Developing Strategy for Civil Society in the Black Sea Region

Black Sea NGO Forum, 21-23 October 2010
About the Project

- Aims to raise awareness, assess strengths and challenges, and galvanize action to strengthen civil society in the region.
- Uses CIVICUS Civil Society Index Project as an action planning tool
- Inspired by TUSEV & Counterpart Armenia’s Cross-border Initiative
- **Project Partners:** TUSEV & Counterpart Armenia
- **Funded by** B | S | T The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation
- **Activities:**
  - Istanbul workshop, July 2010
    - 19 researchers, practitioners and academicians from eight countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia and Turkey
    - Country profile presentations
    - SWOT Analysis
    - Some action planning
  - Comparative Report
    - Country profile presentations (same as above) and SWOT Analysis
  - **E-group**
    - volunteer-run activated as a communication tool between workshop participants and a venue for those who did not attend the Istanbul workshop
  - **Constanța Workshop, October 2010**
    - Presentation of Istanbul Workshop outcomes
    - Action planning based on causes and effects
About CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI)

- An action-research project that assesses the state of civil society in countries around the world
- Past phase (2003-2006) covered 53 countries
- Current phase (2008-2010) covers 56 countries

**Five Core dimensions**
- Civic Participation
- Level of Organization
- Values
- Perceived Impact
- Environment

**Diverse research methods**
- Secondary Literature Review
- Population Survey
- CSO Survey & Focus Groups
- External Stakeholder Survey
- Case Studies (5)
- Country Forum
Istanbul Workshop and Comparative Report Findings

Strengths and Weaknesses & Opportunities and Threats

- Civic participation
- Level of organization
- CS- Government Relations
- Policy Impact
State of Civil Society in the Black Sea Region - Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Level of organizational development** of civil society
  - Varies a lot between countries, half relatively strong, the other half relatively weak
  - One common trait – it is either all weak or all strong
  - Technological resources are strong and improving
  - Increasing levels of international communication

- **Government – Civil Society Relations**
  - Transitioning in every country
  - General agreements that autonomy and dialogue improved in recent years, but remains selective and ad hoc - yet to assume a formal and structured character.
  - Changes (both positive and negative) to civil society legislations in all countries symptomatic of the volatility of these relations.
  - State resources quite narrow and new in all countries

- **Policy impact**
  - Active but only somewhat successful in each country.
  - CSO capacity and political will to include civil society in policy making are the key factors.
  - *Data not fully comparable.*
Future of Civil Society in the Black Sea Region – Opportunities and Threats

- **Level of organizational development** of civil society
  - CSOs with expertise, organizational capacity and embracing certain positive values = opportunity to lead by example.
  - Improvements in technological resources and international communication = opportunity to share good practices
  - Major sustainability threat: dependency on foreign aid

- **Government – Civil Society Relations***
  - Persisting “strong state vs. small civil society” tradition
  - Rapidly changing nature of laws and regulations
  - Successful public-private partnerships (PPPs), esp. at the local

- **Policy impact***
  - No policy impact without any “external push”
  - Danger of being perceived as spokespeople of external forces
  - Potential to achieve policy change if CS strategizes with international actors.
  - *Data not fully comparable.
Civic Participation in the Black Sea Region

- CSI Conceptual Framework
  - Described by formal and informal activities undertaken by individuals to advance shared interests at different levels, from recreation to social and political interests.
  - The ‘active citizenship’ element is a crucial defining factor of civil society and participation within civil society is multi-faceted.

- Three specific sub-dimensions
  - Extent of engagement
  - Depth of engagement
  - Diversity or inclusiveness of civil society
Civic Participation: Strengths and Weaknesses

- Low level of civic participation a major weakness and obstacle
- Citizens that do engage with civil society do so rather frequently and extensively.
- Participation remains rather diverse.
- Strong tendency to volunteer and associate in informal ways
- Elite domination and low levels of social capital (only in some countries)
Civic Participation: Opportunities and Threats

- Diversity and depth of participation assets to build on
- Increasing involvement of youth, unaffected by the negative legacies of the Soviet period, also an opportunity
- Low levels of social capital and elitism of CSOs - major threats, potential to cause even more disconnect between the CSOs and general public.
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<tr>
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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
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<tr>
<td>Civic Participation</td>
<td>Diversity of civic participation (despite some elitism)</td>
<td>Extent of civic participation (small percentage of population)</td>
<td>Youth as an agent of change</td>
<td>Low levels of social capital</td>
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<td>Depth of civic participation</td>
<td>Tradition of informal volunteering</td>
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<td>Disappointment in democratization – gap between expectations and reality</td>
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<td>Increasing social disparities</td>
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<td>Level of Organization</td>
<td>Technological resources</td>
<td>Unsustainable financial resources</td>
<td>Presence of CSOs with institutional expertise, capacity building and good governance</td>
<td>Dependency foreign aid</td>
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<td>International communication</td>
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<td>Use of new media</td>
<td>Losing sight of core mission in pursuit of financial resources (opportunism)</td>
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<td>Losing connection to constituencies</td>
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<td>CS – Government Relations</td>
<td>Existence of a space for autonomy</td>
<td>Ad hoc nature of dialogue</td>
<td>Service delivery in cooperation with the state</td>
<td>Strong central state tradition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Existence of some form of dialogue</td>
<td>Nascent stage of cooperation and fund transfer</td>
<td>New media (web...)</td>
<td>CS legislation volatile</td>
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<td>Service delivery focus compromising watchdog function</td>
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<td>Policy Impact</td>
<td>Civil society is active in influencing policy</td>
<td>Reactive rather than pro-active</td>
<td>Strategizing with international actors</td>
<td>No success unless there is an external push</td>
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Thank you!

- Q&A