



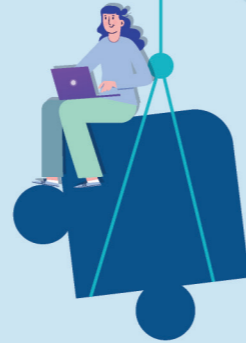
BLACK SEA NGO FORUM

A Successful Story of
Regional Cooperation


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1. INTRODUCTION

The **Black Sea NGO Forum** was organised for the first time back in 2008, by the Romanian NGDO Platform (FOND), with the support of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Representation of the European Commission to Romania and the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation.

The event was initiated within the framework of **the Black Sea Synergy**, the European policy launched at the initiative of Romania, Bulgaria and Greece with the purpose of consolidating regional cooperation between the countries surrounding the Black Sea.

Vision, Mission & Objectives

The vision of the Black Sea NGO Forum is that the Black Sea represents **a cooperation space** rather than a barrier. In this sense, the Black Sea NGO Forum aims to create **an open space for debate, mutual knowledge and understanding, communication and cooperation** among civil society organisations (CSOs), governments, international organisations and donors active in the wider Black Sea region, with a focus on sharing good practices in various domains and success stories of regional cooperation.

The Black Sea NGO Forum aims to:

- Increase the level of dialogue and cooperation among CSOs in the wider Black Sea region;

- Strengthen CSOs' capacity to influence regional public policies;
- Increase the number and quality of regional partnerships, projects and networks.

The Black Sea NGO Forum – a strategic initiative

Since its first edition, the Forum has been a driver of change in the region, reuniting more than 1,100 participants with various backgrounds from 11 countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine.

Over the years, the Forum has managed to build trust in the region by encouraging CSOs to develop contacts, make their projects more visible, meet donors, find new partners, and by offering the space for the creation and growth of new initiatives. In this respect, the Forum builds each year strategically on the objectives of the previous editions, thus contributing to the emergence of common regional goals.

The Black Sea NGO Forum has developed a traditional partnership with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and since 2013, it received valuable support from important partners such as the European Commission and CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE). Moreover, it has developed a collaboration with CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, bringing regional issues in the broader global context of development and enabling environment for civil society.

2. THE BLACK SEA NGO FORUM OVER THE YEARS



Black Sea NGO Forum editions

Up until now, 11 editions of the Black Sea NGO Forum have been organised as follows:

1 “Time to meet!” – October 31st – November 2nd 2008, Bucharest, Romania. The main aim of the first edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum was to increase the level of dialogue and mutual knowledge among NGOs in the wider Black Sea region.

2 “NGOs in Times of Crisis” – October 29th – 31st 2009, Bucharest, Romania. The 2nd edition of the Forum included more space for discussion and participation, on topics such as: democracy & human rights, environment, children rights, advocacy & policy, financial sustainability, volunteering & citizen participation.

3 “Investing in Our Common Future” – October 21st – 23rd 2010, Constanța, Romania. The 3rd edition of the Forum aimed to make an analysis on the status of civil society development in the region, discuss common issues of concern, share good practices, identify potential partners and joint action ideas.

4 “Building a common vision” – October 6th–8th 2011, Bucharest, Romania. During the 4th edition of the Forum participants discussed about the European Neighbourhood Policy and the place of the Black Sea Region in the European Union’s regional cooperation policy, as well as about thematic issues such as civil society leadership, democratic transition, child protection.

5 “Participation and inclusion for responsible development”, October 24th–25th 2012, Bucharest, Romania. The 5th edition was focused on participation and inclusion, addressing topics such as: social entrepreneurship and social inclusion, community mobilization, and youth participation in the decision-making process.

6 “Building Sustainable and Effective Regional Cooperation”, September 4th–6th 2013, Bucharest, Romania. The 6th edition’s objective was to explore the ways in which civil society can contribute to the sustainability and effectiveness of regional cooperation in the extended Black Sea area, as well as offer the opportunity to share experience and good practices with other regional cooperation initiatives such as those of the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas.

7 “Enabling environment for CSOs: Towards a strategy of civil society in the Black Sea Region” – December 8th–10th, 2014, Kyiv, Ukraine). The goal of the 7th edition of the Forum was to launch the process of creating a “Strategic Framework for Civil Society Cooperation in the Black Sea Region”, with the purpose of transforming civil society from a beneficiary into a partner in development and strengthening civil society cooperation.

8 Black Sea NGO Forum, November 2nd – 3rd, 2015, Tbilisi, Georgia. The 8th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum aimed to finalise the above-mentioned Strategic Framework with the purpose of consolidating regional cooperation and providing focus and sustainability to regional initiatives. At the end of this process, 10 thematic cooperation areas were set and corresponding working groups were created.

9 Black Sea NGO Forum, October 31st – November 2nd, 2016, Varna, Bulgaria. The 9th edition of the Forum targeted the implementation of the Strategic Framework by promoting an enabling environment for civil society organisations as a prerequisite for regional cooperation and supporting the Forum’s working groups consolidate their activity.

10 “Anniversary Edition: Advancing Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Region”, December 4th – 6th, 2017, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova. The anniversary edition aimed at reassessing the strategic positioning of the Black Sea NGO Forum in the region and exploring ways in which it can adapt and further develop the

opportunities provided for the CSOs in the Black Sea Region, in order to enable sustainable regional cooperation.

11 “Building a More Resilient Civil Society in the Black Sea Region”, November 12th – 14th, 2018, Brussels, Belgium. The main goal of the latest edition of the Forum was to bring more visibility on the importance of the Black Sea Synergy as a policy framework both for the European level, as well as for civil society active in the Black Sea Region, especially in the context of the Romania’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union (January – June 2019).



3. THE BLACK SEA NGO FORUM'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN CONSOLIDATING REGIONAL COOPERATION

Results of the first 10 editions

According to the report “The Black Sea NGO Forum A Decade On: Evaluation, Impact and Perspectives (2012–2016)”, the Black Sea NGO Forum:

- Successfully meets its original mandate and shows consistency and perseverance in realising its agenda;
- Contributed to creating a regional identity through a functioning NGO-led networked-approach;
- Provided a platform for regional confidence building and dialogue during difficult times;
- Has a strong sense of common ownership;
- Helped nurture collaboration and regional coalitions amongst NGOs in important areas and policies.

The Black Sea NGO Forum is considered **a story of success of the Black Sea Synergy**, with an added value in the region, which enables and supports CSOs in fulfilling their role. The crucial importance of the Black Sea NGO Forum was emphasized both by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as traditional partner over the years, and the European Commission.



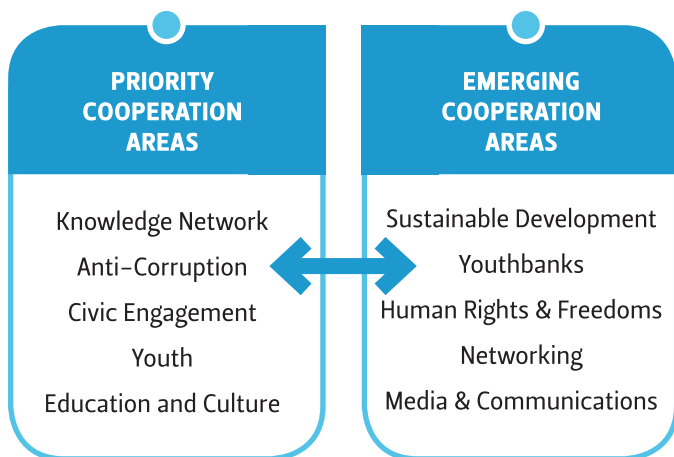
In this sense, the Forum is mentioned as a best practice in the implementation reports of the Black Sea Synergy published by the European Commission and the European External Action Service in 2015 and 2019. Moreover, the importance of the Black Sea NGO Forum in stimulating regional cooperation and advancing sustainable development was recognized by the Council of the European Union in the conclusions published on the 17th of June 2019.

Strategy

One of the main results of the Black Sea NGO Forum is the creation and endorsement of the “**Strategic Framework for Civil Society Cooperation**”.

The Strategic Framework follows 2 main directions:

1. Promoting & supporting enabling environment for CSOs;
2. Supporting the creation of formal and informal thematic networks in the following **10 thematic cooperation areas**:



Capacity building

Based on the Strategic Framework **10 corresponding working groups** were formed.

In 2016 and 2017, **10 regional thematic meetings** of the Black Sea NGO Forum working groups were organised with the logistic support of the European Commission:

2016

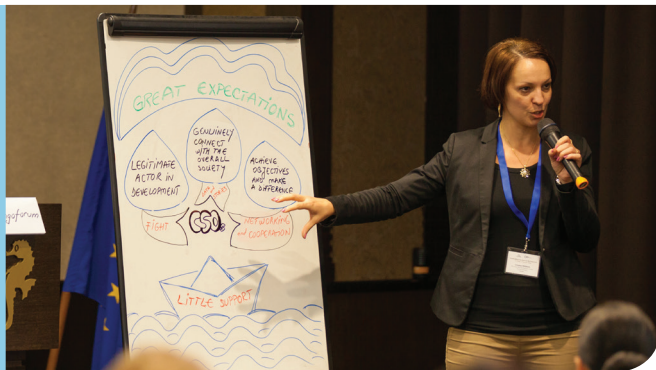
Youth Working Group, Tbilisi, Georgia, 12th of September 2016

Civic Engagement Working Group, Kyiv, Ukraine, 17th of September 2016

Education & Culture Working Group, Kyiv, Ukraine, 11th of October 2016

Anti-corruption Working Group, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova, 13th of October 2016

YouthBank Working Group, Yerevan, Armenia, 15th – 16th of October 2016



2017

Anti-Corruption Working Group – Kutaisi, Georgia, 26th of June 2017

Culture & Education Working Group – Odessa, Ukraine, 17th of July 2017

Human Rights Working Group – Kyiv, Ukraine, 21st of July 2017

Sustainable Development Working Group – Kyiv, Ukraine, 12th of September 2017

YouthBank Working Group – Tbilisi, Georgia, 21st of September 2017

Apart from these, the Forum contributed to the creation and development of **4 regional thematic networks**, either formal or informal:

- ChildPact – The Regional Coalition for Child Protection;
- A network reuniting the national youth councils active in the region;
- An anti-corruption professionals network;
- An informal regional network of the organisations implementing the YouthBank programme within the Black Sea region.

Developing research, policy & reflection papers

Since 2015, FOND, through the Black Sea NGO Forum, has developed several reports and studies highlighting the main challenges that CSOs face in the Black Sea Region and making recommendations for a more open and enabling environment for civil society:

- Report on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development in the Black Sea Region (2015);
- Report on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development in the Black Sea Region. Second Edition (2016);
- Report on Donor-CSO Relationships in the Black Sea Region (2018).

Moreover, based on the input gathered from the participants at the 11th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum, FOND developed the following policy documents:

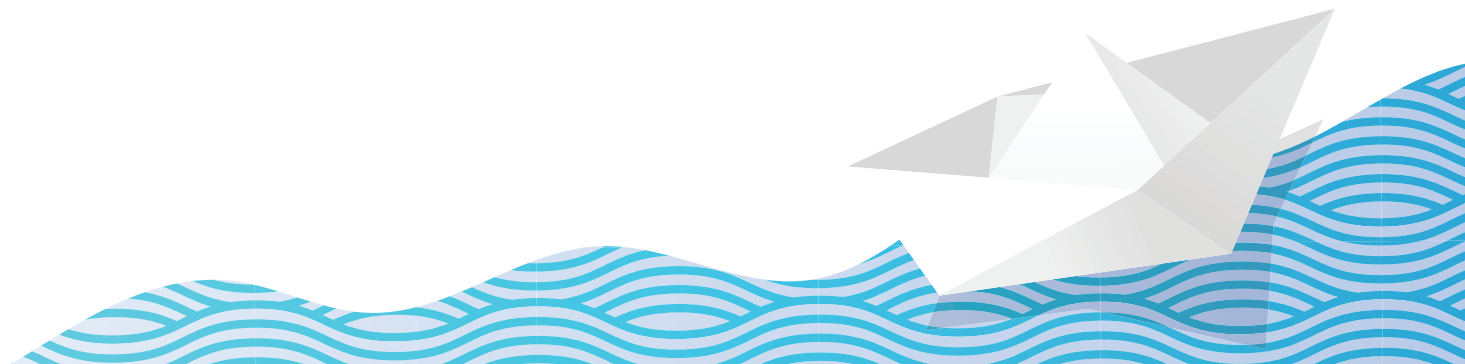
- Black Sea NGO Forum Position Paper on the Black Sea Synergy Review: “Towards a Stronger & More Sustainable Civil Society Cooperation at the Black Sea” (2018);
- Black Sea NGO Forum Reflection Paper on CSO Resilience: What Does It Mean and How Can We Strengthen It? (2018).

In 2019, FOND began the implementation of the new project **“Building CSO Capacity for Regional Cooperation within the Black Sea Region”**, with the support of the European Union for the period 2019 – 2021.

The main goal is to increase **stability and prosperity in the Black Sea Region by strengthening regional cooperation among civil society organisations in the region** in the context of sustainable development and societal resilience.

The new project seeks to **transform the Black Sea NGO Forum into a mechanism of support for CSOs in the region** by:

- Improving the internal capacity of the Black Sea NGO Forum;
- Providing capacity building opportunities for CSOs from the Black Sea Region and for the Black Sea NGO Forum working groups;
- Providing support for the creation of joint partnerships, projects, networks and initiatives of CSOs in the Black Sea Region;
- Increasing the visibility of CSOs from the Black Sea Region at European and international levels.



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