

ONLINE CONFERENCE

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Civil Society Sector in the Black Sea Region

22nd of July 2020, 10 – 12 AM (CET), Zoom Platform

Organised by:

FOND

Federația Organizațiilor Neguvernamentale pentru Dezvoltare din România



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**.

Online Conference: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Civil Society Sector in the Black Sea Region

The Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND organized on the 22nd of July 2020, via Zoom platform, the **online conference “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Civil Society Sector in the Black Sea Region”**.

The event aimed at creating the framework for presenting **the main findings of the Policy Paper “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Civil Society Sector in the Black Sea Region”**, elaborated by FOND Romania and **the space for multi-stakeholder dialogue**, with a focus on the role played by different actors in supporting the regional CSOs.

The online event gathered actors from civil society organisations from the Black Sea Region, European institutions, intergovernmental organisations and donor organisations active in the Region.

The Policy Paper on “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Civil Society Sector in the Black Sea Region” can be consulted online here: <https://blackseango.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Impact-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic-on-the-Civil-Society-Sector-in-the-Black-Sea-Region.pdf>.

More information about the online event can be found here: <https://blackseango.org/online-conference-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-the-civil-society-sector-in-the-black-sea-region-the-22nd-of-july-2020-zoom-platform/>.

Session 1. *The Pandemic going beyond the EU borders: How has Covid-19 affected the CSOs in the Black Sea region?*

Welcoming Remarks: Ms. Ingrid Marinescu, Executive Director, the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND

Guest Speakers:

Ms. Angela Grămadă, Project Manager, the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND, Presentation of the Policy Brief “The Impact of Pandemic on the Civil Society Sector in the Black Sea Region”

Ms. Gayane Mkrtchyan, Program Director, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Armenia, Member of the Advisory Board, Black Sea NGO Forum

Ms. Sorina Macrinici, Program Director, Legal Resources Centre from Moldova, Member of the Focal Points Network, Black Sea NGO Forum

Main Points of Discussion:

- *Civil society is a relevant and important actor that can contribute with expertise, experience and know-how to the processes of elaboration and implementation of public policies;*
- *During the COVID-19 pandemic, non-governmental organisations from EU Member States and from Non-EU States have been facing similar challenges on internal and external levels;*
- *Civil society organisations need support through a coherent, efficient and coordinated response from stakeholders active in the Region.*

In the new context created by the COVID-19 pandemic, **states around the globe have been highly affected**, being forced to find new ways of functioning and strategies for adapting to the new reality.

Public authorities from the Black Sea Region have had different, yet similar responses to the crisis, and in some cases, specific measures have been taken to combat the spread of the coronavirus, measures that have affected three **fundamental freedoms** for the development of the civic sector: *freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.*

The reaction of the civil society organisations to the difficult crisis was fast, managing to **mobilize internal resources** and **continue their activity and projects** under new restrictive conditions, while contributing to mitigating the effects of the pandemic through delivered services and to the stop of spread of fake news and disinformation campaigns.

As relevant actors that can contribute with **expertise, experience and know-how** to the processes of elaboration and implementation of public policies, civil society organisations are now facing **common challenges that require common actions** from stakeholders and other interested parties. **The support of civil society organisations** in these times of crisis, as well as **multi-stakeholder partnerships and initiatives** are thus **essential for consolidating resilient, transparent, democratic, and accountable societies**.

Session 2. Different approaches of solidarity towards civil society resilience in the Black Sea Region

Moderator: Mr. Ştefan Cibian, President, the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND

Guest Speakers:

Mr. Jeroen Willems, Deputy Head of Unit NEAR C2 - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus & Eastern Partnership

H.E. Amb. Michael B. Christides, Secretary General, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

Ms. Patrizia Busolini, Policy Officer, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Sea-basin Strategies, Maritime Regional Cooperation and Maritime Security

Ms. Diana Tase, Black Sea Synergy Coordinator, Division for Eastern Partnership, regional cooperation and OSCE

Ms. Maria Florea, Program Officer, Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation

Main Points of Discussion:

- *Civil society organisations contribute greatly to combating the effects of the COVID-19, as a reliant partner for national governmental, European institutions and international organisations.*
- *The pandemic has demonstrated that cooperation is very much needed, both among and within states, by developing multi-stakeholder COVID-19 recovery strategies, partnerships and initiatives.*
- *European policies such as the Black Sea Synergy or the Common Maritime Agenda encourage cross-cutting dialogue and actions at the level of civil society that can contribute to the mitigation of effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Region.*
- *Flexibility is one of the key elements on which further strategies and action plans can be developed.*

Non-governmental organisations contribute to limiting the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic through their links and **access to vulnerable groups**, through **the monitoring of the implementation of instruments and mechanisms** put into place at national level and also through **the fight against coronavirus misinformation and disinformation**. The European Union is supporting these efforts through strategic partnerships, rapid response mechanisms and recovery financial packages, in order to address immediate health, social, and economic challenges in their partner countries.

At the beginning of the pandemic, an introvert tendency of states that focused on measures at national level could be seen, putting regional and international cooperation at test. Nevertheless, the pandemic has demonstrated that **cooperation is very much need, both among and within states**. FOND, through the Black Sea NGO Forum project, is a recognized catalyst for civil society cooperation in the Region, and encourages constructive and active involvement in developing dialogue and common initiatives.

The implementation of European initiatives and policies aimed at the Region, such as the **Common Maritime Agenda**, provide significant support for civil society organisations and for facilitating a **sustainable and resilient recovery model process**, through a multi-level involvement on transversal priorities. Cooperation with the civil society sector is thus crucial for developing **effective policies at both national and regional levels** that can contribute to the fight against the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis is of a global scale and requires **solidarity and enhanced dialogue**. Consolidated regional cooperation is the prime example of multilateralism and the **Black Sea Synergy**, as a European policy, illustrates the European Union's continuous commitment to **encouraging dialogue on cross-cutting priorities in the Black Sea Region**, with a view to overcome common emerging challenges and lessen economic hardships during these times. In this regard, civil society organisations will remain a very important partner for European and national institutions, for collecting and analysing accurate data on the progress made up so far.

Nevertheless, in this context, **flexibility** is one of the key elements on which further strategies and action plans can be developed. Only by providing flexibility and by taking into account the **primary needs of the civil society sector**, donor organisations in the Black Sea Region can identify and create the most efficient opportunities for inclusive partnerships and long-term collaborations.