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**The Role of CSOs at the Subnational Level in
the Negotiation Process**

Recommendations for Serbia

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Summary

The EU cohesion policy provides opportunities for regional development of the member countries. The extent to which the cohesion policy will contribute to the regional development of each country depends on the extent to which the member countries and their regions will be able to utilize those opportunities.

In the Republic of Serbia, the adoption of the Law on Regional Development in 2009 should have provided the basis for setting up a new legislative, institutional and strategic framework of regional development policy. A defined legislative and institutional framework has been neither established nor put into function. An optimal strategic framework for planning, as well as the policy based on a long-term vision, clearly defined priorities, areas of intervention and financial plan at the national and regional level, have not been established. Unfortunately, the systemic planning, as the basic model for transforming a system and community, did not play its key role in regional development so as to diminish the impacts of the transition process, global economic crisis, etc., i.e. social, regional and political challenges of our society in the 21st century.

In the meantime, negotiations on regional policy and coordination of structural instruments (Chapter 22) have started and additionally raised concerns about the shortcomings of the legislative, institutional and strategic framework. The European Commission has estimated that Serbia is not sufficiently prepared for the opening of this chapter, and recommended that the country should present a detailed action plan to meet the requirements arising from the EU cohesion policy. It is noticeable that the negotiation process is predominantly taking place at the national level. The role of CSOs in the negotiation process is mostly consultative, within the negotiating structures that coordinate this process.

The regional policy and coordination of structural instruments require a well-established and functional consultative mechanism, which would integrate partners from the subnational level. The inclusion of CSOs and partners from the subnational level should lead to a mutual commitment and accountability of all actors in the negotiation process, which is of utmost importance for society and through maximal mobilization of human capital and hidden potentials of regions and cities represents the main objective of regional policy. The regional policy doesn't go in one direction. It is a two-way policy of good governance directed from the local level towards the national level and vice versa.

The challenges of balanced regional development, especially at the subnational level, are becoming more evident due to the lack of adequate regional structures and systemic planning of intervention measures.

On Partnership

Partnership is the key principle of cohesion policy. The partnership approach in Serbia is not sufficiently emphasized and is more declarative in character. Past experiences have shown that partnerships were created mainly on project basis, usually at the time of announcement of open calls, and were of temporary character. Partnerships should reflect the bottom-up approach and provide equal opportunities for all citizens and their organizations to be involved in the regional policy and EU programmes. This is especially important in the context of the EU integration within which framework cooperation between the government and civil society becomes an imperative. For that reason, developing long-term partnerships and cooperation between CSOs and government institutions within the negotiation process is one of the key common challenges and common interests.

Even though CSOs have developed a certain mutual cooperation at the local and regional level, it is noticeable that this kind of cooperation becomes weakened by territorial distances. The process of EU integration calls for the development of partnerships between CSOs within the

region, and CSOs from the region with their counterparts in the EU member states. There is a noticeable need for the local and regional CSOs to play an active role in the EU integration process, as much as there is a need for increased transparency and better access to information from the national level.

On the Public Perception

Citizens are increasingly fatigued by the way politicians and experts represent the European integration process in the media, which, according to research, marks the lack of correlation to real, everyday life. Conducted studies have indicated that citizens' trust in CSOs in Serbia is diminishing. The causes of low levels of public confidence in CSOs mainly lie in the fact that a large number of citizens do not recognize the role of CSOs in solving everyday issues that are of vital importance for them. Additionally, this public perception was intensified by certain negative campaigns to which CSOs were exposed.

CSOs, through their informal and direct approach, could engage citizens and create preconditions for the implementation of a policy that is in line with the needs of the community. Individual enthusiasm, interrelatedness of certain social groups, and flexible approach of CSOs based on the principle *if you cannot get in through the door, get in through the window*, will push matters forward in the absence of a more adequate support framework.

In the context of all the aforementioned, two main issues become clear:

- ◇ The role of CSOs in the negotiation process with the aim of positioning citizens at the center of the regional policy.
- ◇ The role of CSOs in establishing subnational structures in support of the regional policy and coordination of structural instruments.

Citizens at the Heart of the Regional Policy

The consultative role, as a predominant narrative, which CSOs have in the negotiation process could on the ground be formulated through a *narrative that is pointed towards citizens*. CSOs could have a significant role in the negotiation process, through their core activities focused on citizens, in the areas of environment protection, education, rural development, social interaction and inclusion, culture, recreation, gender equality, work with vulnerable groups, and all through an integrated multisectoral approach that would contribute to cohesion.

With regard to partnerships, in contrast to past experience, partnerships must be based on a long-term perspective that will ensure the financial sustainability of the sector, real participation of CSOs and equal treatment among the partners working with the public administration. A long-term strategic partnership will satisfy the interests of all parties involved in the process and effectively deliver expected results to citizens and policy makers.

In the context of the development of structures at the subnational level, it would be of common interest to establish one flexible structure based on the principle of multilevel governance and long term partnership of presentational representatives of the public, civil and private sector. Considering the sensible nature of this subject, political culture and tradition in Serbia, as well as the current legislative and institutional framework, the solution could be found in the development of a single flexible model of multilevel governance, through cooperation between the national, regional and local partners, and in a multisectoral structure that is thematically systematized.

Local and regional CSOs should also assemble through joint subnational platforms, coalitions and intersectoral actions, in interaction with other social groups. From the position of these subnational platforms CSOs could articulate local and regional initiatives towards the national level.

Introduction

The adoption of the Law on Regional Development in 2009 should have led to the establishment of a new legislative, institutional and strategic framework of regional development policy. The Law defined 5 statistical planning regions: Vojvodina, Belgrade, Sumadija and Western Serbia, Southern and Eastern Serbia, and Kosovo and Metohija¹. In relation to other statistical regions, 2 statistical regions (Vojvodina and Belgrade) have their own administrative capacities with the possibilities of creating and implementing certain policies, which shows that there is a partially asymmetrical administrative structure in the Republic of Serbia. In terms of the legislative and institutional framework, as stipulated in the Law and its accompanying regulations, it hasn't come to the establishment of a defined framework, and its putting into the function. Also, it hasn't come to the establishment of an optimal strategic framework for planning and a policy that would be based on a long-term vision and clearly defined priorities, areas of intervention and financial plan.

After explanatory and bilateral screening, the European Commission assessed that Serbia is not sufficiently prepared for the opening of this chapter, and recommended that the country should present a detailed action plan so as to meet the obligations arising from the cohesion policy. The current state of affairs indicates that there have been improvements at the national level in terms of the negotiation process and partner cooperation between CSOs and negotiating structures through the adoption of Guidelines for Cooperation between the Negotiating Team, National Convention on the EU and Serbian Chamber of Commerce. Generally speaking, it should be noted that the partnership approach in Serbia hasn't been affirmed enough. There is still a noticeable need for a more active role of CSOs in the EU integration process, as well as for transparency and better access to information from the national level.

There is noticeable decrease in the support to the EU integration processes among citizens. Several reasons for this lie in the following fact: incomprehensible language became dominant in the EU integration process, which resulted in the lack of both the valorization of attained results and transfer of good practices. Not recognizing the substance and tangible benefits that citizens and local and regional partners could have from the EU policies are the main challenges for a future regional policy in the Republic of Serbia.

The subnational structures and mechanisms necessary for a successful creation and implementation of a regional development policy and cohesion policy have not been established. Without a joint platform for action, certain local and regional initiatives lose their momentum, and the game is left to be played only at the national and international level, with the absence of a practical policy "on the ground".

The purpose of this document is to instigate a comprehensive public debate on a possible role of CSOs at the subnational level in the negotiation process, especially in regional policy and coordination of structural instruments. The intention is to point out, due to certain circumstances, the need for increased engagement through tangible results "on the ground", with a narrative pointed towards citizens on the part of CSOs. The stated issues and proposed courses of action are a result of the research based on previous studies and evaluations, positive regulations in this area and European experiences. They are founded on the key principles and methodological tools for creating and implementing the EU cohesion policy for the programming period 2014-2020.

¹ These statistical regions correspond to the NUTS 2 regions of the EUROSTAT and are established to meet the EU requirements regarding the collection of statistical data on regional development, as well as for the purpose of regional development planning.

1. Regional Development Policy in Serbia

1.1. Legislative, Institutional and Strategic Framework

The challenges of balanced regional development, especially at the subnational level, are becoming more evident today due to the lack of both adequate regional structures and systemic planning of intervention measures. The complexity of the regional development policy, its multisectoral approach and principles of subordination and partnership necessitate the inclusion of numerous actors from the public, private and civil sector, as well as the establishment of a regional institutional structure.

The Law on Regional Development should have established a new legislative, institutional and strategic framework of the regional development policy, as the government's response to the increasing regional imbalances and negative social and demographic trends. Specific challenges were noticed in the establishment of structures at the subnational level and the introduction of systemic planning of the government's policy in this area. Attempts were made to overcome the asymmetry of administrative structures in the country (the regions of Vojvodina and Belgrade have their own administrative capacities and legal subjectivity) through the establishment of regional development councils in all statistical regions. The regional development councils should have served as the basis for establishing consultative mechanisms on the principle of partnership between the local and regional administrative bodies, private and civil sector, and their coordination with the national structures. After they were established these councils failed to start functioning.

When it comes to the structure at the subnational level, it should be noted that the regional development agencies (RDA) were primarily established with the goal to facilitate socio-economic development at the subnational level. The founders of the RDAs are local self-governments, business entities and CSOs. It could be said that the challenges the RDAs encounter today in their work, in addition to their position, reflect the state of affairs and issues in this area. Additionally, the process of accession to the EU has only potentiated the extent to which the institutions are underdeveloped.

An optimal strategic framework for planning, and policy that is based on a long-term vision and clearly defined priorities, areas of intervention and financial plan at the national and regional level, have not been established. Unfortunately, the systemic planning, as the basic model for transforming a system and community, did not play its key role in the regional development so as to diminish the impacts of the transition process, global economic crisis, etc., i.e. social, regional and political challenges of our society in the 21st century. Regardless of the invested efforts and considerable support from the EU, the draft of the National Plan for Regional Development² was not adopted due to the lack of political consensus. Over 100 sectoral strategies, of which some are without an action plan or budgetary basis, mainly remain as a list of wishes without effects. They should be systematically integrated into an overall strategic development of the country.

1.2. Negotiation Process: Chapter 22

Negotiations on the regional policy and coordination of structural instruments (Chapter 22) additionally raised concerns about the shortcomings of the legislative, institutional and strategic framework. The European Commission has estimated that Serbia is not sufficiently prepared for the opening of this chapter. In order to meet the requirements arising from the EU cohesion

² NPRD could have been the first step towards the adoption of the National Development Plan, which would represent a decisive support to the country to integrate sectoral policies, priority investments and consequently define the Community Support Framework – CSF for the EU assistance to Serbia.

policy, the recommendations are directed towards the necessity of establishing a legislative framework that would allow multi-annual programming at the national and regional level.

With regard to the institutional framework, it is expected that an effective structure at the national and regional level will be established and that a wide range of partner organizations will be involved and consulted in the preparation and implementation of the programmes. The programming process requires organizing a wide range of partnerships for the preparation of program documents, which would ensure a sufficient number of quality projects and the ability to complete the implementation of financial programmes.

The strategic framework is still disintegrated. In the current strategic framework, which consists of over 100 strategies adopted by the Government, and which covers all sectors, only 16% of the goals have been harmonized. The problems related to the EU integration process identified in the communication with citizens should be noted here, as well as the future challenges related to the level of informedness about the regional policy and structural instruments, in terms of the process, content, opportunities and tangible benefits for the community. According to the latest survey conducted by the Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), 47% of citizens support Serbian membership in the EU, which represents a certain decline in support for this process. There is a noticeable fatigue among the citizens caused by the way politicians and experts represent the European integration process in the media, which, according to researches, marks the lack of correlation to real, everyday life.

2. Civil Society and Its Role in the EU Integration Process

2.1. The Overall Picture

2.1.1. Public Perception on Civil Society in Serbia

Conducted studies have indicated that citizens' trust in CSOs in Serbia is diminishing. The causes of low levels of public confidence in CSOs lie mainly in the fact that a large number of citizens do not recognize the role of CSOs in solving everyday issues that are of vital importance for them, especially in the areas such as rural development and monitoring the work of local self-governments. Additionally, this public perception was intensified by certain negative campaigns to which CSOs were exposed.

2.1.2. Cooperation and Partnerships

The civil sector in Serbia is relatively young. The majority of CSOs were established after 2000, while a quarter of them were established before 1990. The circumstances of the development of a relatively young sector are certainly the cause of greater expectations that CSOs have from the government, both in terms of providing the conditions for their development and financing, promoting and finally recognizing CSOs' contribution to the development of society³. This is especially important in the context of the EU integration, within whose framework the cooperation between the government and the civil society becomes paramount. Therefore, the development of long-term cooperation and partnership between CSOs and government institutions within the negotiation process is one of the most compelling challenges of common interest.

³ Studies have shown that CSOs have great expectations from the government and international institutions, and less from domestic donors, such as business sector, foundations, and citizens. The majority of projects implemented by CSOs last for less than a year, which directly affects the sustainability of the sector.

Even though CSOs have developed a certain mutual cooperation at the local and regional level, it is noticeable that this kind of cooperation becomes weakened by territorial distances⁴. This is especially important in the context of the EU integration, and a more noticeable demand for the development of partnerships between CSOs within the region, and CSOs from the region with their counterparts in the EU member states. The cooperation between CSOs and local self-governments generally takes place in the form of exchange of information, consulting and participation. In the local self-governments that have a contact person responsible for the cooperation with CSOs, cooperation and participation of CSOs is intensified. Most often, the absence of cooperation with local self-governments is due to the lack of resources, time and competences of CSOs in certain areas.

2.1.3. CSOs in Cooperation with Negotiating Structures

It is evident that the negotiation process is taking place predominantly at the national level. The role of CSOs in the negotiation process is mostly consultative within the structures that coordinate this process.

The sector coordination within the framework of IPA II (2014-2020) related to the programming and implementation of the EU assistance is realized through sector working groups (SWGs), as the key mechanism for the formulation of national priorities in the EU and other development assistance per sector. Even though the participation and consultative role of CSO within the framework of SWGs has been secured to a certain level, when it comes to the work of these bodies the issue of complete access to the partnership principle still remains open. This is primarily related to the possibility of the participation of interested CSOs' representatives in the work of SWGs in a way that will not jeopardize the functionality of the mechanism, the involvement of the partners from the subnational level and the level of informedness about the work of SWGs⁵. The necessity for redesigning the consultative mechanism within SWGs should be highlighted here, in terms of higher efficiency and effective support to regional policy and coordination of structural instruments. Besides, the Serbian EU Integration Office has established a consultative mechanism SECO with CSOs, as a platform for information exchange and CSOs' contribution in the area of planning and programming of the EU funds and international development assistance. The members of SECO participate in the work of SWGs. However, there are also open issues concerning the work of this consultative mechanism. Firstly, SECO doesn't represent a wider CSO community in Serbia. Secondly, the very consultative structure of SECO is underdeveloped. When it comes to the complexity of the IPA programming, smaller CSOs with fewer capacities don't have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to the negotiation process.

The National Convention on the EU is another consultative body within the negotiation process.⁶ The National Convention was primarily established as a standing body, with the aim of facilitating the cooperation between the National Assembly (Committee on the EU Integration) and civil society in the process of Serbia's accession to the EU. Such consultative mechanism and established cooperation between CSOs and public institutions represents advancement in the negotiation process at the national level. Further development of the consultative structure of

⁴ There are certain estimations that at least 35-40% of CSOs are members of some type of network. Best cooperation with the government is developed by bigger CSOs from the Belgrade Region.

⁵ Screening report for Chapter 22 indicates that the subnational level within sector working groups, i.e. bodies through which sector cooperation is implemented, is represented by Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities.

⁶ This mechanism was established on the basis of adopted Guidelines for Cooperation of the Negotiating Team for leading the negotiations on the EU accession of the Republic of Serbia and the negotiation groups with the representatives of civil society organizations (CSO), the National Convention on EU (NCEU) and the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia (CCS), after the screening results had been delivered.

this body remains open, along with the establishment of a consultative feedback loop with a CSO coalition at the subnational level, when it comes to the Chapter 22.

As for the subnational level, it should be mentioned that Vojvodina's Initiative for the EU exists as a regional consultative mechanism, a network of civil society organizations from the Vojvodina region. This body is in the phase of development and is open to new members and ideas. Vojvodina's Initiative for the EU, as a consultative mechanism, is thematically structured for discussions between CSOs, public administration, political parties, unions, and enterprises. The challenges in their further work could be reflected in setting up an effective mechanism, on the thematic basis, for the accumulation and initiation of local and regional initiatives.

3. Citizens at the Heart of the Regional Policy

3.1. Comprehensive Role of CSOs in the Process of the EU Integration

Defining the EU cohesion policy, its objectives, key principles, methodology and evaluation of achieved results is the subject of ongoing debates between the European institutions, member states, institutions at the national, regional and local level as well as numerous partners from both the private and civil sector.

The regional policy doesn't go in one direction. It is a two-way policy of good governance. It is directed from the bottom-up, from the local to the national level, since European and national policies have to be implemented "on the ground", while taking into account the characteristics of individual territories. It is also a policy of top-down governance, from the national to the local level, as financial resources and framework conditions are secured and defined at the EU and national level.

The regional policy and coordination of structural instruments require a well-structured and functional consultative mechanism, which will integrate partners from the subnational level. The involvement of CSOs and partners from the subnational level leads to mutual commitment and accountability of all actors in the negotiation process. This is of vital importance for the society and represents a fundamental objective of the regional policy, through mobilization of human capital and hidden potentials of regions and cities. Therefore, the governing structures, primarily at the national level, should be organized accordingly, in a transparent and consistent manner. To ensure that this policy produces results "on the ground", citizens should be brought back into the center of the regional policy. The role of local and regional CSO in this process could be pivotal.

Why CSOs? CSOs could, through their informal and direct approach, engage citizens and create preconditions for the implementation of a policy that is in line with the needs of the community. Individual enthusiasm, interrelatedness of certain social groups and a flexible approach of CSOs based on the principle *if you cannot get in through the door, get in through the window*, will push matters forward in the absence of a more adequate support framework. The bottom-up approach contributes to the integration of local communities into the national policy. In the complex bureaucratic process of the EU integration, CSOs should adopt a holistic approach to mobilize human capital and provide, in a humanistic manner, meaning to the EU integration and regional policy.

While the purely consultative role of CSOs is the predominant narrative in the negotiation process and regional policy, at the subnational level the predominant narrative should be pointed toward citizens. This is primarily related to the context of expanding the role of CSOs within the EU integration process in a way that would integrate their current work in the areas

of environment protection, education, rural development, social interaction and inclusion, culture, recreation, gender equality and work with vulnerable groups⁷. Considering the public perception and the fact that Serbia is at the very beginning of meeting the requirements of the EU cohesion policy, this is the right opportunity and moment for CSOs and their coalitions to define their future role in the regional policy through a *new agreement* with the government and citizens. Furthermore, a significant role for CSOs at the subnational level, as citizens' intermediaries, could be found in the dissemination of messages in the context of the regional policy's importance and general visibility of the European assistance "on the ground".

Agreements and cooperation between the actors should be established on the basis of the fundamental principle of the regional policy – PARTNERSHIP. The real partnership will involve all interested actors from the public, private and civil sector in the phases of programming, implementing and developing the regional policy, ensure effective access to funds and create adequate intervention measures in line with the specificities of the needs of territories and citizens. Partnership should reflect the bottom-up approach and ensure equal opportunities for all citizens and involvement of their organizations in the regional policy and EU programmes⁸. In contrast to previous experiences, partnerships must be based on a long-term perspective that will provide financial sustainability of the sector, tangible involvement of CSOs and equal treatment among partners in cooperation with the public administration. Long-term strategic partnerships satisfy the interests of all parties in the process and effectively deliver anticipated results to citizens and decision and policy makers.

Taking into consideration the given circumstances in Serbia, especially in the context of the prerequisites for the development of structures at the subnational level, it would be of common interest for a flexible subnational structure to be established on the principle of multilevel governance and long-term partnerships among presentational representatives of the public, civil and private sector. The challenges that are ahead of us, the requirements that have been imposed in the context of the negotiation Chapter 22, indicate that the question is not should we but how do we build structures at the subnational level in support of the preparation and implementation of the future regional policy of the Republic of Serbia⁹.

Van den Brande's report (2014)¹⁰ promotes multilevel governance and partnership as the guiding principles for the policy implementation. Multilevel governance should be seen as a means of "integration into Europe 2020" within the framework of local and regional practices.

Considering the sensible nature of this subject, political culture and tradition in Serbia, as well as the current legislative and institutional framework, the solution could be found in the development of a single flexible model of multilevel governance, through cooperation between national, regional and local partners, and in a multisectoral structure that is thematically

⁷ Conducted studies and analyses show that the main users of CSOs services are citizens. The core activities of the majority of CSOs are social services, culture, media, recreation and environment protection.

⁸ The European Code of Conduct on Partnership in the Framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ECCP), European Commission, 2014, provides detailed recommendations for different types of partnerships and phases of making the decisions that partners should implement

⁹ Through the Article 5 of the Regulation 1303/2013, multilevel governance has become a binding principle for the member states for the programming period 2014-2020. Also the principle of partnership has been strengthened in comparison to the previous programming period when it had been implemented "when possible"; member states now have the obligation to implement the principle of partnership in all phases of programming at all levels.

¹⁰ Van den Brande, Special Adviser to the President of the EC Juncker, who has been appointed to further develop the dialogue between the EU institutions and the EU citizens, prepared *The Van den Brande Report, Multilevel Governance and Partnership*, for the EC.

systematized. The prospective subnational structure should neither have strict hierarchical framework nor be based on strict principles of subsidiarity.

In the context of all the aforementioned, two main issues become clear:

- ◇ The role of CSOs in the negotiation process with the aim of positioning citizens in the center of the regional policy.
- ◇ The role of CSOs in establishing subnational structures in support of the regional policy and coordination of structural instruments.

3.1.1. The Role of CSOs in the Negotiation Process and the Positioning of Citizens at the Heart of Regional Policy

3.1.1.1. Engagement of CSOs on the Ground and Development of Cohesion

Aside from the consultative role in the negotiation process, CSOs could also provide support at the subnational level through their core activities aimed towards citizens in certain areas, through integrated multisectoral and thematic approach, and thus contribute to the development of territorial, economic and social cohesion at the local and national level. It takes even more significant involvement to form partnerships with local self-governments and public institutions on the multisectoral basis. These partnerships are an effective model for financing from the EU funds. There are several areas in which CSOs are directly involved and which are significant for the successful implementation of cohesion policy “on the ground”, such as environment protection, social inclusion, social entrepreneurship and innovation, gender equality and work with vulnerable groups.

In the following text the CSOs’ involvement in the areas of rural development and culture will be considered.

Rural Development

CSOs, especially in rural areas and less developed parts of the country, often have better capacities for preparing and writing projects and more experience in project management than local administrations. CSOs are part of the structure of Local Action Groups (LAGs)¹¹ and have an extremely important role in creating partnerships in rural areas through social networks. Their role is particularly important when it comes to the involvement of rural women and youth.

LAG partnerships are committed to the strengthening of social capital and defining priorities of local partnership, as well as to the strengthening of capacities through training for project preparation, financial planning and project cycle management through the implementation of local strategies for rural development. The implementation of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) comes to the forefront here, as a new instrument of cohesion policy. CLLD is a tool that is effective at the subnational level in order to support the local communities and organizations of the civil and private sector to contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. This methodology requires the harmonization of the economic, social, cultural and environmental dimension and their integration into comprehensive development projects at the subnational level.

¹¹ The necessity for recognizing the specific needs of rural communities and their residents through systematic “bottom-up” approach, coordinated action and the improvement of public-private-civil partnerships in the local community has led to the establishment of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in accordance with the LEADER approach, as an instrument for rural development in the EU.

CLLD is creating a new type of partnerships in the local communities, aimed at fostering social innovation¹². The fact that the majority of the EU member states have incorporated CLLD into their partnership agreements indicates the extent to which this methodology and local development are considered important today.

Culture

Today's culture could be observed through several segments. Aside from its traditional role (art and cultural heritage), culture could also be a strong impetus to economic and social development through cultural and creative industry, micro, small and medium enterprises and tourism. Moreover, culture is today being recognized more and more as a powerful tool in diplomatic relations. As a result, the activities at the EU level have been intensified, along with the firm beliefs about the necessity for synergized action in multiple areas and enhanced involvement of the public, private and civil sector in developing competitive regions and finding solutions to global challenges in the 21st century¹³.

Cross-border cooperation programmes are an effective way of developing long-term partnerships through engagement in the area of culture. The mobility of people in the area of culture is more natural than labor mobility or mobility through political initiatives.

CSOs should provide significant engagement in the area of culture through cross-border cooperation programmes and participate in creating partnerships (cultural networks), especially in the region of the Western Balkans. Cultural CSO networks could be an effective tool for the gathering of various partners and could provide strong support to the EU values, protection of cultural heritage, fostering of cultural identity, creation of new jobs and development of infrastructure. In the area of regional cooperation, the CSOs in the region, as representatives of cultural diplomacy, could be a major factor in supporting the European integration processes, as well as European and national policies.

Permanent cultural dialogue becomes an effective support tool in the conflict prevention and reconciliation processes in the region. Furthermore, through certain forms of cultural HUBs and established partnerships, especially with the private sector, CSOs in the area of creative industries could provide a strong impetus to economic and social development of the local and regional areas.

3.2. Establishing a Multisectoral Mechanism for Good Governance at the Subnational Level

In many cases, the subnational level is considered to have the most potential for improving governance from the ground up. Actors at the subnational level often have insufficient knowledge, but are in a position to motivate and gather partners from different sectors at the local level.

¹² Social innovation is a new instrument in cohesion policy that should integrate various interest groups to find new solutions for pressing social needs and challenges. This tool is becoming particularly suitable for solving growing social issues under the circumstances of limited financial needs. Social innovation is an instrument through which new products, services, organizations and markets are developed.

¹³ In 2016 the European Commission established the *Cultural Diplomacy Platform* to provide support to the EU institutions in the implementation of the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations. The platform focuses on advancing cultural cooperation between the EU and third countries and their citizens. *Conclusions 7953/17 of the Council of the EU in 2017 on an EU strategic approach to international cultural relations* take into consideration pilot projects in third countries to test forms of collaboration, including joint actions and creative cross-sectoral partnerships, with the involvement of local cultural actors, local and regional authorities, relevant NGOs, national cultural institutes and EU delegations.

In Serbia, CSOs increasingly participate in the development of multisectoral partnerships with local self-governments and public institutions. Such partnerships are becoming an effective model for the preparation and implementation of the EU funded projects. Multisectoral partnerships are a win-win situation for all participants. From the position of local self-governments, they provide an easier access to and interrelatedness of different EU funding programmes that are inaccessible to CSOs. On the other hand, CSOs often play a leading role in planning, design and implementation of common projects in the area of social development.

Participation of partners from the subnational level in programming and implementation of IPA II should be integrated in a functional way, while the bodies within the framework of IPA structures, such as sector working groups (SWGs), should be redesigned. Participation of partners from the subnational level should be facilitated through all phases – programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – which should lead to a better and more transparent connection between the national and subnational level, policy and attainment of results “on the ground”. For these reasons, CSOs should intensify their dialogue on developing adequate structures at the subnational level based on both the principle of partnership (public, private and civil sector) and the model of multilevel governance (national, regional, local). European experiences indicate that this could be an extensive process and that there is no unified model acceptable in all countries. Conducted case studies emphasize the examples from the EU member countries where the civil sector innovated new models of good governance. In Rumania’s Timis County, in Timisoara, CSOs presented a new model of good governance following the community’s need for the integration of a higher number of migrants coming from the countries outside of the EU¹⁴.

Taking into consideration our circumstances, the basis could be found in a flexible multisectoral mechanism that would enable the development of long-term partnerships between the public, private and civil sector, facilitate local and regional initiatives and provide support from the bottom-up in coordination with the structures at the national level.

Governance at the subnational level should take the approach of CLLD methodology, as a means of cohesion policy with capacities to mobilize local communities and organizations. Furthermore, CLLD generates new partnership models that cultivate social innovation. In these circumstances, an innovative approach could provide original and specific solutions in creating a functional model for good governance.

Local and regional CSOs should be structured on the basis of joint subnational platforms, through coalitions and multisectoral engagement, in interaction with different social groups. These platforms should provide improved conditions for increased capacities, better organization and continuous work on introducing the instruments and methods of the regional policy, so as to enable their implementation “on the ground”. From the position of subnational platforms, CSOs could articulate local and regional initiatives towards the structures at the national level. In this way continuous dialogue with the national, regional and local public administrations would be established and improved more effectively, and the requirements that would not only be advocative in character but also project oriented would be formulated.

¹⁴ The Timis County recorded an increased influx of migrants from the countries that do not belong to the EU. The county’s civil sector was directly involved in improving the integration of migrants into the Rumanian society, first in Timisoara, and then in four other cities in the county. Innovative solutions to this issue, along with a good governance approach, were accepted by the government at the national level as a model that is being implemented in other counties of Romania.

RECOMMENDATIONS

▪ *Sector Coordination with the Framework of IPA II (2014-2020) Is Being Implemented Through Sector Working Groups (SWGs) – Chapter 22*

Sector working groups are the key mechanism for formulating the national priorities towards the EU and other international development assistance programmes, with the participation of all interested parties from related sectors, including bilateral donors and international financial institutions. In terms of further development of a successful negotiation process, the participation of the Government of AP Vojvodina, i.e. the Government's Secretariats and accredited regional development agencies should be ensured in the work of SWGs at the subnational level. At the national level, the participation of the Serbian Development Agency should be ensured.

▪ *The System of Sector Working Groups and Recognition of the Principle of Partnership*

In the following period, the system of sector working groups should be further upgraded to a functional mechanism and transformed into a smaller number of multisectoral working groups (WGs). During the development of WGs the principle of partnership should be respected and the active participation of the representatives of the civil society, business associations and regional and local bodies should be ensured.

▪ *Citizens at the Center of Regional Policy*

The exclusively consultative role that CSOs have in the negotiation process and regional policy, as the predominant narrative, should at the subnational level be formulated with an additional narrative that is pointed towards citizens. This is predominantly related to the context of enhancing the role of CSO in the EU integration process in a way that would enable connection to the core activities of CSOs already being implemented "on the ground", through sectorial integration in the areas such as employment, environment protection, education, rural development, social interaction and inclusion, culture, recreation, gender equality and work with vulnerable groups. By means of understandable language, carefully designed campaigns and engagement in the issues that citizens are most interested in, CSOs would ensure better visibility and outcomes of the EU assistance, while being in direct contact with citizens.

▪ *Creating Long-Term Strategic Partnerships*

Partnership is the key principle of cohesion policy. Creating and cultivating genuine partnership is a meticulous process that requires time and special engagement. Previous experiences have shown that partnerships have been established on the project basis, most frequently at the time of announcement of open calls, and were mostly temporary in character. In this area, a stronger involvement of the Government and negotiating structures is needed, to lead towards planning an annual campaign with the partners at the subnational level on the subject of establishing long-term strategic partnerships. The campaign could be organized in the form of a conference, seminars or workshops, where examples of good practice, key instruments of regional policy, such as the CLLD method, and the cases of national and European models of good governance would be presented.

▪ *CSOs as a Significant Factor in Dissemination of Information and Visibility of the Results of the EU Assistance*

From the position of subnational platforms of CSO coalitions, a new strategy for communication should be developed with aim of changing the public perception of the civil society in Serbia. It is necessary to establish new ways of communication with citizens regarding the process of the EU integration and their informedness about the regional policy and structural instruments in terms of understanding the opportunities and tangible benefits for the community that this policy could bring as an answer to unbalanced regional growth.

CSOs at the local and regional level should be a significant factor in dissemination of the information and messages from the national level. By means of understandable language used in direct contact with citizens and a thoroughly designed campaign they could significantly increase the visibility of the EU assistance in terms of the scope of attained results.

▪ ***Support to the Establishment of the Structures at the Subnational Level***

Within the framework of the negotiations on Chapter 22, the regional policy and coordination of structural instruments, requirements of the European Commission indicate the necessity of establishing subnational structures. In the context of the role of CSOs at the subnational level, the issue of the manner in which the negotiating structures will define their role in the negotiation process, through an action plan to be presented to the Commission, comes to the forefront. With all of the aforementioned in mind, CSOs at the subnational level and their coalitions should define their position and articulate their requirements and proposals in this respect. From the position of subnational platforms, CSO should intensify their involvement in advocacy and provide support to the development of subnational structures based on the principles of partnership and multilevel governance.

▪ ***Gender Equality as the Common Issue of Sectoral Policies***

Equality between men and women is one of the fundamental values of the EU. Gender equality is an issue that cuts across numerous sectoral policies. It should be integrated into all aspects of the regional policy, development programmes at all levels and partner relations. Gender equality is a goal in itself, with a clear developmental dimension in terms of involvement of entire human capital on one territory. CSOs should intensify their involvement towards women in rural areas, thus opening prospects for social networking, rural economy, new technologies and markets and overall development, in order to combat poverty and discrimination.

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