

Regarding the participation in regional networks of CSOs, it is crucial to continue these partnerships and spread the message about who is guilty and how to overcome things. Ukraine needs to make a lot of reforms in its governing bodies and expert communities but can offer its unique experience to build resilience. These instruments gained by Ukraine can also be shared with others to overcome future crises. Ukrainian society can share their experience in the future.

Ms Natusa Aphkhazava, Director of Batumi Branch/Legal Expert, Civil Society Institute Georgia, explained why the Ukrainian conflict is also Georgia's.

Civil Society Institute tries to see how civil society communicates and what attending to refugees means. Romania and Georgia are hosting many refugees in their countries. Georgia is hosting around 25000 refugees. Both countries are making great efforts as they have never had such an experience. In Georgia, as in Romania, the first step in assisting refugees was from civil society. They showed the government that the Ukrainian people were Georgia's people and the war was Georgia's. Civil society helped support the refugees and the people still in Ukraine.

They showed society that they could stand together. Civil Society Institute analyzed around 35 organizations involved, enough to highlight the challenges and main success stories.

The first challenge was coordination. These CSOs need this coordination and the data and strategic view on how to continue working on this. The second issue was the database. Some challenges are also financial issues. Winter is coming, the number of refugees has increased, and we are still determining when the war will end. Georgia CSOs demanded financial support from the Government and the European Union. Another issue was bureaucracy and transparency from the state. CSOs always stood with Ukraine regardless of the issues.

Ms Iris Alexe explained how Novapolis Association was involved in assisting Ukrainian refugees from the beginning. Their experience in mitigating issues related to migration was essential in this sense. Thus, Novapolis organized within the Sub-Granting Scheme of the Black Sea NGO Forum 6 online workshops for CSOs from Romania, Ukraine and Moldova. The objective was to increase the Ukrainian CSOs' capacity-building and to strengthen regional cooperation in the Black Sea region to effectively manage the humanitarian crisis caused by the military conflict in Ukraine. The activities proposed measures to streamline the response to the humanitarian crisis:

- Combating human trafficking, capacity-building and identifying ways to attract the necessary funds.
- Proposing advocacy measures to support Ukrainian CSOs.
- Countering fake news and information.
- Coordination of public discourse on migration and integration.

Ms Camelia Crișan, Chief Executive Officer of Bistrița Progress Foundation, explained how the NGO she represents approached the humanitarian crisis. In February, the main concern of the Bistrița Progress Foundation was how to support its partners. The strategic decision was not to learn something new: *"We realized that the capacity was expanded to maximum. It was difficult because the librarians were crying with the refugees, and we realized that working with people with trauma is very difficult."*

There is a fine line between the support offered to the refugees by an NGO and the help provided by a psychiatrist. There were many situations when kids couldn't handle it. Due to the machine guns, some kids were into themselves. They wouldn't talk. They needed a specialist. These are the types of things the experts discussed with the librarians during workshops organized by the Bistrița Progress Foundation.

Libraries in Moldova needed to have the basic things for art therapy. All these, put together, really helped the librarians deal with the situation.

### Side event 1

#### Social Entrepreneurship – a pillar for sustainable development in the Black Sea Region

##### Objectives:

- To present the latest policies, trends, strategies and know-how in social entrepreneurship;
- To discuss the level of legislative debates in different states from the Black Sea region;
- To highlight the relevance of the cooperation among the organizations supporting social entrepreneurship development in the Black Sea Region.

**Moderator:** Ms Ana Murray, Country Director, Ashoka Romania

##### Speakers:

- ✚ **Ms Anahit Ghazanchyan**, President/CEO, Development Principles NGO, Armenia
- ✚ **Mr Alin Apostu**, Project Manager, Romanian Business Leaders (online, via ZOOM Platform), Romania
- ✚ **Ms Elena Nofit**, Communication Manager, Contact Center, the Republic of Moldova
- ✚ **Ms Elena Vasiliu**, Communications and Marketing Expert, ADV Romania Group, Romania

This session is a special one. Its objective was to highlight the contribution of FOND members at the regional level by transferring good practices and experiences to the members of the Sustainable Development and CSR working group. To facilitate access to other national experiences, FOND Romania extended the invitation to other Romanian organizations involved in promoting social entrepreneurship and innovative solutions to benefit different social categories.



At the beginning of 2022, a group of social entrepreneurs from Armenia made a study visit to Romania, where they met the experts from the Close to you Foundation, Iasi. They later shared the experience and good practices with partners from Georgia.

Close to you Foundation is also a partner of the Contact Center - a civil society organization from the Republic of Moldova, which prioritized the promotion of social entrepreneurship.

In Armenia, social entrepreneurship has become a powerful trend. It is widely spread and accepted. They were privileged to cooperate with Georgia. For the Development Principles NGO, the project presented in Bucharest is not only dedicated to the business area. The initiative provided opportunities for businesses, not-for-profit organizations and social enterprises. Social entrepreneurship, also named good businesses, is moving in this direction, to be called business for the soul, as its main impact is on vulnerable groups of people, and its social mission is designed from the beginning.

Armenia still needs legislation for social entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs need favourable conditions. That is why the Development Principles NGO is looking for the experience of other countries, including Romania. Ms. Anahit Gazanchyan believes that the future will focus on young people in social entrepreneurship.

Mr Alin Apostu, Project Manager, Romanian Business Leaders, believe that we need active citizens to develop an entrepreneurial system. According to the surveys, 54% of young people want to be entrepreneurs but lack entrepreneurship education and a competitive landscape.

Romanian Business Leaders organization creates programs for young people who want to be entrepreneurs. They are trying to identify young people who wish to develop their entrepreneurship skills but are still waiting to open their businesses. Social collaboration requires a lot of trusts. Trust is a solid asset.

The experience of the Republic of Moldova is different from the Romanian. Only now, social entrepreneurship has become a trend in Moldova. The concept was discussed for several years, but the experts only developed a good legal framework in the last few years. The Contact Center, which Ms Elena Nofit represents, helps the organization in promoting social entrepreneurship. The challenge was convincing NGOs to start social businesses and buy social entrepreneurs' services and products.

The Contact Center organized a national campaign to inform people about social entrepreneurship. After three years, Google results show more than 300 media articles, TV shows, and podcasts about social entrepreneurship. These results convince international donors that this topic is an important trans subject in Moldova.

Developing NGOs - social entrepreneurship has two big impacts: social and economic impact. At the moment, Contact Center developed capacity-building actions to help people learn how to start an NGO and know the legal framework and social entrepreneurship.

At the regional level, there is a Center that supports NGOs at the local level on how to start social entrepreneurship. There are six hubs for young people that want to start their own business at the local level for entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs.

Finally, Ms Elena Vasiliu, Communications and Marketing Expert ADV Romania Group (Close to you Foundation), mentioned that the organisations do their best to alleviate the pressure and create tools to

overcome this tide. Can social entrepreneurship provide tools for sustainable development? ADV believes that social entrepreneurship can be a powerful tool. Further, Ms Elena Vasiliu has presented a good practice- EU4Youth social innovation project, which started in 2008 and became one of the largest social enterprises. This year was the top 1 first small enterprise in the textile sector. Wisetravel, a tour operator, was ranked no 2 in the country.

Many social enterprises are sustainable and are thinking of investing in other capabilities. They decided to create sustainable solutions for the beneficiaries. They were involved in a program offering integration services on the market. They were trained and ready to be integrated.

EU4Youth social innovation project results:

- 1,8 million people have been informed about the project through online methods;
- 4 workshops with public authorities;
- 1 public policy paper to improve the legal framework;
- 4 social innovation labs;
- Over 1000 participants attended skills training;
- 5 people from Moldova and one from Ukraine became social entrepreneurs.

The next step is expanding the Black Sea region's programme and finding more resources. Profit should support the social mission. In ADV, the mission is to support the integration of people with disabilities.

## Side Event 2

### Donor Café Session – session with donor organization representatives

#### Objectives:


- *Highlighting the existing opportunities for the development of the civil society sector.*
- *Promoting projects of interest for regional cooperation.*
- *Providing a practical interaction space for donors and beneficiaries of funding programs.*

**Facilitator:** Ms Angela Grămadă, Project Manager, the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND

#### Donor organizations:

- ✚ **Mr Ionuț Sibian**, Director, Civil Society Development Foundation (online, via ZOOM Platform)
- ✚ **Ms. Angela Sima**, Counselor, Romanian Agency for International Development Cooperation – RoAid
- ✚ **Ms Vera Țurcanu-Spatari**, Program Officer, Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, a project of German Marshall Fund
- ✚ **Ms Alexandra Kirby**, Senior Programm Officer, European Endowment for Democracy (online, via ZOOM Platform)



 **Ms Agnieszka Gmys-Wiktor**, Programme Officer, National Endowment for Democracy  
(online, via ZOOM Platform)

### **Key points**

- Donors are receptive to the changes taking place in the region and are flexible in adapting their programs to new challenges;
- The systemic changes influence donors' objectives in a certain region. These changes condition quick reactions and flexibility, plus systematic consultations with different types of actors;
- Donors from the Black Sea region will continue to remain active in the area;
- ✓ If we talk about government donors, the beneficiaries must be careful and consider the objectives and priorities of national governments, which have limited resources.

The Civil Society Development Foundation is one of the most important partners for Romanian civil society. It is also the organization that sustained from the beginning, in 2008, the conceptualization of the Black Sea NGO Forum as a regional platform. CSDF focuses more on supporting Romanian NGOs but still has some open calls aiming to provide financial assistance to organizations involved in humanitarian aid (for Ukrainian refugees) and sustainable development.

Regarding the Romanian Agency for International Development Cooperation – RoAid, the multi-annual strategic programme focuses on the support of the Romanian development policy. Their partners are Romanian NGOs, but with a clear focus on countries that are defined by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as strategic priorities. The Agency has two modes for implementing the development assistance: half of the annual plan is implemented directly, and the other half in indirect modalities. This yearly call has some restrictions, and the beneficiaries are informed in due time about them.

The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (BST), a project of the German Marshall Fund, is one of the most active donor organizations in the Black Sea Region. This year, due to war, BST has to be more flexible than usual. BST is a flexible donor, attentive to political developments in the region, which supports actions that encourage qualitative changes. This donor understands the role of civil society in the democratic transformation of the communities they represent.

For European Endowment for Democracy, the priority is still to be able to respond to the demands on the ground, taking into consideration what the civil society (registered and non-registered) is facing at the local level. The application process is simple, but the currency represents a challenge due to inflation.

For National Endowment for Democracy, supporting civil society organizations from the Black Sea Region is very relevant, as the trends regarding implementing policies and promoting democratic values are still ongoing. All the requirements regarding the application process are open to future beneficiaries, and details can be found on the official webpage.

## **The Public Cafe – Networking Session for FOND Members**

### **Objectives:**

- ✓ To offer a space where organization members will present their activities;
- ✓ To identify common directions for cooperation;



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- ✓ To present the ongoing projects and initiatives within the organizations at the event, with relevant outcomes for FOND.

**Facilitator: Ms Anemarie Necşulescu**, Advocacy&Policy Officer, the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND

*This Session was organized within the Project implemented by the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND with the financial support of the Active Citizens Fund Romania, programme funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Grants 2014 – 2021.*

### **Recommendations**

#### ***Plea to civil society sector, including for strengthening their position:***

- ✓ CSOs should tackle their mission and monitor the situation in the region and report on it
- ✓ Civil society should create synergies
- ✓ NGOs should pay attention to the way they deliver their messages, promote more sensitive issues in public debates;
- ✓ Before asking for transparency and accountability from others, CSOs should also practice the same values.

#### ***Plea to international bodies:***

- ✓ Increase the interagency coordination and the coordination of Governments and offer them a sense of ownership in the process;
- ✓ Encouraging consistent public consultations with civil society, which can offer effective alternative solutions for various problems;

#### ***Plea to the donors:***

- ✓ Start working now on development, including in CSOs development and capacity-building programs as they need to be stronger and more prepared for far-reaching responses;
- ✓ More flexibility, less bureaucracy.

## Conclusions and acknowledgements

The 15th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum: *The Black Sea Region under Pressure. From Multiple Crisis to Sustainable and Democratic Development* has been organised in a hybrid format and aimed to contribute to the identification of the common challenges that the civil society organisations are facing right now. Throughout its two days of working sessions, the Black Sea NGO Forum gathered around 100 participants, both from the Black Sea Region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Turkey and Ukraine), as well as from the EU (Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Estonia), Non EU countries (Great Britain) and the Balkans (North Macedonia). The Black Sea NGO Forum team wishes to give special thanks to our funders and partners:



We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of our participants for their active involvement during this year's edition as well! We invite you to stay updated with news about the Black Sea NGO Forum and opportunities for the NGO sector from the Black Sea Region by the following:

Our website: <http://blackseango.org/>

Our Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/BlackSeaNGOForum/>

Our Twitter: <https://twitter.com/blackseango>

For any inquiries, please contact us at: [forum@blackseango.org](mailto:forum@blackseango.org) or [fond.romania@gmail.com](mailto:fond.romania@gmail.com).