



## Seminar “Building Resilience in the Black Sea NGO Community”

*5<sup>th</sup> of December 2019, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Brussels, Belgium*

*- FINAL REPORT -*

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## *The Black Sea NGO Forum – A driver of change*

The Black Sea NGO Forum is an annual regional event first organised in 2008 by the [Romanian NGDO Platform \(FOND\)](#) in the context of the **Black Sea Synergy European Policy**, with the support of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Representation of the European Commission in Romania and the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation. Since 2013, the Forum has been financially supported by the European Commission.

Its main objectives are to increase the level of **dialogue and cooperation** among NGOs in the wider Black Sea Region, to strengthen the capacities of NGOs to influence regional and national policies and to increase the number and quality of **regional partnerships and projects**.

Since its very 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. The Forum focuses on **sharing good practices** in various domains and **success stories of regional cooperation**.

### *Seminar: Building Resilience in the Black Sea NGO Community*

The Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND/ Black Sea NGO Forum team organized on **the 5th of December 2019**, at the European Economic and Social Committee headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, the seminar with the title “**Building Resilience in the Black Sea NGO Community**”. The seminar was implemented in the context of the Black Sea NGO Forum project “Building CSO Capacity for Regional Cooperation within the Black Sea Region” and funded by the European Union.

The seminar aimed at highlighting the importance of regional cooperation at the Black Sea and strengthening resilience both at the level of the society and at the level of NGOs from the region, in the context of the Black Sea Synergy policy. At the same time, the event aimed at presenting [the results of this year’s edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum \(23rd – 25th of October, Istanbul, Turkey\)](#).

The event gathered 28 participants from European institutions, Permanent Representations of EU member states, Brussels-based organisations, as well as NGOs from the Black Sea region.

More information can be found at: <https://blackseango.org/seminar-building-resilience-in-the-black-sea-ngo-community-5th-of-december-2019-eesc-brussels/>

## How do the European policies support a resilient civil society in the Black Sea region?

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**Moderator: Ms. Anca Ciucă**, Vice-president, The Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND / President, Foundation for Democratic Changes

**Welcome remarks:**

**Mr. Călin Stoica**, Permanent representative of Romania to the Political and Security Committee of the EU

**Ms. Indrė Vareikytė**, President of the Eastern Neighbours Follow-up Committee, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

**Speakers:**

**Mr. Vassilis Maragos**, Head of Unit, C.2. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus & Eastern Partnership, DG NEAR, European Commission

**Ms. Diana Tase**, Black Sea and OSCE Policy Officer, Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, European External Action Service (EEAS).

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### Main points of discussion:

- *The role of NGOs is unique and essential in building resilience at the level of local communities;*
- *In the next years, real partnership is sought between the EU and the Eastern Neighbourhood;*
- *The European Union wants to bring one step forward its partnership with civil society organisations from the Black Sea region;*
- *In the past year there have been important milestones in advancing regional cooperation: the launch of the third implementation report of the Black Sea Synergy, of the Council Conclusions on the EU's engagement to the Black Sea regional cooperation, as well as the adoption of the Common Maritime Agenda and of the Strategic and Research Innovation Agenda (SRIA).*

In 2019, the Eastern Partnership policy has celebrated 10 years from its initiation. The EU and its adjacent institutions, especially the European Economic and Social Committee have been central drivers of the policy both within the European and the Eastern Neighbourhood region. After 10 years, **real partnership** is sought, by ensuring equality in dialogue and promoting more cooperation opportunities between the two regions. The European Union can only reach local and national communities from the Eastern Neighbourhood **with the support of the civil society organisations**, recognizing their central role in consolidating and promoting EU values beyond its borders.



In this regard, the European Union supports the development of the non-governmental sector in the Black Sea region, in order to move from a traditional perspective of funding to creating space for **more engagement, ownership, interaction and integration**. Moreover, **consolidating resilience of civil society organisations in the countries surrounding the Black Sea** is already on the agenda of the new European Commission, despite the growing trends of shrinking civic space across the region.

The Romanian Presidency at the Council of the European Union was marked by three successful accomplishments when it comes to bringing the Black Sea region closer to the EU. To begin with, in June 2019, the Council of the European Union adopted a **set of conclusions on the EU's engagement to the Black Sea regional cooperation**, reaffirming its long-standing commitment to fostering prosperity, stability, and resilience in the Black Sea area. Apart from this, in May 2019, two strategic documents have been adopted by the EU together with the governments of the Black Sea countries – **the Common Maritime Agenda** for the **Black Sea and the Strategic and Research Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea**. Also earlier this year, in March, the **third implementation report of the Black Sea Synergy** was launched, underlining results and drawing lessons learned on strengthening regional cooperation.

## Opportunities and support mechanisms for regional cooperation and resilience for civil society in the Black Sea region

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**Moderator: Ms. Natalia Budescu**, Director, The Association for Cross-Border Cooperation “Lower Danube Euroregion”

**Ms. Irina Boboc**, Project Manager, The Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND

**Ms. Gayane Mkrtchyan**, Program Director, Eurasia Partnership Foundation Armenia / Representative of BSNGO Advisory Group

**Ms. Natia Aphkhazava**, Batumi Branch Director, Civil Society Institute Georgia

**Ms. Mariana Ianachevici**, Board Member, ChildPact – The Regional Coalition for Child Protection / CEO, The Association for Child and Family Empowerment “AVE COPIII” Republic of Moldova

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### Main points of discussion:

- **The Black Sea NGO Forum initiative acknowledges and supports the important role civil society plays in building societal resilience in the Black Sea region;**

- *Civil society organisations are stronger together when working with small communities;*
- *There are many thematic priorities on which civil society representatives and experts from the Black Sea region are working together in the context of the Forum such as civic engagement and children's rights;*

**The Black Sea NGO Forum** represents one of the most important initiatives of the **Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND**, focusing on fostering thematic regional cooperation among civil society organisations and promoting dialogue among a variety of stakeholders, being guided by 2 main strategic directions: creating regional thematic networks and promoting an enabling environment for CSOs in the Black Sea Region. For the BSNCOF, **civil society plays an important role in ensuring society resilience** by promoting democratic values and the rule of law, holding governments accountable and ensuring public participation.

Apart from this, civil society organisations have a more targeted impact at the grassroots level, reaching and working with small communities and youth. **Every time civil society is supported, a vote is casted for the future we are building together, as we are all working towards the public good.** Yet, the power of civil society organisations comes from their very own interaction and the Black Sea NGO Forum, as an unique platform in the region, offers this space for dialogue, learning and sharing ideas.



At the 12th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum, which took place between the 23rd and 25th of October 2019, in Istanbul, Turkey, following an interactive process of identifying and adopting new strategic thematic priorities, **ten new Black Sea NGO Forum Working Groups have emerged.** One of them focused on **increasing the level of civic engagement**, a common challenge across the Black Sea region. The members of the Working Group, coming from Armenia, Georgia, Romania and Ukraine agreed on working together on **grassroots initiatives**, promoting citizens' rights and highlighting the importance of networks by introducing new democratic digital tools.

Another thematic cooperation area which emerged throughout the editions of the Forum is child protection and children's rights. Back in 2011, many participants had the view that child protection is an investment both for the future and for the resilience of societies, and they decided to come together under a common initiative – ChildPact. **ChildPact represents a regional coalition for child protection – a network of networks** that brings together 600 child-focused NGOs from 10 different countries. In this regard, working in networks has proven to be essential in advancing common initiatives and working on regional issues.

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The Seminar „Building Resilience in the Black Sea NGO Community” is the first one from a series of visibility events which will be organised in Brussels, in the context of the Black Sea NGO Forum project “Building CSO Capacity for Regional Cooperation within the Black Sea Region” and funded by the European Union.

The visibility events aim at promoting the activities of the civil society from the Black Sea region, the Black Sea NGO Forum project, the opportunities it offers and the results it has achieved.

**The Black Sea NGO Forum team wishes to give special thanks to:**



**The European Union, for supporting financially the event**



**The European Economic and Social Committee, for hosting the event**