

Guide
on Institutional
Mechanisms for Civil
Society Participation in
Policy-Making Related to
EU Integrations



Guide on Institutional Mechanisms for Civil Society Participation in Policy-Making Related to EU Integrations

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Водич за институционални механизми за учество на граѓанските организации во креирањето јавни политики поврзани со интеграциите во ЕУ

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FOR THE PUBLISHER:

Fani Karanfilova – Panovska, executive director

AUTHOR:

Ivana Petrovska

EDITORS:

Nada Naumovska

Aleksandar Kolekeski

Danche Danilovska – Bajdevska

GRAPHIC DESIGN:

KOMA

PROOFREADING:

Eleonora Stojkoska – Popetrevska

TRANSLATION FROM MACEDONIAN LANGUAGE:

Katerina Dimishkovska

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Table of Content

Abbreviations and Acronyms	5
Introduction	6
Introduction to the EU	7
EU Institutions	8
European Commission	8
European Parliament	8
Council of the European Union	9
European Economic and Social Committee	9
Decision-making at EU level	10
EU Enlargement	12
Enlargement	12
Accession criteria	13
DG Enlargement	13
EU and the Civil Society	14
Civil society - partner in democratic processes	14
Civil society participation in EU policy making	14
Citizens in the centre of decision-making for the future of Europe	16
Civil society and EU enlargement	17
Conclusions	18
Republic of North Macedonia and the European Union	21
EU Accession	22
Adoption of the EU acquis	22
Accession Process Management System	22
Annual Progress Report of the European Commission	24
Civil society participation	24
Accession Negotiations	25
Accession Negotiations Structure	25
New Methodology	25
Civil Society Participation	30

Pre-Accession Assistance	32
Introduction to IPA	32
IPA Programming in RNM	34
Sector Working Groups	35
IPA Implementation in RNM	36
Other EU Programmes	37
Europe during the COVID-19 Crisis	38
Civil Society Participation	39
Conclusions	42
Mechanisms for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making	45
Regulatory Impact Assessment and ENER	46
Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society	47
Open Government Partnership	49
Conclusions	50
EU and the Western Balkans	53
Berlin Process	54
Civil Society Forum	54
Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)	55
Western Balkans Fund	55
Regional Economic Area	56
National Investment Committee (NIC)	57
EU Integration Experiences from the Region	58
Republic of Serbia	58
Republic of Montenegro	58
Key Points	59
Instead of Conclusion	61
About the project	63
Sources	65

Abbreviations and Acronyms

CSOs	Civil society organizations
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
ENER	Single National Electronic Register
EP	European Parliament
EEAC	European Union External Action Service
JCC	Joint Consultative Committee
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
CEA	Commission on European Affairs
SAC	Stabilization and Association Committee
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NAO	National Authorization Officer
NIPAC	National IPA Coordinator
NPAA	National Programme for Adoption of the EU Acquis
OGP	Open Government Partnership
RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
SEA	Secretariat for European Affairs
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
SWGs	Sector working groups
CFCD	Central Financing and Contracting Department

Introduction

Enlargement is one of the most important policies of the European Union (EU). From six founding states in 1957, today the EU is a union of 27 member-states, with a total of 445 million people who share the joint market, economy, democratic values and culture. EU integration implies a process of economic, political, social and cultural integration of member-states and those wishing to join the Union.

The Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) is a candidate country for EU membership since 2004. EU accession is the country's most important strategic commitment. Hence, all public policies and strategies are in compliance with the EU integration process. While EU accession is primarily viewed as institutional and political process, it is accompanied by very important societal and culturological changes. Therefore, the EU integration process should be open and inclusive, and - in addition to the institutions - it also involves other societal factors: civil society organizations (CSOs), educational and cultural institutions, academia and the media.

CSOs play an important role in the EU accession process. They promote the European values before citizens, emphasize the benefits of EU membership and - through cooperation with other CSOs from the EU - assist the EU integration process. CSOs have expertise and knowledge to contribute to all processes under RNM's EU accession. The EU underlines importance of the civil society as important element of any democratic system, with a key role in policy creation and adoption.¹

This Guide on Institutional Mechanisms for Civil Society Participation in Policy-Making Related to EU Integrations (hereinafter: the Guide) is intended to provide an overview of opportunities for civil society involvement in the EU integration process.

The Guide is organized in several parts.

The **first part** provides an overview of EU institutions and their competences, EU structure and policies, and its current priorities.

The **second part** offers information on the EU integration process of the Republic of North Macedonia and ways in which CSOs are involved in that process.

The **third part** provides detailed description of national mechanisms for civil society participation in policy-making relevant for EU integrations.

The **fourth part** covers the regional approach, regional networking and experiences of other countries in the region.

At the same time, the Guide proposes adequate tools, mechanisms and methods for civil society involvement in policy-making; presents good practices of civil society organizations, institutions and initiatives in RNM, the region and at EU level; and reconsiders possibilities for greater involvement of CSOs in the EU integration process.

¹ Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, North Macedonia 2020 Report, available at: <https://bit.ly/39L0951> [Last retrieved on 01.03.2021]

Introduction to the EU

The European Union is a political and economic union comprised of 27 member-states. It was created in 1957 for the purpose of strengthening economic cooperation and promoting peace and reconciliation in the European continent. Today, except for economic benefits of the "single market", the EU is responsible for many policies that have direct impact on the European citizens: agriculture, competitiveness, economic growth, social issues, environment, climate change, security, etc.

EU's Strategic Agenda for the period 2019-2024 covers the following priorities:

- ✓ protecting citizens and freedoms;
- ✓ developing a strong and vibrant economic base;
- ✓ building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe;
- ✓ promoting European interests and values on the global stage.

The European Commission's priorities in the period 2019-2024 are:

- ✓ European green deal;
- ✓ Europe fit for the digital age;
- ✓ economy that works for people;
- ✓ promoting the European way of life;
- ✓ stronger Europe in the world;
- ✓ new push for European democracy.

EU Institutions

The European Union's functioning is built on the basis of the Treaty for Establishment of the European Union from the 50s and follow-up treaties like the Maastricht Treaty from 1992 and the Lisbon Treaty from 2007. The EU has specific institutional structure that respects the sovereignty of its member-states which have delegated portion of decision-making at EU level.

The European Union is governed by several institutions:

- ✓ **European Council**, comprised of the heads of states and governments from member-states, sets key political directions and priorities of the EU;
- ✓ **European Commission** represents interests of the Union and proposes and enforces the legislation;
- ✓ **European Parliament**, comprised of members directly elected by European citizens, approves the legislation;
- ✓ **EU Council (Council of Ministers)**, comprised of ministers from member-states, approves the EU legislation;
- ✓ **European Court of Justice** guarantees enforcement of EU law;
- ✓ **European Court of Auditors** audits EU finances;
- ✓ **European Central Bank** is responsible for EU monetary policy;
- ✓ **Committee of the Regions**, an advisory body, represents interests of the local and regional authorities;
- ✓ **European Economic and Social Committee**, an advisory body, represents interests of the organized civil society.

The three most important institutions with legislative powers at EU level are:

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The European Commission (EC) is referred to as the "executive government" because it is responsible for proposing legislation and implementing policies. It is comprised of 27 commissioners, each with a term of office in duration of five years and specific portfolio. All member-states are entitled to nominate one commissioner each, but they do not represent interests of their member-states, but the Commission's interests. At the start of their mandate, one of these 27 commissioners is elected as the President of the European Commission. From administrative point of view, the EC is organized into Directorates-General, each responsible for different EU policy, and its seat is located in Brussels. **European Commission represents interests of the European Union.**

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament (EP) is the EU's legislative body. It is comprised of a total of 705 members from all EU member-states, elected at direct and immediate elections. Each member-state is assigned a different number of EPs according to the methodology that takes into account the

number of their respective populations. Bigger countries have higher number of EPs because they represent larger number of EU citizens. Germany is assigned the highest number of EPs (96), followed by France (74) and Italy (73), with Malta, Estonia, Cyprus and Luxembourg having the lowest number (6 EPs each). However, according to the principle of digressive proportionality, smaller states are better represented in the European Parliament due to the fact that one EP from these states represents a smaller number of EU citizens compared to EPs from bigger states. In 2021, the number of EPs was changed after the United Kingdom's exit from the Union, whereby the number of parliament seats was decreased from 751 to 705.²

The European Parliament takes decisions and controls the EU budget. European Parliament Members have a five-year mandate and they elect EP's President the start of their mandate. Elected MPs belong to parliamentary groups, and work is organized into various parliamentary committees and delegations. The EP's seat is located in Strasbourg, but some sessions also take place in Brussels. **European Parliament represents the interests of EU citizens.**

COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The EU Council (known as the Council of Ministers) is the EU's legislative body. It is comprised of representatives from EU member-states at the level of ministers and ambassadors. Its composition and attendance depends on the topic discussed, for example, when agriculture issues are discussed, the Council convenes under its composition of agriculture ministers from member-states. The EU Council, together with the European Parliament, takes decisions at EU level. **It represents interests of EU member-states.**

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is an important institution for the civil society, in broader terms. Its members are representatives of employers, employees and organized civil society from all member-states. EESC is an advisory body and provides opinion on important issues in the economic and social sphere that are of interest for EU citizens. This body provides an opportunity for direct representation of civil society opinions in the EU in respect to policy making. It is important to note that EESC structure includes external cooperation bodies, including the EU-North Macedonia Joint Consultative Committee (JCC). JCC started its operation in 2009, but has been inactive since 2013. From the Macedonian side, JCC has six members, two of which come from representative associations of employers, two members come from representative trade unions, and two members are from civil society organizations. In October 2020, an open call was announced for selection of two ranking members and one observer from civil society organizations. JCC holds two meetings annually, one organized in RNM and one in Brussels.

European Economic and Social Committee represents the civil society and its positions before EU institutions.

² Infographic: How many seats does each country get in the European Parliament?, available at: <https://bit.ly/3dy5m1q> [Last retrieved on 01.03.2021]

DECISION-MAKING AT EU LEVEL

The European Union is founded on the rule of law, i.e. each decision should be in compliance with the legislation approved by all member-states. The EU law is comprised of primary and secondary legislation. Primary legislation is comprised of the Treaties on Establishing and Functioning of the EU, which determine EU goals, functioning of EU institutions, EU's relations with its member-states, etc. Secondary legislation is adopted in the form of regulations, directives, decisions, proposals and opinions.

The EU adopts legislation only in areas that fall within its competences. Three principles are of key importance in determining policy areas in which the EU can have a role: 1) conferral of competences from EU member-states to the EU, according to the treaties; 2) proportionality, which means that the EU must not overstep its competences in order to attain EU goals; 3) subsidiarity, i.e. in cases when the EU or national authorities cannot take action, the EU steps in only when such action is considered more effective.

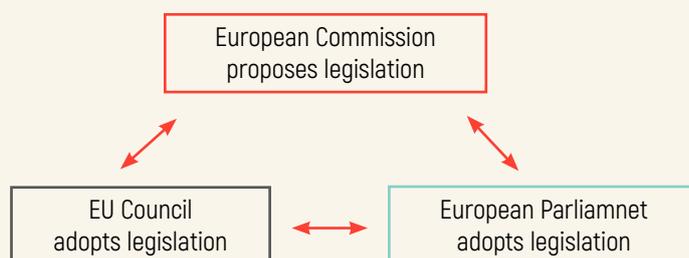
The EU holds exclusive competences in some areas, but shares competences with member-states in other policy areas.

Exclusive competences	Shared competences with member-states	Competences of member-states that are supported by the EU
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Customs Union ■ Competition rules on the internal market ■ Common Monetary Policy ■ Common Trade Policy ■ Preservation of maritime biological resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Common market ■ Social policy ■ Economic, social and territorial cohesion ■ Agriculture, fisheries ■ Environment ■ Consumer protection ■ Transport ■ Trans-European networks ■ Energy ■ Freedom, security and justice ■ Public health ■ Research and the space ■ Developmental cooperation and humanitarian aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Public health ■ Industry ■ Culture ■ Tourism ■ Education, training, youth and sport ■ Civil protection; and ■ Administrative cooperation

The European Commission consults the civil society and other stakeholders in adopting new legislation or policy development. Namely, before any legislative act enters procedure, the European Commission is obliged to develop an impact assessment. Such assessment determines advantages and disadvantages of the policy proposed, including options for policy implementation. Also, the Commission consults stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, local authorities and industry representatives.

Decision-making at EU level is not a simple process. It involves all three institutions, whereby the European Commission proposes legislation, while the EU Council and the European Parliament take decisions. There are two legislative procedures in place: 1) standard, i.e. regular legislative procedure wherein the European Parliament and the EU Council vote on proposals from the European Commission and have equitable role in decision-making. Vast part of the EU acquis is adopted under this standard procedure; 2) special legislative procedure, in which the Council can adopt legislation on its own, but only after consultations or previously obtained approval from the European Parliament. Legislation can be approved in "first reading" by the European Parliament and the Council, but when it is not passed, legislative acts are returned for "second reading".

CSOs are involved in development of new legislation through consultations organized as part of the impact assessment process.



Once a piece of legislation is approved by the EU Council and the European Parliament, member-states implement the laws, while the European Commission is tasked to monitor implementation.

EU Enlargement

Enlargement is one of the most important EU policies. From a Union of 6 states, today the EU represents a Union of 27 member-states.



1957 year
West Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and Italy



1973 year
Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom



1981 year
Greece



1986 year
Portugal and Spain



1995 year
Austria, Finland and Sweden



2004 year
Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia



2007 year
Bulgaria and Romania



2013 year
Croatia

ENLARGEMENT

The EU accession process has been significantly changed from the first enlargement to present, especially in the 90s, as preparation for the "big bang" enlargement that happened in 2004 and 2007, when 12 countries from Central and Eastern Europe joined the EU.

The EU enlargement process includes several steps³:

- ✓ The country submits an application for EU membership to the EU Council, followed by opinion from the European Commission;
- ✓ EU member-states decide unanimously to grant the country candidate status;
- ✓ Negotiations are opened upon unanimous decision by all member-states;
- ✓ After conditions are fulfilled, the EC proposes a negotiating framework as basis for the talks;

³ EU accession process step by step, available at: <https://bit.ly/39MUhlu> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

- ✓ During negotiations, the candidate country prepares to implement the EU laws and standards;
- ✓ Once negotiations are finalized, the EC gives positive opinion on finalization of the negotiations;
- ✓ Member-states need to take unanimous decision on acceptance into membership, followed by a consent from the EP;
- ✓ All member-states and the candidate country sign the EU Accession Treaty.

ACCESSION CRITERIA

To become EU member-state, the candidate country must satisfy the so-called Copenhagen criteria from 1993, thus demonstrating that the country is ready to join the EU⁴:

- ✓ Political criteria: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, protection of minorities and good-neighbourly relations;
- ✓ Economic criteria: functioning market economy and ability to cope with competitive forces on the EU market;
- ✓ Administrative and institutional capacity to effectively transpose and implement the *acquis communautaire* at national level and ability to take on the obligations of membership.

In addition to Copenhagen accession criteria, Maastricht criteria from 1995 request the candidate country to be able to adjust its administrative system in order to fit within the EU public administration.

At the moment there are 5 candidate countries for EU membership: Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Turkey, and two potential candidates: Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

DG ENLARGEMENT

The membership decision is taken by the EU Council and, in the final stages, by the European Parliament. However, the EC has a central role in the process for EU membership preparations. The EC's structure includes the Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR)⁵, tasked with implementing the EU enlargement policy. DG NEAR assists candidate countries to meet the accession criteria, monitors their progress and ensures bilateral contacts with candidate countries.⁶ For that purpose, DG NEAR cooperates with the European Union External Action Service (EEAS)⁷. EEAS is EU's diplomatic service responsible for implementation of the foreign and security policy. It was established in 2009, and manages the EU Delegations in all countries across the world.

4 European Commission - Enlargement - Accession criteria, available at: <https://bit.ly/3cNBhLX> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

5 DG NEAR, available at: <https://bit.ly/3uownLw> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

6 DG NEAR Strategic Plan 2020-2024: <https://bit.ly/31Q2FTa> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

7 European Union External Action Service: <https://eeas.europa.eu> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

EU and the Civil Society

The European Union assigns importance to cooperation with the civil society. Namely, Article 15 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union stresses that, in order to advance good governance, the Union shall promote participation of the civil society. Article 11 of the Treaty on the European Union stipulates that the institutions shall find appropriate means for exchange of information, shall maintain an open and transparent dialogue with citizens and citizens associations, and shall consult them in creation of European policies. The civil society is viewed in broader terms and includes trade unions, associations of employees and of employers, civil society organizations, and other grass-root organizations.⁸

CIVIL SOCIETY - PARTNER IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

Although there is no unified definition of civil society and the same significantly varies from one to another state, all across the EU, civil society organizations are faced with similar challenges: demographic changes, economic downturn, digitalization, populism and narrowing space for civic action. Populism, and thereby Euroscepticism, are on the rise in EU member-states, putting European values at risk. At the same time, space for action by civil society organizations is narrowing, threatening even the fundamental rights to association and to freedom of expression. Therefore, EU institutions need to engage in greater cooperation with civil society organizations to address these issues.⁹

CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN EU POLICY MAKING

The European Union support participation of civil society organizations in development and implementation of EU policies in different ways:

✓ Consultation in policy development

Whenever it proposes new laws and policies, the EC is obliged to organize broad stakeholder consultations.¹⁰ In particular, citizens, business entities and organizations are able to take part in the consultation procedure through the website on public consultations.¹¹ The European Economic and Social Committee plays an important role in representing interests of the civil society through surveys, consultations and reports developed and presented to other EU institutions. EU institutions regularly consult the civil society in developing new policies, white papers, green papers and other initiatives.

8 EUR-Lex Glossary: <https://bit.ly/3sWf3Nm> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

9 The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030: <https://bit.ly/2PVkpde> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

10 Protocol to the Amsterdam Treaty on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality: <https://bit.ly/3mly60C> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

11 Consultations: <https://bit.ly/2QfjPqL> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

✓ Have your say

In 2015, the European Commission started an initiative for direct involvement of citizens, business community and other actors in all phases of policy development. For that purpose, in 2017, it proposed establishment of the website "Have your say", a platform where everybody can share their opinions on EU policies.¹² This instrument was used by European Commission to inquire about opinions of EU citizens in respect to single-use plastic. Most opinions received on the website referred to the fact that single-use plastic pollutes the environment and that the EU should take urgent action in that regard. In response, the EU adopted legislation on banning single-use plastic. This is an example of how EU institutions react to requests from its citizens.¹³

✓ Advocacy and lobbying in Brussels

CSOs and other non-institutional actors, such as large non-governmental organizations, networks, trade associations and trade unions are part of the so-called "third sector", which is present on the advocacy scene in Brussels. Representatives of registered advocacy entities, including civil society organizations, have regular meetings with EPs in Strasbourg, Brussels and in EU member-states. In that, they advocate for interests of their civil society organizations in policy development at EU level.

✓ Implementation of EU policies: the principle of partnership

CSOs are able to participate in implementation of EU policies by means of implementing and taking part in EU projects. They are eligible to apply for funding from the EU structural and investment funds (European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, Cohesion Funds, etc.). Implementation of these programmes is subject to the principle of partnership according to which public authorities, economic and social partners and bodies representing the civil society are partners to EU member-states in organizing programmes and funds throughout the entire program cycle comprised of preparations, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.¹⁴ Also, civil society organizations are able to apply with project proposals to majority of EU programmes, like Erasmus+ (programme for education, training, youth and sports), Horizon 2020 (programme for research and innovation), Creative Europe (programme for culture and art), etc.

✓ Participation in European networks

Networking of civil society organizations is one of the most effective ways to have the civil society's voice heard. Association among civil society organizations does not only allow exchange of experience and practice among its members, but also facilitates advocacy before EU institutions. Networks can be of different type: thematic, geographical, comprised only of civil society organizations or comprised of different types of actors. The fact that networks represent a multitude of organizations from different states allows them more opportunities for advocacy and greater importance before institutions.

12 Have your say portal: <https://bit.ly/322qUhi> [last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

13 New rules on plastics: shaped by your views: <https://bit.ly/3fY10VA> [Last retrieved on 09.04.2021]

14 European code of conduct on partnership: <https://bit.ly/2PSWDyX> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

CITIZENS IN THE CENTRE OF DECISION-MAKING FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

In the last decade, the EC has taken initiatives to encourage direct participation of citizens in the debate about the EU, current challenges and the future. It is a matter of broad and comprehensive consultation process with citizens in different formats: citizen dialogues and meetings, online consultations, research papers, etc.

✓ Citizens dialogues

The citizens dialogues are public debates in which citizens are able to directly communicate with members of the European Commission, the European Parliament and other politicians at local and national level. These events are held in different cities across EU member-states, are open for participation and are often streamed online. Debates can be followed on Twitter with the hashtag #EUdialogues.¹⁵

European Union supports civil society participation in development and implementation of European policies.

✓ Conference on the Future of Europe

Conference on the Future of Europe was announced in 2020 as joint proposal of the Commission and the European Parliament, in order to discuss the EU's future and necessary reforms. It is expected to last over a period of two years and will involve citizens, youth and civil society organizations, as equitable partner to the EU.¹⁶

✓ European Citizens Initiative

The Lisbon Treaty from 2007 introduced an important mechanism for encouraging direct democracy and citizens' participation in EU policies: **European Citizens Initiative**. Under this mechanism, at least one million citizens from one quarter of EU member-states are able to propose an initiative for adoption of EU legislation, when the subject matter falls under competences of the EU. When the required number of signatures is collected, the initiative is considered automatically submitted to EU institutions, which then decide whether it would be supported or not. From 2012, when the European Citizens Initiative was first introduced, there have been more than 76 initiatives raised, but only 6 of them were supported.

¹⁵ Citizens Dialogues: <https://bit.ly/3uDLLDP> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

¹⁶ Shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-conference-future-of-europe-january-2020_en.pdf [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

✓ Petitions to the European Parliament

Any citizen of the European Union or any person with residence in EU member-state is entitled to petition the European Parliament on matters that fall within its competences. Petitions can have the form of complaints or requests and should concern issues of public or private interest. Petitions can be submitted to complaint or remark enforcement of the EU legislation or to request the European Parliament to approve proposals on particular topic. The purpose behind petitions to the European Parliament is to provide an opportunity for direct communication with EU citizens.¹⁷

The European Union is committed to establishing direct contacts with its citizens. These initiatives are an example of its commitment to direct democracy and civil participation in EU policy development. CSOs remain fully engaged in mobilizing the citizens for direct participation, information and involvement in all processes. Also, for many decades, civil society organizations have invested significant time and resources to educate citizens and encourage active citizenship as precondition for citizens to engage in such initiatives.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND EU ENLARGEMENT

CSOs are an important partner to the EU in its external relations. In 2012, the EU proposed a policy for cooperation with civil society organizations across the world, not only as beneficiaries of EU financial support, but also as partners in democratic processes.¹⁸ This policy anticipates three levels of intervention for the civil society actors: 1) promoting an enabling environment for civil society organizations in EU partner countries; 2) participation of civil society organizations in national and EU policy making; 3) increasing capacity of civil society organizations as independent actors.

Also, the EU views the civil society as important partner in the EU enlargement and integration processes. A strong civil society is indicator of functional democracy. Therefore, the EU builds partnership and cooperation with civil society organizations from candidate countries and supports their involvement in policy making. Positive, enabling environment for civil society development is among democratic development conditions for EU membership.

Furthermore, the EU fosters cooperation with the civil society from member-states in order to encourage public debate on its enlargement policy. Eurobarometer surveys show that high 45% of EU citizens are against enlargement with other countries.¹⁹ Therefore, this type of civic dialogue allows exchange of opinion and development of positive attitudes to the enlargement process.

European Union seeks the opinion of its citizens on European policies and legislation.

17 Petitions to the European Parliament: <https://bit.ly/3mz5DoF> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

18 The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with civil society in external relations: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0492:FIN:EN:PDF> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

19 Standard Barometer 93, Public Opinion in the European Union, Summer 2020: <https://ec.europa.eu/com-frontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/standard/yearFrom/1974/yearTo/2020/surveyKy/2262> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

Conclusions

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ The European Union is an economic and political union of 27 member-states that share common democratic and cultural values.

- ✓ The three most important EU institutions in respect to legislative decisions are the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Council.
 - European Commission represents interests of the EU.

 - European Parliament represents interests of EU citizens.

 - EU Council represents interests of EU member-states.

- ✓ European Economic and Social Committee is the body where the voice of the organized civil society in the EU is heard.

- ✓ Enlargement is an important EU policy from its establishment to present.

- ✓ Accession criteria are:
 - stable institutions that guarantee democracy and good governance;

 - strong economy that is able to cope with competitive forces on the EU market;

 - preparedness to implement the EU acquis.

- ✓ Directorate-General on Neighbourhood and Enlargement plays a crucial role in preparing the countries for EU membership.

- ✓ European Union External Action Service implements the EU foreign policy and manages the EU Delegations across the world.

- ✓ EU recognizes the civil society as partner in building democratic processes.

- ✓ EU encourages direct civic participation through different formats:
 - Conference on the Future of Europe;

 - European Citizens Initiative;

 - Petitions to the European Parliament;

 - Citizens Dialogue;

 - Public Consultations.

- ✓ EU views civil society organizations as partners in implementation of its external relations.

- ✓ CSOs play an important role in the EU enlargement process.

STEP BY STEP: WHERE TO START?

1 **Get informed about EU policies** – the first step in advocating for your interests before EU institutions is to get acquainted with EU policies, actors and developments. Without knowledge of these matters, you would not be able to initiate cooperation with the EU.

2 **Find your collocutor** – in the Brussels' "labyrinth" of institutions, agencies, services and various other actors, find your appropriate collocutor. Start with the question: who should hear our voice?

3 **Try to establish direct line of communication** – EU institutions have a policy of openness. When topics and the situation allow, EU institutions are open to meetings, consultations, information sharing. Anyways, you have nothing to lose.

4 **Be clear and concise** – before attempting any kind of communication with EU institutions, be prepared. What exactly are you trying to convey as message? Why it is important and for whom it will be useful?

5 **Try "locally"** – the European Commission has delegations in all partner countries. Communication "with Brussels" can also take place in your capital!

6 **Network** – membership in European networks can be very useful for establishing contacts, getting timely information and adequately conveying your message to decision makers.

7 **Stay focused** – communication with EU institutions should not be the goal in its own right. Stay focused on your organization's mission that you advocate for and represent. Conveying your experience at EU level is an added value to your primary activity.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Official website of the European Union:

<https://europa.eu>

Official website of the European Commission:

<https://ec.europa.eu>

Official website of the European Parliament:

www.europarl.europa.eu

Official website of the European Economic and Social Committee:

www.eesc.europa.eu

Official website of the Directorate-General on Enlargement:

https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/about/directorate-general_en

Official website of the EU Delegation in the Republic of North Macedonia:

https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/republic-north-macedonia_en

Republic of North Macedonia and the European Union

EU membership is a strategic goal of the Republic of North Macedonia. RNM started its road to EU members from its independence. After having signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2001, the country was granted candidate status in 2005, and obtained a positive opinion for start of accession negotiations from the European Commission in 2009. The EU Council gave the green light to opening the accession negotiations in 2020. Today, RNM awaits the official date for formal start of accession talks.

Chronology of North Macedonia's relations with the EU

1995	Diplomatic relations with the EU are established.
2001	Stabilization and Association Agreement is signed.
2003	Thessaloniki Summit confirms the commitment to EU integration of the Western Balkans.
2004	Stabilization and Association Agreement enters into force.
2004	EU membership application is submitted.
2005	RNM is granted the candidate status.
2009	Start of the visa liberalization.
2009	European Commission recommends opening of the accession negotiations.
2012	Launch of the High Level Accession Dialogue.
2019	Prespa Agreement is signed.
2020	EU Council takes decision on the start of accession negotiations.

EU Accession

RNM's accession in the EU is organized on the basis of SAA and pursuant to the Copenhagen political, economic and legislative criteria, as well as the Madrid criteria on public administration reform.

ADOPTION OF THE EU ACQUIS

The central activity under EU accession is adoption of the EU acquis by RNM. The National Programme on Adoption of the EU Acquis (NPAA) is an important document that provides guidelines, reforms, structure, resources and deadlines to be met by RNM in order to join the EU.²⁰ NPAA follows the structure of the Copenhagen criteria. NPAA implementation is coordinated by the Secretariat for European Affairs (SEA). Regular publication and availability of most recently updated documents are of great importance for civil society participation in EU integrations. Being the key document on EU integration, NPAA should be regularly published and updated on the websites of competent institutions.

In order to meet the economic criteria, every three years RNM adopts the Pre-Accession Economic Programme which is known as the Economic Reform Programme since 2014²¹. This is a strategic document for coordination with EU economic policies.

ACCESSION PROCESS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

In 1997, RNM established the management system for the EU accession process, which is subject to continuous adjustments.²² In particular, the system is comprised of:

Government of RNM

- ✓ **Committee for Euro-Atlantic Integrations** – comprised of the Prime Minister, all line ministries, the Governor of the National Bank and the President of MASA, takes decisions on the country's accession policy;
- ✓ **Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs** – coordinates the accession process from an operational point of view;
- ✓ **Secretariat for European Affairs** – a body within the Government of RNM responsible to coordinate the overall EU integration process: coordinates the process of negotiations, programs IPA funds, and communicates EU integrations to citizens and other stakeholders;
- ✓ **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** – responsible for **RNM's Permanent Mission** in Brussels and communicating the country's positions to EU structures. Also, MFA maintains bilateral relations with all EU member-states;

20 For more information on NPAA, visit: <https://bit.ly/3dxTmg4> [Last retrieved on 12.02.2021].

21 For more information about the Economic Reform Programme, visit: <https://bit.ly/3c0ysZK> [Last retrieved on 12.02.2021]

22 Accession Process Management System, SEA's website: <https://bit.ly/3wtiNZb> [Last retrieved on 12.02.2021]

- ✓ **Working Committee for EU Integration at the Government of RNM** – operational body for implementation of strategic decisions on EU integrations, comprised of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs and all state secretaries at line ministries in RNM;
- ✓ **35 working groups for development of NPAA** – in 2018 these working groups were renamed into working groups for development of NPAA and negotiating groups.

Parliament of RNM

The Parliament of RNM adopts laws pertaining to the country's EU integrations.

- ✓ **Committee on European Affairs**²³ is the parliamentary committee comprised of MPs to reconsider issues pertaining to EU integrations.
- ✓ **National Council for EU Integrations**²⁴ is responsible to provide guidelines for RNM's negotiations with the EU, provide opinion on legislation alignment, to monitor and evaluate the country's accession process. The Council is comprised of MPs, representatives from the central government, local governments, journalist associations, chambers of commerce, trade unions and religious communities. CSOs have one representative in this Council through the Civil Society Platform of Macedonia.

In the past, with SAA's entry into effect, the following bodies were established²⁵:

- ✓ **SAA Council** – the highest political level body, discussing important political issues about RNM-EU relations. From the Macedonian side, the Council is chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs from the member-state currently holding the EU Presidency.
- ✓ **Stabilization and Association Committee (SAC)** – operational body comprised of representatives from RNM and the EU, which meet once every year to review achievements and reforms.
- ✓ **SAC Subcommittees** – 7 subcommittees in policy areas covered under SAA: 1) innovation, information society and social policy; 2) transport, environment, energy and regional development; 3) internal market and competition; 4) economic and financial issues and statistics; 5) agriculture and fisheries; 6) trade, industry, customs and taxes; 7) justice, freedom and security.
- ✓ **Special Group on Public Administration Reform** that operates as subcommittee.

Assessment on civil society participation:

1

No participation

²³ Commission on European Affairs at the Assembly of RNM: <https://bit.ly/3dDAhJI> [Last retrieved on 12.02.2021]

²⁴ National Council on EU Integrations, Assembly of RNM: <https://bit.ly/3rT8Lg7> [Last retrieved on 12.02.2021]

²⁵ SAA bodies, SEA's website: <https://bit.ly/3unIrgU> [Last retrieved on 12.02.2021]

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Every year, the European Commission publishes the so-called Enlargement Package, which provides an overview of state-of-play in candidate countries and potential candidates in respect to their EU accession process. At the same time, the EC publishes an accompanying document in the form of Progress Reports describing the state-of-affairs in relevant candidate country, progress in respect to the Copenhagen criteria and results from reforms under EU integration. The report is drafted by the EU Delegation and the Directorate-General on Enlargement, in cooperation with institutions involved in the EU integration process. CSOs are invited to take part in consultations to discuss current state-of-affairs prior to the report's publication.

CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

CSOs in the Republic of North Macedonia are able to join EU accession processes in several ways, most often in the form of information and consultation:

- ✓ **Information to CSOs:** SEA keeps the database of civil society organizations working on topics related to EU integrations. Through this database, SEA informs civil society organizations about debates, discussions and consultations, as well as the technical screening process.

Assessment on civil society participation:

2

Information

✓ **Consultations with CSOs:**

- Parliament of RNM invites civil society organizations that operate in areas that are of importance for EU integrations to participate in committee hearings and plenary sessions.
- EU Delegation in Skopje consults civil society organizations when drafting baseline documents for the EC's Country Progress Report.

Assessment on civil society participation:

3

Consultation

✓ **Dialogue with CSOs**

National Council for EU Integrations is the most adequate body where civil society organizations can express their views on EU integrations. However, they are represented by only one council member, with other non-state actors being allowed to have more members. Notably, religious communities have five council members, trade unions - three members, and chambers of commerce have two council members. There are no mechanisms in place for broad consultations with the civil society on advocacy positions, and there is no adequate dissemination of information on decisions taken by the National Council.

Assessment on civil society participation:

4

Dialogue

Accession Negotiations

Accession negotiations are part of RNM's EU integration process since 2007, when the country has established its institutional platform and principles for leading the EU accession negotiations.²⁶ This document enlists the most important aspects of the country's accession negotiations:

- ✓ **The essence of accession negotiations** is acceptance of the rights and obligations under the *acquis communautaire*, i.e. harmonization of the national legislation with the EU *acquis*.
- ✓ **Screening** is the analytical examination of harmonization with the EU *acquis* – this is a technical operation performed by the European Commission. The purpose of the screening process is for candidate countries to be familiarized with the EU *acquis* and the European Commission to assess the level of preparedness by candidate countries. The screening process is performed in two phases: explanatory meetings for presentation of the EU *acquis* and bilateral meetings in the country.
- ✓ **Intergovernmental Conference** – an intergovernmental conference is formed for each candidate country and it meets two times in year at high political level.
- ✓ Alignment of negotiating positions is pursued at the level of **working groups**, EU Council working group on enlargement and working groups per chapters in RNM.
- ✓ **Setting benchmarks** aims at improving the quality of accession negotiations by providing incentives for implementation of reforms in the early stage.

ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS STRUCTURE

In 2018, the Government of RNM established the Accession Negotiations Structure by upgrading the above-enlisted working bodies for SAA implementation.²⁷ The negotiating structure²⁸ is comprised of:

- ✓ **Committee for Accession Negotiations between RNM and the European Union**

This committee is the highest government body responsible to coordinate the EU negotiations process. Its role is to review and determine the negotiating positions before they are formally adopted. The Accession Negotiations Committee is comprised of the Prime Minister (chair), the Chief Political Negotiator, members of the negotiating group and eleven government members. It meets once every year, usually before the intergovernmental conference.

- ✓ **Working Committee for EU Integrations**

26 Institutional platform and principles for leading negotiations on the Republic of Macedonia's accession in the European Union: <https://bit.ly/3sWKhUN> [Last retrieved on 12.02.2021]

27 Official Gazette of RM: <https://bit.ly/39Pnwuh> [Last retrieved on 12.02.2021]

28 Accession Negotiations Structure, website of the project "EU Dialogue": <https://bit.ly/3vI32wS> [Last retrieved on 12.02.2021]

Working Committee for EU Integrations (Working Committee) is the body responsible to coordinate implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement and monitor working groups for development of NPAA and negotiating positions for EU accession talks. It is comprised of all state secretaries from line ministries and is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs. The Working Committee for EU Integrations meets every month.

✓ **State Delegation for EU Accession Negotiations**

State Delegation for Accession Negotiations between the Republic of North Macedonia and the EU (State Delegation) leads the negotiations by presenting the government's official negotiating positions before EU institutions and member-states. Head of the State Delegation is the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs (Chief Negotiator). In addition, the State Delegation is comprised of other members: Minister of Foreign Affairs serving as Deputy Head of the Delegation, the Chief Technical Negotiator, Head of RNM's Mission to the EU in Brussels, and Secretary of Accession Negotiations.

✓ **Negotiating Group**

RNM's Negotiating Group for EU Accession (Negotiating Group) is the government's expert and technical body managed by the Chief Technical Negotiator. The negotiating group leads negotiations under all chapters and in all stages of negotiations at technical level. Members of the Negotiating Group include: Chief Technical Negotiator, four deputies to the Chief Technical Negotiator, Head of RNM's Mission to the EU in Brussels, and representative from the Office of the Chief Technical Negotiator to the EU in Brussels, and the Secretary of Accession Negotiations. Members of the Negotiating Group monitor performance of working groups for development of the National Programme for Adoption of the EU Acquis and negotiating positions (working groups).

✓ **Working groups for development of NPAA and negotiating positions (working groups)**

The working groups are auxiliary bodies to the Working Committee for EU Integrations. They are tasked to develop NPAA sections on relevant chapters for which they have adequate competences, develop the draft negotiating positions, to make recommendations on proposed laws and by-laws intended for alignment with the EU acquis. Working groups are formed for 33 chapters and separate groups are formed for the political, economic and administrative accession criteria, including the group on EU acquis terminology.

The accession negotiations structure also includes:

- ✓ **Office of the Chief Technical Negotiator (CTN Office)**
- ✓ **Secretariat of the Accession Negotiations Structure**

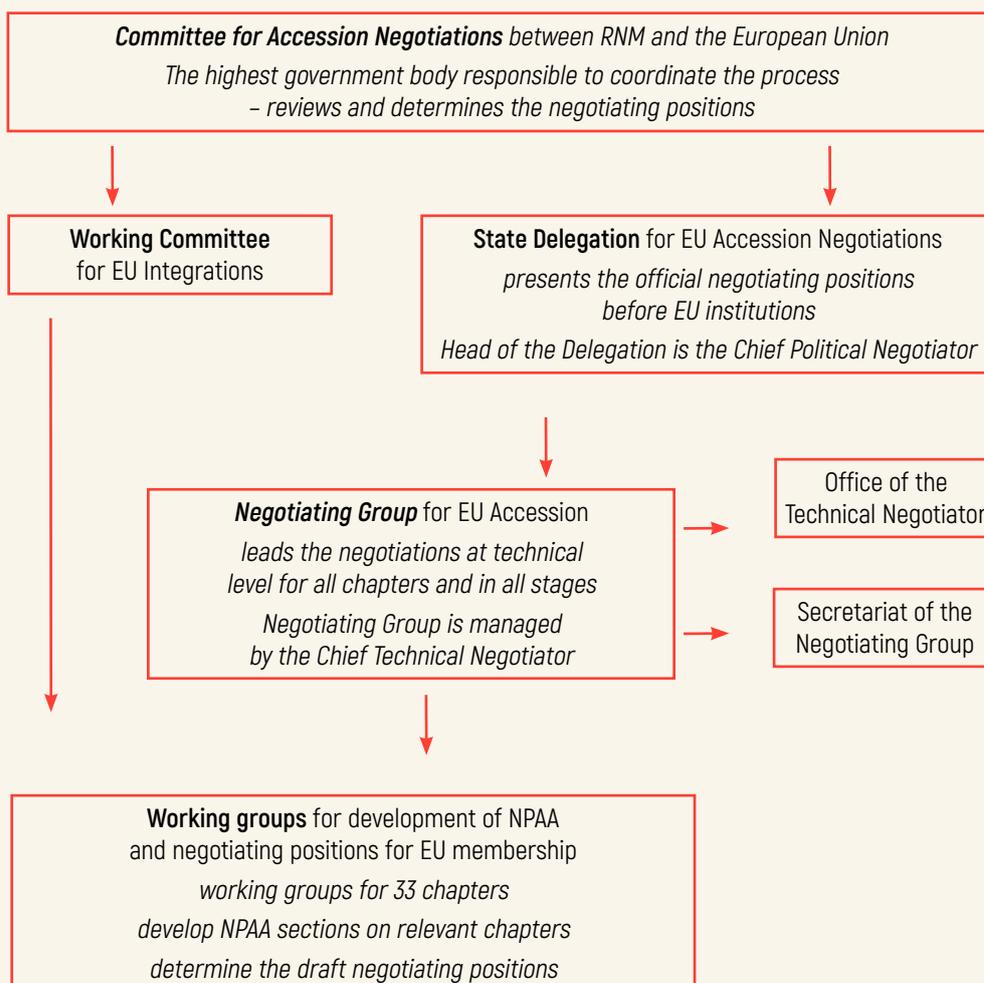
The structure covers functions such as:

- ✓ **Chief Negotiator – Head of the State Delegation**
- ✓ **Chief Technical Negotiator – Head of the Negotiating Group**

- ✓ **Secretary of Accession Negotiations**
- ✓ **Members of the Negotiating Group and Negotiators**
- ✓ **Chairs of Working Groups²⁹**

The Chief Technical Negotiator leads the Republic of North Macedonia's negotiations for accession in the European Union at technical level and under all chapters. The Chief Technical Negotiator performs his/her duties at the Government and at RNM's Mission to the European Union in Brussels. On behalf of the Negotiating Group, the Chief Technical Negotiator informs the broad public about activities related to the accession negotiations.

This structure is tasked with leading the accession negotiations, by involving other bodies of the Government of RNM. However, having in mind that the process of accession negotiations is long and arduous, the same should be organized in a manner that ensures participation of all actors in the society. The process of accession negotiations should be open to all institutions: Parliament of RNM and its bodies responsible for EU integrations, various bodies and agencies, civil society and the media. The Accession Negotiations Structure is tasked to inform the public of any developments, to represent interests of the people and to support Europeanization of the society. Therefore, it is important to ensure participation of civil society organizations and other societal actors in this process from the very start.



²⁹ Accession Negotiations Structure, Andrea Stojkovski: <https://bit.ly/3tM7kBB> [Last retrieved on 12.02.2021]

NEW METHODOLOGY

In 2019, the EC proposed a new methodology³⁰ for accession negotiations as a result of France's demand to change the enlargement approach. The Copenhagen criteria remain irreplaceable in the process. The EC will negotiate with RNM and Albania according to the new methodology, while Serbia and Montenegro, both of which already started accession talks, will be allowed to choose whether they would continue under the old methodology or shift to the new methodology. This methodology intensifies the process of negotiations, improves its effectiveness and relies on the importance of building trust with all stakeholders. The new methodology strengthens member-states' position in assessing progress made by candidate countries. Actually, the European Commission underlines that it is not a matter of complete revision of the negotiations, but an injection of new dynamism to the process.

The new methodology is based on four principles:

- ✓ **New dynamism** of the process is expected on the basis of chapters being organized into 6 thematic clusters and optimal commitment to each cluster that could last up to 1 year.
- ✓ It anticipates **stronger political steer and greater political will** on the part of the Republic of North Macedonia and on the part of the European Commission, to deliver results and intensify dialogue at the level of ministers and heads of government.
- ✓ The process is expected to be **more credible**. The accession negotiations will focus on the **fundamentals**, representing the first cluster to be opened and the last cluster to be closed.
- ✓ Better **"predictability"** of the overall process, with clear assignments and expectations from both sides, making clear the positive effect from implemented reforms, but also the negative consequences when there is no progress.

The new methodology anticipates organization of all 35 chapters into 6 clusters.

30 Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans: <https://bit.ly/3blzHzF> [Last retrieved on 12.02.2021]

Cluster	Chapter
1. Fundamentals	23 Judiciary and Fundamental Rights
	24 Justice, Freedom and Security Economic criteria Functioning of democratic institutions Public administration reform
	5 Public Procurements
	18 Statistics
	32 Financial Control
2. Internal Market	1 Free Movement of Goods
	2 Free Movement of Workers
	3 Right to Establishment and Freedom to Provide Services
	4 Free Movement of Capital
	6 Company Law
	7 Intellectual Property Law
	8 Competition Policy
	9 Financial Services
	28 Consumer and Health Protection
3. Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth	10 Information Society and Media
	16 Taxation
	17 Economic and Monetary Union
	19 Social Policy and Employment
	20 Enterprises an Industrial Policy
	25 Science and Research
	26 Education and Culture
29 Customs Union	
4. Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity	14 Transport Policy
	15 Energy
	21 Trans-European Networks
	27 Environment
5. Resources, Agriculture and Cohesion	11 Agriculture and Rural Development
	12 Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy
	13 Fisheries
	22 Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments
	33 Financial and Budgetary Provisions
6. External Relations	30 External Relations
	31 Foreign, Security and Defence Policy

CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

The Accession Negotiations Structure anticipates involvement of civil society organizations and other stakeholders in the process. Based on the envisaged structure, in 2018 the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society developed a proposed model for civil society participation in EU accession negotiations.³¹

The proposed model enlists following stages and methods of participation:

- ✓ **Analytical review of the EU acquis (screening)** – involvement of civil society organizations in monitoring the screening process.
- ✓ **Monitoring the process of accession negotiations** – civil society organizations to be involved as observers of EU accession negotiations, with one civil society representative per chapter attending the actual negotiations.
- ✓ **Independent monitoring** – civil society organizations to provide independent and unbiased assessment on the progress made under accession negotiations.
- ✓ **Working Groups** – direct involvement of civil society organizations in working groups.

Assessment on civil society participation:	2	Information
Assessment on civil society participation:	3	Consultation
Assessment on civil society participation:	4	Dialogue
Assessment on civil society participation:	5	Partnership

Furthermore, the document anticipates civil society organizations to be represented in all working groups formed, depending on their identified capacity and expressed interest for participation in the process, through registration and nomination of civil society representatives. This process would be pursued by means of an open call announced by the Government's Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society and information campaigns. CSOs would apply through the so-called electronic register and the same will be used to disseminate information to civil society organizations on participation of their representatives in working groups. The selection of civil society representatives would be performed by external commission to the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society. Selected representatives would **directly** participate in working groups. This model resembles the model of civil society participation under Montenegro's EU accession process, which is described in the last chapter of this Guide.

³¹ Proposed model for civil society participation in EU accession negotiations: <https://bit.ly/3fNjflN> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

The proposal was submitted in 2018 and is likely to be subject of changes pursuant to the new methodology for accession negotiations, i.e. organization into 6 clusters of negotiating chapters.

This proposed method concerns participation of civil society organizations in the Government's negotiating structure.

In addition, the civil society needs to be adequately represented in EU integration processes of other institutions, i.e. the Parliament of RNM. Several studies and policy briefs³² indicate the need for the Parliament of RNM to be adequately involved in the system of accession negotiations. Parliament's working bodies include the Committee for European Affairs (CEA) and the National Council for EU Integrations, which provide an opportunity for civil society participation in the debate around the European Union. In 2007, the Parliament of RNM recognized the need for involvement of civil society organizations in EU integrations. Although civil society participation is limited to the status of observers within CEA and participation of one civil society member in the National Council, the civil society is still a relevant partner to the Parliament in this process.

Finally, in addition to this proposal for direct involvement of CSOs in working groups, due notice should be made of the initiative for Convention on EU Integrations. This model follows the example from Serbia, which has replicated the model from Slovakia. It is a matter of broad and public consultations for each of 35 chapters, in order to build positions that will be presented to working groups. This model will be elaborated in details in the last chapter of this Guide. In the Republic of North Macedonia, the initiative for introduction of such convention is led by the European Movement in RNM and to present work is underway on 5 from total of 35 chapters.³³

32 Civil society organizations and North Macedonia's European integration: Towards strategic participation and transparent accession negotiations: <https://bit.ly/3fMcda1> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

33 National Convention on the European Union in the Republic of North Macedonia: <https://nkeu.mk> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

Pre-Accession Assistance

EU financially supports candidate countries in their integration processes and implementation of reforms for EU accession through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.³⁴ IPA beneficiaries are candidate countries and potential candidates: North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

INTRODUCTION TO IPA

IPA was established in 2007 and unifies several EU programmes for support to candidate countries: PHARE, CBC, CARDS, SAPARD and ISPA.

In the financial framework 2007-2013, IPA I was structured in 5 components: 1) institution building; 2) cross-border cooperation; 3) regional development; 4) human resources; and 5) rural development. Actually, under this structure the programme mirrored EU Structural Funds awarded to its member-states. Financial support under IPA I amounted to 11.5 billion euros for all beneficiary countries, i.e. 612 million euros for RNM.

In the financial framework 2014-2020, IPA II was changed by replacing components with priority areas and introducing the so-called sector-wide approach.³⁵ Priority areas are related to the enlargement strategy, such as democracy, the rule of law, etc. IPA II is more focused on outcomes and impact, by stressing adequate programming, monitoring and evaluation. Programmed budget under IPA II accounted for 11.7 billion euros (for all beneficiary countries), i.e. 608 million euros for RNM.

In addition to the Country Indicative Strategy Paper, the Republic of North Macedonia is also among beneficiaries of the Multibeneficiary IPA. In particular, Multibeneficiary IPA supports regional and cross-border projects, initiatives and networks among the Western Balkans and Turkey.

IPA III covers the programming period 2021-2027. It is based on experiences from IPA I and IPA II. In particular, IPA II is organized into 5 windows and 17 thematic priorities³⁶:

34 Overview - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance: <https://bit.ly/31PW2jI> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

35 Planning and programming IPA assistance in the period 2014-2020 (IPA II): <https://bit.ly/3cWWpvn> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

36 IPA 2021 - 2027: <https://bit.ly/3upVDAU> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

Window 1 Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy

- Judiciary
- Anticorruption
- Fight against organized crime
- Migration and border management
- Fundamental rights
- Democracy
- Civil society

Window 2 Good Governance, Acquis Alignment, Good-Neighbourly Relations and Strategic Communication

- Good governance
- Administrative capacity and acquis alignment
- Good neighbourly relations and reconciliation
- Strategic communication, monitoring, evaluation and audit

Window 3 Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity

- Environment and climate change
- Transport, digital economy and energy

Window 4 Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth

- Education, employment, social protection and inclusion policies, and health
- Private sector development, trade, research and innovation
- Agriculture and rural development
- Fisheries

Window 5: Territorial and Cross-Border Cooperation

- Cross-border cooperation with IPA beneficiary countries
 - Participation in micro regional strategies
-

IPA III introduces several novelties:

- ✓ Unlike its predecessors when assistance was distributed under the so-called “envelopes”, i.e. programmed budgets per country, IPA III does not have a pre-defined budget per candidate country. That means that all seven IPA beneficiary countries “will compete among them” for the total budget, which is set in the amount of 14.7 billion euros for the financial framework 2021-2027. Nevertheless, the European Commission proposes “fair allocations” that will take into account some form of balance in distribution of funds among beneficiary countries.
- ✓ It introduces a change in programming by taking into account so-called “green projects”. Programming of IPA assistance is pursued in two stages. The first stage implies development of project fiches, with full project applications being submitted only for those that are well designed and assessed as priority. The programming activity will remain within the sector working groups (elaborated in the section “IPA Programming in RNM”).

Successful implementation of IPA in RNM is of great importance for its EU integration process because it demonstrates the country's capacity to manage EU funds. IPA funds are allocated from the EU budget and indicate in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which always covers a period of 7 years.³⁷

IPA PROGRAMMING IN RNM

A key document for IPA II is the Country Indicative Strategy Paper that covers the period 2014-2020, which was revised in 2017.³⁸ This document enlists priority areas for EU financial support to RNM and how they can best attain political priorities of EU integrations.

According to the Indicative Strategy Paper, IPA II has four specific objectives: 1) support for political reforms; 2) support for economic, social and territorial development; 3) strengthening the ability of the beneficiary country to fulfil the obligations arising from EU membership; 4) strengthening regional integration and territorial cooperation. In particular, IPA II covers several priority areas: 1) reforms in preparation for EU membership and related institution and capacity building; 2) socio-economic and regional development; 3) employment, social policy, education, human resources and promotion of gender equality; 4) agriculture and rural development; 5) regional and territorial cooperation.³⁹

³⁷ Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 adopted – Consilium: <https://bit.ly/3tLcUnl> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

³⁸ Country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020: <https://bit.ly/31TqSbe> [Last retrieved 16.02.2021]

³⁹ Idem [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

IPA Regulation⁴⁰ and Framework Agreement between the EU and Republic of North Macedonia underline coordination of policies, strategies and funding in various areas under IPA II. Actually, planning of IPA II funds is subject to the newly introduced “programming” or “sector-wide” approach, unlike in the previous period which relied on the “project approach”. This approach aims to align IPA priorities with those defined at national level. The sector-wide approach introduced multiannual planning framework, better alignment of the country’s priorities and EU strategies, and better coordination with other donors.⁴¹

SECTOR WORKING GROUPS

Assessment on civil society participation:

4

Dialogue

IPA II and the sector-wide approach introduced the sector working groups (SWGs) which represent:

- ✓ forum for sector-wide dialogue, place to discuss progress under sector policies and institutional capacity;
- ✓ forum to discuss IPA programming;
- ✓ forum for coordination among different donors;
- ✓ forum for preparation of sector monitoring committees that are focused on IPA implementation; and
- ✓ support for SAA structure and the future negotiating structure⁴²

SWGs are interdisciplinary bodies comprised of relevant ministries and institutions responsible for policy making, implementation and evaluation in their respective sectors. They provide a mechanism for public policy dialogue, EU assistance programming and donor coordination.

Each sector working group is comprised of chair/s (competent minister or ministers), co-chair (Head of Cooperation at the EU Delegation in RNM) and members. SWG members are representatives from relevant institutions whose competences overlap with topics covered by the relevant sector group, donor community, embassies and civil society representatives.⁴³ SWGs meet at plenary sessions and bilateral meetings at technical level.

40 REGULATION (EU) No. 231/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II): <https://bit.ly/3dDRmTB> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

41 Sector Policy Coordination: <https://bit.ly/2PIOWeq> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

42 Idem [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

43 Shadow Report from Monitoring Work and Effects of Sector Working Groups, January 2019 – February 2020: <https://bit.ly/3vQW5cY> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

RNM has formed a total of 12 sector working groups.

- 1** | Democracy and the Rule of Law
 - a. Public Administration Reform
 - b. Public Finance Management
- 2** | Rule of Law and Fundamental rights
 - a. Justice
 - b. Home Affairs
- 3** | Competitiveness and Innovation
- 4** | Agriculture and Rural Development
- 5** | Transport
- 6** | Environment and Climate Action
- 7** | Education, Employment and Social Policy
- 8** | Regional and Local Development
- 9** | Roma Integration
- 10** | Healthcare

SWGs participated in development of 2021 and 2022 project fiches under IPA III. Namely, SWGs - in coordination with SEA - have presented 22 project fiches for the indicated years. All proposals were selected for the second stage, i.e. maturity assessment.⁴⁴

IPA IMPLEMENTATION IN RNM

Successful implementation of IPA in RNM is of crucial importance for the EU integration processes. Adequate implementation of projects demonstrates the country's preparedness to manage EU funds. Under IPA I, RNM established the system of decentralized management of funds and formed the following bodies for that purpose.

⁴⁴ IPA 2021-2027 <https://bit.ly/3wzkILD> [Last retrieved on 01.02.2021]

- ✓ **CFCF** – Central Financing and Contracting Department at the Ministry of Finance, tasked with ensuring effective and efficient implementation of projects funded under IPA;
- ✓ **National IPA Coordinator (NIPAC)** is the Secretariat for European Affairs and has a central role in IPA coordination, ensuring continuous cooperation with the European Commission and line ministries in RNM;
- ✓ **National Authorization Officer (NAO)** is appointed by the Government of RNM, responsible for financial management of IPA funds and held accountable for legality and regularity of basic transactions.

Portion of IPA II funds are implemented under the system of decentralized management, i.e. funds are managed directly by the Republic of North Macedonia. Another portion of funds are managed by the EU, i.e. the EU Delegation in Skopje. As the country demonstrates greater preparedness for project implementation, more assistance funds will be implemented under the decentralized system.

IPA II underlines the impact to be achieved by projects and the focus is put on monitoring and evaluation. For that purpose, IPA monitoring committee was established. This committee is responsible to monitor implementation of IPA funds. IPA monitoring committee is comprised of the National IPA Coordinator (NIPAC), the European Commission and other relevant ministries that are beneficiaries of IPA assistance. They meet once every year. Meetings can be attended by representatives from civil society organizations and the business sector, according to the rules of procedure. In addition to IPA monitoring committee, there are also sector monitoring committees. These committees are tasked to monitor implementation of IPA programme in the given sector. They are comprised of ministries and institutions from the relevant sector, while the business community and civil society organizations can be involved when such participation is regulated under the rules of procedures.

Beneficiaries of IPA funds are ministries in the Republic of North Macedonia, state institutions, local governments, public enterprises, international organizations and civil society organizations. Funds are awarded in different manner: open calls for projects, institutional grants, tenders, etc.

OTHER EU PROGRAMMES

Except for IPA, the EU has more than 50 other programmes, known as Union Programmes:

- ✓ **Erasmus Plus** – one of the best known EU programme that supports education, youth and sports. In the new programming period 2021-2028, Erasmus Plus continues its support for mobility, with an increased budget. CSOs are eligible to apply for funding and in the next financial framework the programme will offer more opportunities for grass-root organizations.
- ✓ **European Solidarity Corps** is a relatively new programme based on the former European Volunteer Service and supports youth volunteering and community engagement.
- ✓ **Europe for Citizens** is the programme that supports civic engagement, cooperation between civil society and local authorities. In the new programming period 2021-2028, this programme will be integrated under the programme Justice, Rights and Values. Together with the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme, this programme supports promotion of European values and civil society organizations are eligible to apply for funding.

- ✓ Horizon Europe is the research and science programme. In the new programming period, it has increased budget compared to its predecessor, and plans are in place for civil society organizations to have a bigger role in implementation of activities.
- ✓ **Creative Europe** is the programme that supports culture, art and media. In the new programming period 2021-2028, Creative Europe continues to support small and large scale projects on cultural exchanges, including projects of civil society organizations. In the future, the focus will be on digital transformation.

All these programmes are built around particular EU policy, for example, culture, education or research. They are intended to encourage cooperation among actors from different EU countries in implementation of various projects and building partnerships. Hence, they do not only support European policies, but also integration within the EU. Unlike IPA, whose funds are intended for projects of national interest and EU integration priorities, overall goal of these programmes is to encourage cooperation at EU level. Projects include European partners and applications are submitted directly to EU institutions and specialized agencies in Brussels, except in some cases when these agencies have delegated competences to member-states and candidate countries. CSOs can apply for funding to almost all programmes. Most civil society organizations in RNM already manage such projects or participate as partner organizations.

EUROPE DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

In 2020, emergence and spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) caused significant health, social and economic damages, not only to Europe but across the globe. In order to respond to the crisis, in July 2020, the EU proposed an interim financial instrument called "Next Generation EU", in the value of 750 billion euros. Large share of these funds (625 million euros) are disbursed in the form of grants and loans for EU member-states to implement reforms and investments in response to the crisis and aimed at coping with the consequences. Next Generation EU aims to make Europe greener, more digital and more sustainable against the new challenges.⁴⁵

In April 2020, the EU took a decision to provide financial support for the Western Balkans to cope with the COVID-19 crisis. Namely, the EU approved 3.3 billion euros as support to the six countries from the region, funds reallocated from IPA, whereby portion of them are intended as urgent support to the healthcare sector, another portion is intended to accommodate economic and social needs, and portion of funds come from the European Investment Bank. In addition, the EU provides emergency humanitarian aid for migrants and plans funds under the European Solidarity Fund.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Recovery plan for Europe, European Commission: <https://bit.ly/3w5Ko0Z> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

⁴⁶ Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery: <https://bit.ly/3hm-jv5f> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

IPA Regulation anticipates participation of civil society organizations and other stakeholders in programming and implementation of IPA funds. Namely, the European Commission is tasked, when relevant and possible, to timely inform and consult the civil society, giving them an important place in this process.⁴⁷

Position of civil society organizations is stressed in several places throughout the Indicative Strategy Paper. It does not only anticipate civil society participation in consultations and IPA programming, but also enlists them as beneficiaries of IPA assistance. Actually, this document underlines the importance of civil society participation in implementation of key reforms related to EU integration: democratic processes and establishing dialogue between institutions and civil society organizations, importance of civil society organizations in fight against extremism, gender issues, environment and economic development.

Participation of the civil society in IPA programming and implementation can be presented from three aspects:

✓ Participation in IPA programming

The EC anticipates involvement of civil society organization in IPA programming through information and consultation. First, civil society organizations are informed and consulted in development of the Indicative Strategy Paper. In RNM, around 250 CSOs took part in the consultation process organized around the Country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020.⁴⁸ At the same time, Macedonian CSOs regularly participate in programming under the Multiannual Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes with neighbouring countries.

Assessment on civil society participation:

3

Consultation

✓ Participation in the sector-wide approach and sector working groups

As indicated above, sector working groups (SWGs) are comprised of competent ministries, donor community and the civil society. CSOs take part in almost all 12 SWGs and contribute with their expertise and experience in the relevant sector.

Assessment on civil society participation:

4

Dialogue

⁴⁷ REGULATION (EU) No 236/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL laying down common rules and procedures for the implementation of the Union's instruments for financing external action: <https://bit.ly/3mtq2eP> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

⁴⁸ REGULATION (EU) No 231/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II): <https://bit.ly/3dDRmTB> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

SWG	Competent ministry	Civil society participation
Public Administration Reform	Ministry of Information Society and Administration	12 representatives from CSOs
Public Finance Management	Ministry of Finance	7 representatives from CSOs
Justice	Ministry of Justice	8 representatives from CSOs
Home Affairs	Ministry of Interior	4 representatives from CSOs
Competitiveness and Innovation	Government of RNM – Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs	No representatives from CSOs 4 representatives from the chambers of commerce as “non-state actors”
Agriculture and Rural Development	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy	3 representatives from CSOs
Transport	Ministry of Transport and Communications	4 representatives from CSOs
Environment and Climate Action	Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning	6 representatives from CSOs
Education, Employment and Social Policy	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy Ministry of Education	18 representatives from CSOs
Regional and Local Development	Ministry of Local Self-Government	5 representatives from CSOs
Roma Integration	Minister without Portfolio Responsible for Roma Issues Ministry of Labour and Social Policy	17 representatives from CSOs
Healthcare	Ministry of Health	7 representatives from CSOs

The Shadow Report from Monitoring Work and Effects of Sector Working Groups⁴⁹ defines operation of SWGs, but its primary focus is put in participation of civil society organizations. Conclusions based monitoring performance of SWGs in 2019 indicated the lack of unified method for selection of civil society representatives in these sector groups. In that, civil society members are selected in different manners for different SWGs: open call announced by the competent ministry, direct appointment of CSOs, and upon proposal from the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society.

On general, civil society organizations participate in plenary sessions. Although meetings are held regularly, there is no calendar of activities which makes it difficult for CSOs to plan their participation in SWGs. Another issue duly noted in the Shadow Report concerns civil society representatives in SWGs, as they represent their organizations and foundations and often do not act as representatives of the broader civil society active in the relevant area covered by SWGs.

The survey "Needs Assessment among Civil Society Organizations and Their Experiences" conducted as part of the project "EU Dialogue" on sample of 110 civil society representatives, shows that large share of them are not familiar with SWGs and do not participate in these sector groups. At the same time, survey results are indicative of great interest among civil society organizations to participate in these processes.

✓ Participation in project implementation

CSOs are eligible to apply for funding under IPA. First, the Indicative Strategy Paper indicates that particular attention should be devoted to establishment of fair and transparent procedures for funding civil society organizations at central and local level.

IPA also includes a special programme intended to strengthen civil society organizations, i.e. IPA Civil Society Facility, under which CSOs can implement projects at national level and at the level of the Western Balkan region. The purpose of this facility is to improve the enabling environment for civil society operation and to enhance capacity of civil society organizations to participate in policy making. Except for this programme, CSOs are eligible to participate in implementation of cross-border cooperation projects between RNM and neighbouring countries.

Successful implementation of IPA projects is of particular importance for RNM. In particular, they demonstrate the country's absorption capacity, i.e. preparedness of the country and other actors to adequately utilize EU assistance funds. In some cases, civil society organizations provide support and expertise to other actors (municipalities, public enterprises) in respect to implementation of their administrative and financial obligations under projects. Finally, CSOs cooperation with European actors under different EU programmes contributes to implementation of EU integration policies.

⁴⁹ Shadow Report from Monitoring Work and Effects of Sector Working Groups, January 2019 – February 2020: <https://bit.ly/3vQW5cY> [Last retrieved on 16.02.2021]

Conclusions

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ The Republic of North Macedonia is **candidate country** for EU membership since 2004 and in 2020 was given the green light for start of accession negotiations.

- ✓ EU accession is the **most significant strategic goal** of RNM and all national policies and strategies are aligned with the country's EU integration.

- ✓ RNM's accession in the EU is organized on the basis of the **Stabilization and Association Agreement**, and pursuant to Copenhagen and Madrid criteria for EU membership.

- ✓ **National Programme for Adoption of the EU Acquis** (NPAA) is an important document that lays down guidelines, reforms, structure, resources and deadlines which RNM must fulfil in order to join the EU.

- ✓ **Secretariat for European Affairs** is the key actor among institutions in RNM, responsible to coordinate the overall EU integration process.

- ✓ **Parliament of RNM** plays an important role in EU integrations by adopting "EU-flagged" legislation.

- ✓ **National Council for EU Integrations** is the parliamentary body that provides direction for accession negotiations. It is comprised of MPs, representatives from the Government and the civil society, in broader terms.

- ✓ Accession negotiations are part and parcel of the EU integration process.

- ✓ RNM has established the **Accession Negotiations Structure** with adequate representation of all stakeholder institutions.

- ✓ The negotiating structure is comprised of several bodies: Negotiating Committee, Working Committee, State Delegation, Negotiating Group and Working Groups.

- ✓ The Chief Technical Negotiator leads accession negotiations between the Republic of North Macedonia and the European Union at technical level, for all chapters.

- ✓ In 2019, the European Commission proposed a **new methodology** for accession negotiations that grouped all 35 chapters into 6 clusters.

- ✓ The new methodology is expected to inject **new dynamism to the process, greater political will, focus on the fundamentals and better predictability of processes.**

- ✓ The Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society submitted **proposed model for civil society participation in accession negotiations** through direct participation of civil society representatives in working groups.

- ✓ CSOs need to be actively involved in work of the **Parliament of RNM** related to EU integrations.

- ✓ **Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance – IPA** is the EU's financial assistance awarded to candidate countries to achieve their EU accession agenda and implement necessary reforms.

- ✓ **IPA I** covered the period **2007-2013** and was organized into 5 components.

- ✓ **IPA II** covered the period **2014-2020** and was organized into 8 sectors.

- ✓ **IPA III** covers the period **2021-2027** and proposes 5 windows.

- ✓ IPA II introduced the **sector-wide approach** for better programming and monitoring of IPA projects, in order to ensure better coordination within sectors covered under IPA.

- ✓ At national level, the sector-wide approach resulted in establishment of **12 sector working groups** that serve as interinstitutional coordination bodies. In addition to relevant ministries, SWGs also include donors and civil society organizations with expertise in the relevant areas.

- ✓ CSOs are eligible **beneficiaries of IPA** and other EU programmes.

- ✓ IPA includes a programme intended for civil society development, i.e. **Civil Society Facility**.

STEP BY STEP: WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

CSOs are needed in the process

- 1 RNM is a relatively small country, with limited resources for leading the EU integration process. Therefore, any involvement of experts, the academia and civil society in that process is of particular importance. In the capacity of civil society actors, CSOs can contribute with their expertise and experience in all sectors covered by the process.

Get informed

- 2 The first step is to get informed about the EU negotiations process and sector policies in your area of operation. Regularly follow information published on official websites of the Government, SEA and the Parliament of RNM. Enter your contact data in SEA's civil society database to receive regular notifications on developments. The website "EU Dialogue" contains all information pertaining to the EU integration process and offers quality literature and analyses on these topics.

Find your institutional collocutor

- 3 The overall system of SAA bodies, accession negotiations and IPA might appear complex. There is no need to know all bodies and sub-bodies in great details. What is important is to be aware of policies at "your" ministry, i.e. actors that are important for implementation of policies in the sector where you operate. That is where you will be able to get the most relevant information on policies and actions in your area of operation.

Communicate with your representative

4

The negotiating structure and the system of EU integrations anticipate an adequate role for civil society organizations. A number of CSOs are already part of bodies responsible for developing European policies. Find the civil society representative in your area of operation. Get information directly from them, but do not forget to share your views, which they can later present before relevant institutions. Only through consultation, dialogue and cooperation, the civil society is able to be adequately represented in these bodies.

Engage in responsible spending of EU funds

5

EU integrations are financially supported by different programmes where civil society organizations are important actors. By means of successful implementation of EU projects, you directly contribute to societal change and RNM's approximation to the EU. Do not forget that these programmes are financed from the EU budget, with participation of EU citizens. By engaging in responsible spending of "EU money", you help in strengthening the trust and improving the country's capacity for absorption and management of EU funds.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Official website of SEA:

www.sep.gov.mk

Official website of the Parliament of RNM:

www.sobranie.mk

Website of the project "EU Dialogue":

<https://dijalogkoneu.mk>

Mechanisms for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making

The Government of RNM's 2018-2020 Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society⁵⁰ states that "development of the civil society holds exceptional importance for democratic values in any country and for encouraging civic engagement". The first Strategy on Government's Cooperation with the Civil Society (2007-2011) was adopted in 2007, followed by the second strategy that covered the period 2012-2017. These key documents determine the principles and values of cooperation between institutions and civil society organizations as important actors in the society. The overall goal is to respect the basic values of cooperation: mutual trust, partnership, independence, pluralism, participation, transparency, equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

The Government of RNM's 2018-2020 Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society recognizes the role of civil society organizations as check-and-balance mechanism in policy making, partner to the state and **driving force of EU integrations**. One of the three strategic goals is: democratization, active participation of the civil society in societal process and in policy making and monitoring, with special focus on EU integrations. The Government of RNM is committed to regularly consult with and involve CSOs in all stages of policy making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The Strategy enlists possibilities for cooperation with the civil society cooperation under different mechanisms: in addition to civil society participation in sector working groups and developing of negotiating positions, CSOs should also be involved in processes related to development and adoption of policies pertaining to EU integrations.

Also, the Code of Good Practices for Civil Society Participation in Policy-Making⁵¹ underlines that cooperation between civil society organizations and institutions can be pursued at four levels: information, consultation, dialogue and partnership. Cooperation can take place in all stages of the policy process: setting priorities, drafting laws, monitoring action plans, and implementation.

Large portion of laws and policies in RNM are adopted with the so-called "EU flag", meaning they are laws from the National Programme for Adoption of the EU Acquis (NPAA) intended for alignment of national legislation with the EU acquis. Participation of civil society organizations in policy making is of particular importance and through these processes civil society organizations take part in EU integrations.

50 Strategy of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society 2018-2020: <https://bit.ly/3sVnUil> [Last retrieved on 11.03.2021]

51 Code of Good Practices for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making: <https://bit.ly/3mos8wB> [Last retrieved on 11.03.2021]

Regulatory Impact Assessment and ENER

Assessment on civil society participation:

3

Consultation

Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is a process for adoption of quality regulations that will have positive impact on the life of citizens, will cut down unnecessary administrative costs and will improve competitiveness of the Macedonian economy. RIA was first introduced in 2009 and this process was updated in 2013.

The methodology for regulatory impact assessment⁵² stresses that promoting the quality of regulations contributes to respect of the basic principles of good governance: 1) transparency and openness: through involvement of all stakeholders in the process; 2) effectiveness and efficiency: finding solutions that attain the goals at lowest cost; and 3) alignment with the EU legislation.

Furthermore, the methodology stresses that RIA is of particular importance for the EU accession process, especially in respect to alignment of national legislation with the EU acquis. Namely, by means of thorough analysis of EU legislative acts and adequate transposition into the Macedonian legislation, RIA serves as tool to determine impact of adopted legislation. This process will be crucial when RNM joins the EU and, at the moment, allows the country to build its national positions in the negotiating process. RIA implies involvement of stakeholders that could contribute to advanced quality of regulations.

One of the basic tools for stakeholder participation in policy making and regulatory impact assessment, especially of civil society organizations, is the Single Electronic Register of National Legislation (ENER).

ENER is an electronic system that contains all regulations in effect, proposed laws and other types of documents, such as: strategies, action plans of ministries in development stage, RIA reports, clean copies of laws, etc. ENER is also a tool that allows citizens, business community, educational institutions, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to receive first-hand information, as well as to submit proposals, opinions and remarks on draft laws and other policy documents. It is important to note that ENER allows citizens and civil society organizations to submit their comments and initiatives.⁵³ Most certainly, ENER has certain limitations. Proposed laws are available for review for a limited time period of 20 days, while submission of comments is not allowed for proposed laws being adopted in fast-tracked procedure.

⁵² Methodology for Regulatory Impact Assessment: <https://bit.ly/31UdfIS> [Last retrieved on 13.03.2021]

⁵³ What is ENER?: <https://bit.ly/39NOSAS> [Last retrieved on 11.03.2021]

Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society

Assessment on civil society participation:

5

Partnership

The Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society (the Council) is an advisory body to the Government, tasked with promoting cooperation, dialogue and support to civil society development in RNM.

The decision on establishment of the Council was taken in 2017⁵⁴, and enlists following roles:

- ✓ to monitor implementation of the Strategy on the Government's Cooperation with the Civil Society and the Strategy's Action Plan;
- ✓ to encourage promotion of cooperation and partnership relations between the government and state administration bodies with the civil society;
- ✓ to monitor and analyse policies related to and/affecting the civil society;
- ✓ to issue opinions on proposed laws, strategies, programs and other legal acts related to or affecting civil society development and operation;
- ✓ to make proposals in planning areas of and setting priorities for funding activities of civil society organizations from the Budget of RNM;
- ✓ other issues falling within its competences.

The Council is comprised of 31 members, of which 15 are representatives from state institutions and 16 are representatives from civil society organizations. All members have a term of office in duration of three years.

Representatives from state institutions are appointed by the Government, from the ranks of public administration employees and on the proposal from:

- Ministry of Interior;
- Ministry of Justice;
- Ministry of Finance;
- Ministry of Economy;
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy;
- Ministry of Health;
- Ministry of Education and Science;
- Ministry of Labour and Social Policy;

⁵⁴ Decision on establishment of the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society: [Last retrieved on 11.03.2021]

- Ministry of Local Self-Government;
- Ministry of Culture;
- Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning;
- Ministry of Information Society and Administration;
- Secretariat for European Affairs;
- Secretariat for Implementation of the Framework Agreement;
- Agency for Youth and Sport.

Civil society representatives are selected on an open call, by civil society organizations registered in RNM. Selected representatives are profiled in one of following policy areas:

- civil society development;
- democracy and the rule of law;
- promotion and protection of human rights and non-discrimination;
- economic and sustainable development;
- science, education and life-long learning;
- youth;
- social protection and child protection;
- protection of marginalized persons;
- gender equality;
- health protection;
- agriculture and rural development;
- culture;
- media and information society;
- environmental protection;
- sport;
- EU integration and policies.

Detailed information about the Council (members, decisions, minutes) is available on the website of the Department for Cooperation with CSOs. In addition, video recordings from the Council's sessions are available on the website of the project "EU Dialogue". Civil society representatives in the Council are responsible to regularly communicate, consult with and report to civil society organizations about recent developments within the Council.

Open Government Partnership

Open Government Partnership (OGP) is an international initiative to increase transparency and access to information, fight against corruption, and enhance good governance by utilizing the power of technology and innovation. OGP was formed in 2011 as an initiative of 8 countries and today it has 78 participant countries and large number of local authorities. OGP is a platform for cooperation between states and civil society organizations as equitable partners. It is based on the idea that open governance is more open, accessible to citizens and improves relations between citizens and their governments in the long term.⁵⁵ According to OGP methodology, the governments, civil society organizations and local authorities jointly create action plans and specific steps, i.e. commitments.

RNM joined OGP in 2011, and has since adopted four two-year Action Plans in 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018. OGP action plans are adopted in consultation with citizens and civil society organizations. Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA) is the institution responsible for the OGP process. OGP Council was formed as advisory body, tasked to coordinate and monitor the process in all stages: from planning to implementation.⁵⁶ OGP Council is comprised of representatives from state institutions and civil society organizations.

There are 7 working groups under OGP: 1) access to information; 2) integrity and good governance; 3) fiscal transparency; 4) open data; 5) local transparency; 6) access to justice; 7) climate change.

CSO Network for Open Government Partnership was established in the wake of developing the OGP Action Plan for the period 2021-2023. It is a matter of an informal network, with clear internal structure. This network aims to coordinate and enhance the voice of civil society organizations advocating for participation, openness and accountability of governments.⁵⁷ OGP implementation is monitored through the so-called Independent Review Mechanism, where interested parties can follow progress in delivery of commitments assumed and can plan the next steps.

OGP provides an opportunity for civil society organizations, together with institutions, to jointly create open government commitments, determine priority areas, participate in implementation of action plans and assess performance.

55 Open Government Partnership: www.opengovpartnership.org [Last retrieved on 11.03.2021]

56 OGP Council: <https://bit.ly/3fJDSZn> [Last retrieved on 11.03.2021]

57 CSO Network on Open Government Partnership: <https://bit.ly/3cUQTgX> [Last retrieved on 11.03.2021]

Conclusions

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ Civil society development is of exceptional importance for **democratic values** in any country and for encouraging civic engagement.

Government of RNM's 2018-2020 Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society recognizes civil society organizations as check-and-balance mechanism for policies, partner to the state and **driving force of EU integrations**.

- ✓ Code of Good Practices for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making underlines that cooperation between civil society organizations and institutions can be pursued at four level: **information, consultation, dialogue and partnership**.

- ✓ Cooperation can take place in **all stages of the policy process**: setting priorities, drafting laws, monitoring action plans and implementing legislation.

- ✓ **Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)** is a process of adopting quality regulations that will have positive impact on the life of citizens, will cut down unnecessary administrative costs and will improve competitiveness of the Macedonian economy.

- ✓ RIA is of particular importance in the EU accession process, especially in respect to aligning national legislation with the EU acquis.

- ✓ **Single Electronic Register of National Legislation (ENER)** is one of the basic tools for civil society participation in policy development.

- ✓ **Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society** is an advisory body to the Government, responsible to promote cooperation, dialogue and support to civil society development in RNM.

- ✓ Council for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society has a particular role in EU integrations.

- ✓ **Open Government Partnership (OGP)** is an international initiative to increase transparency and access to information, fight against corruption and enhance good governance by utilizing the power of technology and innovation.

- ✓ OGP provides an opportunity for civil society organizations, together with institutions, to jointly create open government commitments, determine priority areas, participate in implementation of action plans and assess performance.

- ✓ **CSO networks** provide an excellent opportunity for organized support to EU integrations.
- ✓ Networks inform their members on EU integrations, conduct research analyses and draft policy briefs on EU issues, exchange expertise on issues relevant for EU integrations, etc.
- ✓ Networks provide concentration of expertise in particular policy area, while also ensuring representativeness. Hence, they serve as advocacy and lobbying bodies for the interests of civil society organizations.

STEP BY STEP: WHERE TO START?

1 **Get informed** about all processes – the first and basic step in policy development is information. Therefore, the civil society needs to be informed about institutions, developments and participation tools available.

- Leave your contact information with all relevant institutions (Department for Cooperation with CSOs, SEA, MISA), networks and project (EU Dialogue, CIVICA, CSRC, TACSO, etc.), in order to receive timely information.
- Subscribe to newsletters of these institutions and projects.
- Follow them on the social media.

2 **Take part in consultations** – all institutions, networks and projects do not only inform, but also consult civil society organizations about their views and opinions!

- In the capacity of CSO, register to all available platforms and forums where you can raise initiatives, present problems or propose solutions.
- Do not use ENER's platform only to get informed, but also to comment and debate current issues.
- Take part in surveys and focus groups: although it might seem an insignificant contribution, exactly these tools provide a clear image of needs and possible solutions.
- Take part in working groups and other bodies where you can share your experience and expertise.

3 **Make decisions** – mechanisms are in place where civil society organizations are equitable decision makers!

- Be part of mechanisms where civil society organizations can share their opinion and take decisions: Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society, OGP Council, etc.
- Nominate and vote for your representative in the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society, maintain regular contacts with them for information and advocacy.
- Apply for participation in the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society where you can represent other organizations.

4

Network: two can always do more than one, the strength lies in networking!

- Get informed about existing networks and reconsider possibilities to join such networks.
- Reconsider establishment of network with your partners or same-minded associates.
- Search for networks at regional and at EU level that would be interesting for topics covered by your organization and reconsider possibilities to join them.

5

Be prepared for dialogue! In the capacity of civil society representatives, make sure you are prepared when joining any dialogue! Institutions at national and local level seek partners; they need information, ideas and supporters. Policy development is a long process of adjustment, learning and partnership. Participation in policy development is the only way to guarantee sustainable development that yields long-term results. That is why participatory processes and stakeholder involvement therein is needed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Official website of ENER:

<https://ener.gov.mk>

Official website of the project "Government Mirror":

www.ogledalonavladata.mk

Official website of the General Secretariat's Department for Cooperation with CSOs

www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk

Official website of the Open Government Partnership:

<https://ovp.gov.mk>

Official website of the project "EU Dialogue":

<https://dijalogkoneu.mk>

Official website of the project "Civica Mobilitas":

<https://civicamobilitas.mk>

Official website of the project TACSO:

<https://tacso.eu>

EU and the Western Balkans

The European Union emphasized the interest for the Western Balkan countries to become members back in 2003, at the Thessaloniki Summit. EU integration of the Western Balkans is in the interest of the Union from political, security and economic aspects. Regional cooperation among the Western Balkan countries is important for stability in the region, improving good-neighbourly relations and reconciliation, as precondition for fight against nationalism, intolerance, and for establishing political dialogue.

EU's interest in the Western Balkan region was confirmed in 2018 by the European Commission. Namely, EC's document "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans"⁵⁸ stresses that the enlargement policy is an investment in the Union's security, economic prosperity and the ability to protect its citizens. Except for support to the rule of law, fundamentals and good-neighbourly relations, the European Union also underlines the importance of socio-economic development and initiatives for support to economic connection in the region.

In 2020, the European Commission again shifted the focus on EU enlargement in its document "Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans".⁵⁹ In this document, it refers to the importance of merit-based and equitable EU membership as a geopolitical investment. Actually, the EC proposed new dynamism to this process by greater involvement of all actors, greater accountability, transparency and participation of all parties in the process. This political commitment was confirmed with the decision for North Macedonia and Albania to start accession negotiations.⁶⁰

The EU demonstrates its political commitment to the Balkan under the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans.⁶¹ This document underlines the need for investment in the Western Balkan region to stimulate long-term recovery from the COVID-19 crisis by means of green and digital transformation, leading to sustainable economic growth. Together with IPA III, the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans anticipates 9 billion euros for inclusive and sustainable growth that combines the EU green and digital agendas. This plan finances projects for sustainable transport, renewable energy, support to the private sector and investment in human capital.

Regional cooperation in the Western Balkans allows economic, social and political connections among countries in the region for faster and easier integration in the EU. It is a matter of multi-stakeholder process that involves different economic, political and social actors. CSOs play an important role in these processes.

58 A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans: <https://bit.ly/3mqrWNx> [Last retrieved on 13.03.2021]

59 Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans: <https://bit.ly/2R-b0iam> [Last retrieved on 13.03.2021]

60 Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process – Council Decisions on Albania and North Macedonia: <https://bit.ly/3tHaNRH> [Last retrieved on 14.05.2021]

61 Commission Communication "An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans": <https://bit.ly/3cZKxNn> [Last retrieved on 14.05.2021]

Berlin Process

Berlin Process is an initiative aimed at stepping up cooperation with the Western Balkans to assist EU integration of countries in the region. It was launched in 2014, on the initiative from Germany.⁶²

The Berlin Process aims to encourage cooperation among six countries in the Western Balkan: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. Support to peace and reconciliation, resolution of bilateral issues and regional economic cooperation is expected to allow these countries to jointly and more easily lead their respective processes for EU integration.

The process takes place at three levels: social dimension, economic dimension and political dimension. The Berlin Process enhanced intergovernmental cooperation among the six countries. Three structures are established: Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), Western Balkans Chambers Investment Forum (WBCIF) and Western Balkans Fund (WBF). As part of the Berlin Process, annual meetings are organized at the level of heads of government from the Western Balkans and EU member-states, and EU officials. The process is supported by Germany, France, Austria, Italy, Slovenia and the United Kingdom.⁶³

CSOs are directly and indirectly involved in the Berlin Process through different formats.

CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

Civil Society Forum of the Western Balkans is a platform of think-thanks and civil society organizations that work on public policies in the region. The purpose of this forum is to contribute to the debate around issues of regional relevance, through exchange of experiences, direct messages to decision makers and engagement in public advocacy.⁶⁴ Civil Society Forum develops policy briefs and recommendations. It is comprised of six working groups on topics such as: the rule of law; security and migrations; socio-economic development; connectivity; digital agenda; and reconciliation and good-neighbourly relations. Participation in working groups is open to all think-thanks and civil society organizations from the Western Balkans. The process is financially supported by the European Fund for the Balkans.

62 Berlin Process: <https://bit.ly/3dCZPqI> [Last retrieved on 13.03.2021]

63 In 2018, annual meeting of the Berlin Process took place in London.

64 Civil Society Forum of the Western Balkans: <https://wb-csf.eu/about> [Last retrieved on 13.03.2021]

REGIONAL YOUTH COOPERATION OFFICE (RYCO)

The Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is an intergovernmental organization for promotion of peace and reconciliation among youth in the Western Balkans. It was established in 2016 during the Western Balkans Summit in Paris. Its head office is located in Albania, and has local offices in all other countries from the region. Among other goals, RYCO supports EU integration of the region by promoting the European spirit of cooperation, understanding and tolerance.

Decision-making structures at RYCO include representatives from governments of member countries and youth representatives. Youth representatives are often supported by civil society organizations from member countries and are experienced in civic activism. CSOs played an important role in establishment of RYCO through consultations, advocacy and participation in working groups for creation of this regional organization. RYCO provides direct support to the civil society, in particular to youth organizations from the region, by financing activities for regional cooperation. Together with schools, CSOs are the most frequent implementing entities of activities financed by RYCO. CSOs are entitled to nominate their representative in RYCO Governing Board and influence decisions at this regional office.

WESTERN BALKANS FUND

Western Balkans Fund (WBF) is an intergovernmental organization formed in 2015, with participation of countries from the region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia and Montenegro. It supports regional cooperation, cross-border cooperation and good-neighbourly relations through the so-called people-to-people exchange. WBF does not only provide financial support to civil society projects, but also serves as "bridge" between governmental bodies and civil society organizations.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Western Balkans Fund's Strategic Development Plan 2020-2024 <https://bit.ly/3utSHDu> [Last retrieved on 08.03.2021]

Regional Economic Area

One of the basic goals of regional cooperation is to strengthen economies in the Western Balkans through development of the Regional Economic Area. In 2017, at the Trieste Summit, the Western Balkan countries adopted the Multiannual Action Plan on Regional Economic Area (MAP REA). This multiannual document is coordinated by the Regional Cooperation Council and supported by the European Commission.⁶⁶

The Multiannual Action Plan on Regional Economic Area defines 4 priority areas:

- 1 **Trade** – aimed at establishing a form of joint single market without any barriers to trade exchange;
- 2 **Investment** – greater harmonization among regional investment policies;
- 3 **Mobility** – eliminating barriers to mobility of staff and mutual recognition of diplomas;
- 4 **Digital Integration** – development of digital infrastructure, internet safety and reduced roaming cost.

The Regional Economic Area and its Multiannual Action Plan play an important role in supporting the business sector and creating an enabling environment for private sector development. The Regional Cooperation Council is the key holder of this policy and is tasked with coordination and implementation of the Multiannual Action Plan. All six Western Balkan countries have established coordination mechanisms, i.e. national coordinators and contact points for the Multiannual Action Plan on Regional Economic Area. Every two years, RCC publishes the report in implementation track record under the Multiannual Action Plan.

CSOs are not mentioned in the Multiannual Action Plan Report. Although vast portion of activities concern policy areas in which civil society organizations are active and can have an active role (e.g. mobility, digitalization, etc.), at the moment, they are not identified as actors that could contribute to implementation and promotion of this process.

⁶⁶ Multiannual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans: <https://bit.ly/3umgxkm> [Last retrieved on 08.03.2021]

National Investment Committee (NIC)

Assessment on civil society participation:

1

No participation

Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) is a joint initiative of the EU, governments in the Western Balkans, financial institutions and bilateral donors, to support socio-economic development and EU integration of the Western Balkans through financial and technical support for strategic investments.⁶⁷ WBIF awards grants, loans and support to infrastructure investments in energy, environment, social issues, transport, digital sector, and private sector development.

National Investment Committee (NIC) is an advisory body that reconsiders strategic infrastructure projects in the Western Balkans. NIC ensures better planning of projects and priority-setting for allocation of funds for transport infrastructure and energy connectivity between RNM and other countries in the region under the Western Balkans Investment Framework. It was established in 2015 and is comprised of three parts: ministerial composition, technical working group, and working groups for programming funds in the sectors of transport, environment, energy and social policy.⁶⁸ CSOs have an opportunity to be indirectly involved in work of the National Investment Committee, through their representatives in working groups per sector. CSOs are not directly involved in work of this committee.

Under the new Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans adopted in October 2020, the European Commission anticipates financial support for economic development in the Western Balkans.⁶⁹ This plan prioritises interregional economic exchange and trade and better connectivity between Western Balkan economies and the EU. The focus is put on the EU's Green Deal and Digital Strategy and their implementation in this region. The Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans represents continuation of EU efforts in 2015, when the focus was put on the connectivity agenda, i.e. connectivity between the EU and the Western Balkans by improving transport and energy infrastructure in the region.⁷⁰

67 About WBIF: <https://bit.ly/3cX72m1> [Last retrieved on 08.03.2021]

68 First meeting held by NIC (SEA website): <https://bit.ly/3wyp59W> [Last retrieved on 08.03.2021]

69 An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans: <https://bit.ly/3cZKxNn> [Last retrieved on 08.03.2021]

70 EU Connectivity Agenda for the Western Balkans: <https://bit.ly/3dEovPc> [Last retrieved on 08.03.2021]

EU Integration Experiences from the Region

REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Serbia has started its negotiations for EU membership in 2014, with the screening process and opening of negotiating chapters taking place in 2015. Participation and engagement of CSOs in Serbia's EU negotiations depends on the context of their activity, i.e. limited possibilities for civil society development and low share of citizens supporting the EU integration process compared to other countries in the region. Hence, the purpose of civil society participation is to give greater legitimacy to this process, monitor government actions in respect to EU accession, inform the public about the process and utilize all resources in the country.

In Serbia, CSOs are not directly involved in the negotiating teams, in order to maintain their watchdog role. However, there are 3 parallel structures that express opinion in respect to negotiating positions. Biggest among them is the National Convention, comprised of 700 civil society organizations, grouped into 21 working groups on different topics. The National Convention holds plenary sessions attended by the Minister of European Integration. Then, there is the Coalition prEUgovor focused on chapters 23 and 24, and the Coalition 27, focused on chapter 27: environment.⁷¹

In 2014, the Republic of Serbia adopted the Guidelines for Involvement of Civil Society Organizations in the Adoption of Regulations. These guidelines anticipate civil society participation at four levels: information, consultation, participation and partnership, according to the following principles: active participation of civil society organizations in all stages of the process, mutual trust, transparency and accountability, effectiveness and efficiency.

REPUBLIC OF MONTENEGRO

Montenegro is a candidate country for EU membership since 2010 and started EU accession negotiations in 2012. Since then, it has opened all 33 chapters, but only 3 of them are partially closed. CSOs in Montenegro are directly involved in the negotiating process, i.e. each negotiating group has one member from the ranks of civil society. Advantages from direct participation of civil society organizations in negotiating groups include: better access to information, greater transparency of the process, better planning of advocacy, etc.⁷² Although this model has many advantages, it also has challenges, such as: the need for transparency in selection of civil society representatives, the need for selection of experienced experts from the civil society, availability and publicity of documents, and limited influence on the final reports.

71 Accession Negotiations between Serbia and the EU: <https://bit.ly/3mnV5ZD> [Last retrieved on 08.03.2021]

72 Direct Participation of CSOs in Working Groups to Conduct Accession Negotiations with the EU: <https://bit.ly/3wuQZ6y> [Last retrieved on 08.03.2021]

Key Points

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ Western Balkan is comprised of six countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro.

- ✓ **Regional cooperation in the Western Balkans** enables economic, social and political connections among countries in the region, aimed at faster and easier integration in the EU.

- ✓ **Berlin Process** is an initiative for encouraging cooperation with the Western Balkans to support the EU integration of countries in the region. CSOs are directly or indirectly involved in the Berlin Process, under different forms of participation.

- ✓ **Civil Society Forum** is a platform of think-thanks and civil society organizations that work on policies relevant for the Western Balkan region.

- ✓ **Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)** is an intergovernmental organization for promotion of peace and reconciliation among youth in the Western Balkans.

- ✓ **Western Balkans Fund** is an intergovernmental organization formed in 2015 with participation of countries in the region. It provides financial support to civil society projects and represents a "bridge" between government bodies and civil society organizations.

- ✓ One of main goals under regional cooperation is to enhance economies in the Western Balkan countries through development of **Regional Economic Area**.

- ✓ **Western Balkans Investment Framework** is a joint initiative of the EU, governments from the Western Balkan countries, financial institutions and bilateral donors, to support socio-economic development and EU integration of the Western Balkans through financial and technical assistance for strategic investments.

STEP BY STEP: WHERE TO START?

- 1 | **Get informed** about the regional cooperation and developments in the Western Balkans.

- 2 | **Find** the regional actors, follow their activities and establish direct contact with them, when relevant.

- 3 | **Get informed** about your representative in RYCO.

- 4 | **Take part** in the Civil Society Forum when you can contribute to the regional debate.

5 | **Get informed** about regional economic cooperation.

6 | **Follow** work of the Regional Cooperation Council; their research papers provide a source of information on current state-of-affairs.

7 | **Build partnerships** with other organizations in the Western Balkan region. Joint actions yield more and better results.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Official website of the Berlin Process:

<https://berlinprocess.info>

Official website of the Civil Society Forum under the Berlin Process:

<https://wb-csf.eu>

Official website of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office:

www.rycowb.org

Official website of the Western Balkans Fund:

<http://westernbalkansfund.org>

Official website of the Western Balkans Investment Framework:

www.wbif.eu

Official website of the Regional Cooperation Council:

www.rcc.int

Instead of Conclusion

Numerous examples on importance of the civil society in policy development clearly indicate the need for designing mechanisms that ensure adequate involvement of the civil society in EU integrations. Instead of conclusion, this Guide provides an assessment of existing mechanisms for civil society participation, according to adapted participation levels from the Code of Good Practices for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making: **information, consultation, dialogue and partnership**. The category “**no information**” was added because some structures do not engage in information dissemination about their relevant processes, but also deny participation of civil society organizations and other actors.

Assessment score	Level	Definition (Code of Good Practices)	Method	Example
1	No participation	No information on processes and developments No participation of civil society organizations and other stakeholders		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National Investment Fund ■ SAA Council ■ Stabilization and Association Committee (SAC)
2	Information	Information provides the basis for further steps in stakeholder participation and cooperation	Information in the media Information on the website Presentations Live streaming Panel discussions TV shows/interviews E-newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CSO databases ■ Information to CSOs ■ Streaming sessions from the explanatory screening ■ Specially designed web-portals ■ Inviting CSOs to presentations and public events
3	Consultation	Consultations are a process which seeks expert contribution and opinion from stakeholders, primarily by state administration bodies	Surveys, questionnaires Focus groups Forums Interviews Epistolary consultations Public discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CSO consultations for the EU's Country Progress Report ■ CSO consultations for I PA programming ■ ENER

4	Dialogue	Dialogue emphasizes mutual commitment of involved parties to exchange of information and opinion	Round tables Meetings Workshops Shadow reports Participation in working groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ EESC Joint Consultative Committee ■ CSO participation in IPA sector working groups ■ CSO participation in IPA monitoring committees ■ EU National Convention ■ National Council for EU Integrations
5	Partnership	Partnership implies assuming joint commitments in all stages of cooperation by the government, state administration bodies and civil society organizations	Participation in committees Participation in councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society ■ Open Government Partnership: OGP Council, working groups, Independent Reporting Mechanism ■ CSO participation in negotiating teams

About the project

The project "CSO Dialogue – Platform for Structural Participation in EU Integrations" aims to facilitate meaningful and structured participation of the civil society that expresses the views of citizens, to impact key sector reforms in the EU accession process.

Project implementation started on 1 April 2019 and will end on 31 March 2022.

The project is focused on attainment of three objectives:

- 1 | Establish a platform that for structural participation of the civil society in consultations and decision-making related to the country's accession in the EU;
- 2 | Enhance formal consultation mechanisms with the civil society;
- 3 | Increase the civil society impact on the country's accession in the EU;

The project strives to increase the civil society impact on policies related to EU accession, by means of evidence-based policy creation, development of policy documents (shadow reports, policy briefs, position statements) in key sector and reform policies under the EU accession process.

Project activities

- designing a functional web-platform as central point for information dissemination to civil society organizations and institutions;
- conducting research to measure civil society involvement and participation;
- organizing events and public consultations;
- monitoring performance of sector working groups, by developing analyses and reports;
- designing visual charts on key conclusion from work of sector working groups, in order to improve information dissemination to citizens about this process;
- production of video materials, educational videos, tutorials and the like;
- drafting a declaration on transparency of the negotiating process;
- live-streaming meetings of the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society
- organizing annual conferences on the issue of civil society participation in sector policy development and implementation.

Implementation of project activities is primarily expected to increase the scope of available and relevant information for citizens about the EU accession process, but also to ensure better information dissemination and to increase capacity for civil society participation in policy development. Project activities will result in establishment of formal mechanism for civil society networking, greater transparency of institutions involved in the EU accession process, and active participation of the civil society in decision-making, thereby ensuring its greater impact on public policies.

Sources

INSTITUTIONAL WEBSITES

European Union:
<https://europa.eu>

European Commission:
<https://ec.europa.eu>

European Parliament:
www.europarl.europa.eu

European Economic and Social Committee:
www.eesc.europa.eu

Directorate-General on Enlargement:
https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/about/directorate-general_en

Secretariat for European Affairs:
www.sep.gov.mk

Parliament of RNM:
www.sobranie.mk

General Secretariat's Department for Cooperation with CSOs:
www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk

ENER:
<https://ener.gov.mk>

Open Government Partnership:
<https://ovp.gov.mk/>

OTHER WEBSITES

Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society:

<https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/81>

Project "EU Dialogue":

<https://dijalogkoneu.mk/>

Civil Society Forum of the Western Balkans:

<https://wb-csf.eu/>

Berlin Process:

<https://berlinprocess.info/about/>

Western Balkans Investment Fund:

www.wbif.eu/

Regional Cooperation Council:

www.rcc.int

Western Balkans Fund:

<http://westernbalkansfund.org>

DOCUMENTS

The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030

DG NEAR Strategic Plan 2020-2024

Shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe

Code of Good Practices for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making

Strategy of the Government of RM for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society 2018-2020

A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans

An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans

Methodology on Regulatory Impact Assessment

Institutional platform and principles guiding the Republic of Macedonia's negotiations for accession in the European Union

Proposed model for civil society participation in EU accession negotiations

OTHER SOURCES

EU accession process step by step, European Commission

Shadow Report from Monitoring Work and Effects of Sector Working Groups, January 2019 – February 2020, project “EU Dialogue”, 2021

- Accession Negotiations between Serbia and the EU: Involvement and Participation of CSOs, by Vladimir Medzak, PhD
- Direct Participation of CSOs in Working Groups to Conduct Accession Negotiations with the European Unions: The Curious Case of Montenegro, by Jovana Markovic
- Accession Negotiations Structure, by Andrea Stojkovski, M.Sc

Guide on the Republic of North Macedonia's Accession Negotiations, Eurothink, 2020

