

THROUGH
DIALOGUE



Civil Society Participation in National Policy Creation Related to EU Integrations of the Republic of North Macedonia



This project is financed
by the European Union



REACH-OR
research in action

Center for Civil Communications
Центар за граѓански комуникации



This edition of policy papers is developed to assist the civil society and citizens, in general, engage in an informed debate and have access to expert knowledge, views and opinions on topics of importance for EU integrations. Areas in which the Republic of North Macedonia will lead its EU accession negotiations are both complex and diverse, while reforms that need to be implemented will open many dilemmas that necessitate an expert debate. For more contents produced under the project “CSO Dialogue – Platform for Structural Participation in EU Integrations”, visit the website: www.dijalogkoneu.mk

- Author: MSci Aleksandra Dimovska
- This edition is available only in electronic format

Table of Content

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Regional Cooperation and CSOs in Montenegro, Serbia and Croatia	4
Chapter 2: Model of Cooperation between CSOs and Government Institutions at National Level	6
Cooperation Strategy	7
Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations	10
Recommendations for the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia	11
Recommendations for civil society organizations	12

Introduction

Development of the civil society is particularly important for democratic values in any country, and contributes to stimulation and enhancement of civic awareness. Its role and contribution to promotion and development of democratic culture at all levels of social life is an expression of the need for mutual cooperation with the government, in order to facilitate efficient response to challenges in the country.

Hence, it is particularly important to stimulate enhanced participation of the public and of civil society organizations in policy creation and implementation, but also participation in active monitoring of reform processes that directly contribute to democratization and Europeanization of the society on the path to full-fledged membership in the European Union.

A democratic society cannot be sustained without participation of citizens. The participatory democracy aims at creating an organized and dynamic society of active citizens who are encouraged to participate in the political scene through direct contribution in policy making. This is a crucial aspect that allows permanent and sustainable participation of citizens in the political process and contributes to open and transparent performance of the executive government.

Establishing dialogue and cooperation between government institutions and civil society organizations is an integral part of the EU-defined conditions for countries aspiring to join the Union.^[1]

The civil society's role in EU integrations is not formally regulated. The EU does not propose a model to be applied by aspiring countries in respect to civil society participation in the negotiating process, but it insists on openness, constructive dialogue and multitude of communication channels. In that, the EU does not affect the model of civil society participation, but rather the intensity and quality thereof. More specifically, Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty^[2] clearly defines importance assigned to involvement of civil society organizations in policy creation and adoption, especially those related to EU integrations. This encourages key actors in countries aspiring to join the EU to enhance and promote such dialogue as much as possible, while also strengthening democratic capacity of government institutions.^[3]

Therefore, while civil society organizations are mainly viewed through the prism of their primary role, i.e. as mechanism of checks and balance, including their watchdog role, it is necessary for government institutions to also acknowledge them as partners that make positive contribution in bringing the country closer to EU membership.^[4]

Without adequate, timely access to information about the country's negotiating positions and the content of progress benchmarks under the EU accession process, i.e. information on national positions for key EU acts that affect the life of citizens in the post-accession period, it is difficult to speak about an enabling environment for dialogue between the government and civil society.^[5]

Chapter 1: Regional Cooperation and CSOs in Montenegro, Serbia and Croatia

Analysis of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans: Montenegro, Serbia and Croatia

Relying on positive experiences, good practices and lessons learned in any area is of great importance for quality and timely implementation of relevant policies. In this specific case, and having in mind that countries in the region share a strong commitment to EU integration (North Macedonia and Albania are waiting for date to start accession negotiations, Serbia and Montenegro are in advanced stage of accession negotiations, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are making efforts to obtain the status of candidate country, while Croatia, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria are already full-fledged members), cross-border cooperation in this area is an invaluable asset for attainment of defined goals. In that, exchanged experiences and data will be applied upon previous adjustment to specificities of each country.

Cooperation in this field should be pursued among counterpart institutions from countries in the region, as well as through cooperation with competent institutions at the EU level.

[1] European Commission, 2021 Progress Report for North Macedonia. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/north-macedonia-report-2021_en

[2] Official Journal of the European Union, Treaty of Lisbon. URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12007L/TXT&from=EN>

[3] Marovic, Stefanovski and Ivanovik, "Comparative Study – Civil Society in the Western Balkans - Monitoring EU Accession Negotiations – From Initiatives to Dialogue Built", April 2019. URL: <http://www.centaronline.org/userfiles/files/publikacije/komparativna-studija-civilno-drustvo-zapadnog-balkana.pdf>

[4] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Government's Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society 2018-2020. URL: https://www.nvodorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/Strategija%202018%20-%202020%20usvoena%209%2010%202018_0.pdf

[5] Center for Democracy and Human Rights – CEDEM, "Comparative Analysis of Cooperation Experiences between Civil Society and State Institutions and Bodies in EU Integrations of Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia", March 2020. URL: https://www.cedem.me/images/Uporедна_анализа_искустава_сарађење_цивилног_сектора_и_др%25Еавних_институција_и_тјела_у_процесу_европске_интеграције_у_Србији_Гори_Хрватској_и_Србији-compressed.pdf

The Western Balkans have different approach to dialogue and cooperation with their respective civil society organizations. In that, creation of possibilities for participation of civil society organizations in working groups per negotiating chapter intensifies the dialogue, while the civil society's recommendations, proposals and/or criticism contribute to actual dialogue between the government and civil society representatives.[6]

Berlin Process is an initiative aimed at stepping up cooperation with the Western Balkans to assist EU integration of countries in the region. CSOs are both directly and indirectly involved in the Berlin Process[7] through several mechanisms, including the Civil Society Forum,[8] the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYKO)[9] and the Western Balkans Fund (WBF).[10]

The Regional Cooperation Council promotes mutual cooperation and Euro-Atlantic integration of Southeast European countries in respect to stimulating development of the region and wellbeing of its citizens. RCC also operates as forum for permanent presence of the international community engaged in the region. Its key role is creation and coordination of developmental policies and creation of political climate that facilitates overall economic and social progress in Southeast Europe. The Council's work is focused on priority areas such as: economic and social development, infrastructure and energy, justice and home affairs, cooperation in the area of security, human capacity building and parliamentary cooperation.[11]

Civil society participation in the negotiating structures for EU accession in Montenegro, Serbia and Croatia

Formal involvement of the civil society in the region varies from one to another country. Taking Serbia and Montenegro as, **Montenegro** is the only country where civil society organizations are directly involved in EU negotiations, i.e. each negotiating group includes one member from the ranks of civil society. Advantages from allowing direct participation of civil society organizations in negotiating groups includes better access to information, greater transparency of the process, better advocacy planning, etc. While EU negotiating structure in Montenegro has numerous advantages, it also faces many challenges, especially in respect to implementation, including transparency of the process for selection of civil society organizations, the need for selection of adequate civil society experts and lack of full access to information disposed by working groups, such as reports from expert missions, EC opinions on key legislation, etc.[12][13]

Although civil society participation is institutionalized and enabled, their role in accession negotiations is limited due to restricted access to information and lack of sufficient funding. Moreover, parallelism within the negotiating structure of Montenegro further decreases the role played by civil society actors.[14]

Participation of civil society organizations in **Serbia's** EU accession negotiations is not fully institutionalized like in the case of Montenegro, mainly for the purpose of maintaining their role as watchdog. CSOs in Serbia are not involved in working groups, but their participation is determined through membership and participation in work of the National Convention for the European Union (NCEU). NCEU is a collective body coordinated by the European Movement in Serbia, which provides a platform for consultations between the Serbian government and civil society. In spite of the fact that they are not part of institutional structures, NCEU has a role in the decision-making related to Serbia's negotiating positions. In practice, CSOs in Serbia are facing several challenges in the accession process. It could be concluded that the civil society has a rather consultative than central role in decision-making despite the fact that NCEU is a key partner in the EU negotiations process. Hence, the model in Serbia implies insufficient contribution by civil society organizations.[15] [16]

[6] Ibid

[7] Berlin Process. URL: <https://berlinprocess.info/about/>

[8] Western Balkans Civil Society Forum. URL: <https://wb-csf.eu/about>

[9] Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). URL: www.rycowb.org

[10] Western Balkans Fund, URL: <http://westernbalkansfund.org>

[11] Regional Cooperation Council. URL: https://www.rcc.int/download/pubs/RCC-factsheet-mk-A4_web.pdf/230bf484c0df406823c9626c89b553ec

[12] Foundation Open Society – Macedonia. "Guide on Institutional Mechanisms for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making Related to EU Integrations", August 2021. URL: <https://bit.ly/3B3HQoa>

[13] Nikolovski, Ivan, "Macedonian Model for Civil Society Participation in Accession Negotiations", September 2018. URL: https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/web_A5_CSOSMKD.pdf

[14] Ibid

[15] Ibid

[16] Foundation Open Society – Macedonia. "Guide on Institutional Mechanisms for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making Related to EU Integrations", August 2021. URL: <https://bit.ly/3szzXTv>

Croatia had a rather open and inclusive negotiating structure. It included working groups for negotiation preparations under individual chapters, i.e. *acquis communautaire*.^[17] A key value from the Croatian experience with EU negotiations is the open and inclusive approach applied by the negotiating structure, whereby the working groups were comprised of representatives from state administration bodies, including the Mission of the Republic of Croatia to the European Communities, representatives from the academia, economic and social partners, civil society, professional associations, businesses and other professionals.^[18]

Partnership between civil society and the European Union

Civil society is a very important partner to the EU in its foreign relations policy. Also, the Union considers civil society organizations an important partner in its enlargement and integration process. Building a strong civil society is an indicator of functional democracy, and is enlisted among key criteria for membership in the Union.^[19] On that account, the EU insists on building close cooperation with CSOs in candidate countries and supports their involvement in policy making.

When adopting new legislation or developing policies, the European Commission holds regular consultations with several stakeholders, including civil society organizations, as well as local authorities and industry representatives.^[20]

Building the national accession strategy anticipates instruments that should help the candidate country fulfil the accession criteria (i.e. the Copenhagen criteria). One of them concerns active dialogue with the civil society, i.e. involvement of the civil society from the candidate country and from Union member-states.^[21] The Union supports involvement of civil society organizations in development and implementation of EU policies in different ways, including wide consultations during development of policies and laws, sharing opinions with the EC under the instrument called “Have Your Say”^[22] by citizens, business community and other actors, during all steps of policy development, advocacy and lobbying in Brussels, implementation and participation in EU policies through the principle of partnership, participation in European networks, Conference for the Future of Europe, and the European Civic Initiative.^[23]

Chapter 2: Model of Cooperation between CSOs and Government Institutions at National Level

In the case of North Macedonia, which is a candidate country for EU membership since 2005, accession in the EU is the most important strategic goal. Therefore, development of all policies and strategies is in line with and aimed at EU integration. While EU accession is viewed as institutional and political process, it is accompanied by important societal and cultural changes. Hence, the EU integration process should be open and inclusive and, in addition to state institutions, it should also include other social actors, such as civil society organizations, scientific, educational and cultural institutions, and the media.

CSOs play an important role in the EU accession process. They promote the European values before citizens, underline the benefits from EU membership and, through cooperation with other civil society organizations in the EU, help the overall EU integration process. Moreover, CSOs hold expertise and capacity to contribute to North Macedonia’s accession in the EU. The Union regularly emphasizes importance of the civil society as key element of any democratic system, with an important role in policy creation and adoption.

The Government of North Macedonia takes measures for building continuous, transparent and fully inclusive dialogue with the civil society, treating them as equitable partners and corrective of governmental decisions, with full-fledged right for participation in policy creation, and for provision of suggestions and criticism.^[24]

In 2007, the Government of North Macedonia adopted the first Strategy on the Government’s Cooperation with Civil Society Organizations and Action Plan 2007-2011. In this document, the Government emphasized importance of the civil society, laid the foundations for cooperation with civil society organization

[17] Belgrade Open School. “Negotiating Structure in Croatia”. URL: <https://eupregovori.bos.rs/pregovaracka-struktura-hrvatske.html>

[18] Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia. “Decision on formation of the negotiating structure for the Republic of Croatia’s accession in the European Union”. URL: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2005_04_49_950.html

[19] Perez-Solorzano, Nieves. “The Search for Europe: Contrasting Approaches”, 2015. URL: <https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/articles/civil-society-and-eu-enlargement/>

[20] Foundation Open Society – Macedonia. “Guide on Institutional Mechanisms for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making Related to EU Integrations”, August 2021. URL: <https://bit.ly/3szzXTv>

[21] Secretariat for European Affairs. “EU Accession Negotiations”, January 2009. URL: <https://www.sep.gov.mk/data/file/Publikacii/pregovori-za-clenstvo.pdf>

[22] European Commission, “Have your say”. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say_en

[23] Foundation Open Society – Macedonia. “Guide on Institutional Mechanisms for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making Related to EU Integrations”, August 2021. URL: <https://bit.ly/3szzXTv>

[24] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Government’s Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society 2018-2020. URL: https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/Strategija%202018%20-%202020%20usvoena%209%2010%202018_0.pdf

and committed to provide an enabling environment by means of systemic improvements to general conditions for faster and more efficient development of the civil society. In 2012, affirming the civil society's contribution and its important role in social development, encouraging democratization and inclusivity, the second Strategy on the Government's Cooperation with Civil Society Organizations 2012-2017 was adopted.

Cooperation Strategy

Strategy of the Government of North Macedonia for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society 2018-2020[25] reflects on previously achieved results, but also provides a framework for future activities that will contribute to enhanced cooperation with and development of the civil society as check-and-balance mechanism to state policies, partner of the state, and driving force of EU integration. One of three priority areas concerns democratization, active civil society participation in policy creation and monitoring, with special focus on EU integrations.[26] [27]

Recently, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia published the Draft Strategy on Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society and Action Plan 2021-2024. Its main goal is to provide sustainable basis for civil society operation and development, whereby civil society organizations operate independently and dynamically, contributing to enhanced democratic governance, reflecting interests and needs of citizens, and participating in structural dialogue for promotion of the society.[28]

Holding regular consultations with civil society organizations is an additional confirmation that the EU integration process is equally important for the government and for other actors in the society, especially the civil society that has an important role in this process and can make great contribution by making effective proposals.[29]

The civil society's role in EU integrations was first recognized and encouraged in the Parliament's 2007 Resolution on North Macedonia's EU Accession Priorities.[30] By means of this resolution, the legislative house has committed to involvement of CSOs in all activities aimed at intensifying accession negotiations and recommended the government to utilize all potentials in the society.[31]

For a long string of years, civil society organizations are consulted in development of the National Programme for Adoption of the EU Acquis (NPA) and allocation of IPA funds. Moreover, civil society organizations are involved in work of certain bodies within the Government and the Parliament, with direct or indirect competences in respect to EU integrations, such as the National Council for European Integration, the Council for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society, the Council for Monitoring Implementation of the Strategy on Justice System Reform, the Council for Civic Oversight on Security Services, and working groups within individual ministries and IPA sector working groups. It is important to note that civil society organizations can also join work of all parliamentary bodies by attending public hearings.[32]

Council for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society is an advisory body to the government for promotion of cooperation, dialogue and development of the civil society in North Macedonia. Administrative and technical affairs on behalf of the Council are performed by the Department for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations within the Government's General Secretariat.[33]

[25] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Government's Strategy for Cooperation and Development of Civil Society 2018-2020. URL: https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/Strategija%202018%20-%202020%20usvoena%209%2010%202018_0.pdf

[26] Foundation Open Society – Macedonia. "Guide on Institutional Mechanisms for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making Related to EU Integrations", August 2021. URL: <https://bit.ly/3szzXTv>

[27] Ibid

[28] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Government's Draft Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society and Action Plan 2021-2024. URL: <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/Strategija%202022%2010%202021.pdf>

[29] Secretariat for European Affairs. "Thematic Consultations with Civil Society Representatives", "EU Integration Should Unite Us All", August 2017. URL: <https://www.sep.gov.mk/post/?id=2085#.yWn7PyORoOp>

[30] Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia. "Resolution on the Republic of Macedonia's Priorities for Accession in the European Union and for Opening Accession Negotiations", 2007. URL: https://www.sobranie.mk/WBStorage/Files/Rezolucija%202007_11_2007.pdf

[31] Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia. Parliament of RNM and European Parliament. URL: <https://www.sobranie.mk/sobranieto-i-eu.nspx>

[32] Nikolovski, Ivan. "Civil Society Organizations and North Macedonia's EU Integration: Towards Strategic Participation and Transparent Accession Negotiations", July 2020. URL: https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/web_A5_CSOSMKD.pdf

[33] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Council for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society. URL: <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/273>

The Council's work includes:

- monitoring and analysing public policies and policy-making processes that concern or affect the civil society;
- initiating amendments to existing regulations;
- promoting cooperation and building partnership relations between CSOs and the government;
- participating in development and monitoring implementation of the Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society and the Strategy's Action Plan;
- proposing priorities for funding activities of civil society organizations from the Budget of North Macedonia;
- other matters falling within its competences.

The Council is comprised of 31 members, of which 16 members are appointed on proposal from civil society organizations registered according to the Law on Associations and Foundations, by means of an open call, whereby each representative covers a particular area, including civil society development, democracy and the rule of law, promotion and protection of human rights and antidiscrimination, economic and sustainable development, and EU integration and policies.[34]

As part of the process for drafting relevant acts, led by the Secretariat for European Affairs, Cabinet of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Secretariat for Legislation and intended to regulate work and competences of bodies within the negotiating structure, the Council for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society prepared a **Draft Model for Participation of Civil Society Organizations in Accession Negotiations for EU Membership**,[35] which should contribute to regulation of work and competences for working groups that are part of the negotiating structure, and reflect civil society views in terms of its participation in EU accession negotiations.

Civil society participation in EU accession negotiations will cover several stages and participation methods:

01. CSOs will be involved in **monitoring the explanatory screening process** for the EU *acquis* per negotiating chapter, enabled by the Government through direct streaming of presentations made by EU institutions in the country and abroad.

02. CSOs will be involved in **working groups** on equitable basis with representatives from state institutions, state administration bodies, academic community, chambers of commerce and other expert public. They will participate in working groups at the level of negotiating chapters, areas and subareas mirroring the structure of the government's negotiating groups formed for EU accession negotiations, but also according to capacity of relevant organizations and experts selected by the Government's Council for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society. Tasks and duties defined for working groups include development of the National Programme for Adoption of the EU Acquis (NPAA) and development and submission of draft negotiating positions to relevant negotiating groups, chief political negotiator and chief technical negotiator for further action.[36]

03. Monitoring the process of EU accession negotiations with one civil society representative at the level of individual chapters, including the possibility to monitor negotiations by means of direct attendance.

04. Independent monitoring, depending on the expert field covered as part of their strategic goals, which will allow civil society organizations to implement activities aimed at ensuring independent external monitoring of the overall negotiating process based on their independent and expert assessment.

Department for NGO Cooperation at the Government's General Secretariat[37] was formed as a result of efforts made by the Government of North Macedonia to institutionalize cooperation, and promote, support and advance partnership relations with the civil society. This department is competent to monitor and coordinate implementation of the Government's Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil

[34] Dialogue to EU. Government's Council for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society. URL: <https://dijalogkoneu.mk/усо-дијалог/совет-за-соработка-со-граѓански-центар>

[35] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Proposed Model for Involvement of Civil Society Organizations in EU Accession Negotiations. URL: [https://nvorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/30.11.18%20Predlog-model%20za%20vklucuvanje%20na%20gragianske%20organizacii%20vo%20procesot%20na%20%20pregovo%20\(1\).pdf](https://nvorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/30.11.18%20Predlog-model%20za%20vklucuvanje%20na%20gragianske%20organizacii%20vo%20procesot%20na%20%20pregovo%20(1).pdf)

[36] Stojkovski, Andreja. "EU Negotiating Structure", 2021. URL: <https://dijalogkoneu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Структура-за-преговори-со-Европската-Унија.pdf>

[37] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Department for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations. URL: <https://www.nvorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1>

Society, care for advancing cooperation between the government and civil society, by involving CSOs in policy making and by creating an enabling environment for financial sustainability of the civil society, provide expert and administrative support for operation of the Council for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society, the commission for allocation of funds intended to finance programme activities of associations and foundations, and the commission for public benefit organizations.

The Government of North Macedonia recognizes the important role played by civil society organizations as partners in definition of EU integration policies and has committed to regular organization of consultations with and involvement of civil society organizations in all stages of policy creation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Also, it is anticipated for civil society organizations to be regularly invited to participate in processes for planning, programming and monitoring absorption of EU pre-accession assistance.[38]

The Code of Good Practices for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making[39] notes that cooperation between civil society organizations and institutions can take place at four levels: information, consultation, dialogue and partnership. Also, it notes that cooperation can be pursued in all stages of policy making, i.e. setting priorities, drafting laws, policy papers and strategies and action plans, and implementing laws.

North Macedonia's EU Negotiating Structure and Civil Society Participation in EU integrations

As regards civil society participation in EU accession negotiations, in 2018 the Government started the process for creation of the country's negotiating structure and the concept thereof was first presented by then-current chief political negotiator Bujar Osmani and then-current chief technical negotiator Bojan Marichikj, with formal publication of acts on the negotiating structure in 2019. In particular, the country's negotiating structure is established under seven decisions taken by the Government and published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia on 1 August 2019.

North Macedonia anticipates a negotiating structure similar to the structure in Montenegro, especially in regard to the part falling under government competences. Civil society participation is anticipated under Article 6 of the Decision on formation of working groups for development of the National Programme for Adoption of the EU Acquis and development of negotiating positions for EU accession.

The negotiating structure is comprised of several bodies, as follows:[40]

- 01.** Coordination Body for the EU Accession Process
- 02.** Rule of Law Council
- 03.** North Macedonia State Delegation for EU Accession Negotiations
- 04.** Negotiating Group
- 05.** Secretariat of the Negotiating Group
- 06.** Office of the Chief Technical Negotiator
- 07.** Working Groups for Negotiation Preparations

Civil society organizations are a very important factor in the negotiating process, but at the time when the negotiating structure was published, the model for their involvement was still under reconsideration and implied the dilemma whether they should be integrated in working groups or not, in order to be able to monitor the process.

As regards participation of civil society organizations in accession negotiations, it is anticipated for working groups to serve as bodies for broad consultations in the society. Hence, working groups provide a forum for inclusive and comprehensive dialogue in the society, because they are envisaged to include members from different groups of key actors, including representatives from state authorities, academic community, individual experts, but also civil society organizations. Broad involvement of societal factors ensures greater acceptance of national policies, as well as unity and inclusiveness of the overall process for joining the European Union.

[38] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Government's Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society 2018 - 2020. URL: https://www.nvlosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/Strategija%202018%20-%202020%20usvoena%209%2010%202018_0.pdf

[39] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Code of Good Practices for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making. URL: https://www.nvlosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/kodeks_na_dobri_praktiki.pdf

[40] Nikolovski, Ivan. "Macedonian Model for Involvement of Civil Society Organizations in Accession Negotiations", September 2018. URL: https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/web_A5_CSOSMKD.pdf

Although not referenced as formal part of the negotiating structure, the Parliament is also involved in the EU accession process through the National Council for European Integration (NCEI), which should provide opinions on negotiating positions defined by the Government. However, NCEI accepts only one civil society representative within its composition. Therefore, the impact of civil society organizations on the Council is disputable, especially knowing that NCEI members that are not MPs do not have voting rights and NCEI is a consultation body whose decisions are non-binding.[41]

On the other hand, the Commission for European Affairs (CEA) is a standing parliamentary body tasked to oversee the country's EU integrations. CEA monitors and provides opinions on alignment of national legislation with the EU *acquis*. However, on the account of insufficient involvement of civil society organizations in monitoring parliament work related to EU accession negotiations, this role needs to be enhanced by allowing direct involvement in parliamentary oversight.[42]

In particular, relevant compositions of NCEI and CEA need to be increased, by engaging more civil society representatives in their work, in order to strengthen the dialogue, but also the control over the EU accession process.

Moreover, regular consultations between the EU Delegation in Skopje and civil society organizations about North Macedonia's progress reports should continue.

Participation of civil society organizations in the EU accession process is very important. The established negotiating structure seems open for inclusion of actors that are not exclusive representatives of the state administration, but also representatives from civil society organizations. Nevertheless, the Government must organize and define the method for civil society participation in EU accession negotiations within its negotiating structure in more specific and more precise terms.

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Civil society is a key component of any democratic system and continues to be recognized as such by state institutions.[43] A strong and vibrant civil society is the bloodstream of any democracy.[44]

Regional cooperation among the Western Balkans allows economic, social and political relations among the countries, for the purpose of easier and faster integration in the European Union. Civil society organizations are a crucial component of this process.[45]

Development of the civil society is important for fostering and promoting democratic values in the country, and for encouraging civic awareness.[46]

Under the EU accession negotiations, civil society organizations and the government need to build mutual trust and cooperation for joint actions, especially in respect to anticipated reforms – this represents the essence of accession negotiations.

Upcoming activities for North Macedonia's EU integration and creation of European democratic society require greater engagement not only by the government, but also by the society as a whole, because this is a process to which each citizen should contribute.[47]

The Government of North Macedonia needs to remain committed to transparent, inclusive and sustainable cooperation with all political and societal actors in the country, and intensify efforts for EU accession negotiations to start as soon as possible.

[41] Ibid

[42] Nikolovski, Ivan. "Macedonian Model for Involvement of Civil Society Organizations in Accession Negotiations", September 2018. URL: https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/web_A5_CSOSMKD.pdf

[43] European Commission. 2021 Progress Report for North Macedonia. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/north-macedonia-report_2021_en

[44] EU Fundamental Rights Agency. "Pandemic Exacerbates Challenges Civil Society Faces", September 2021. URL: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2021/pandemic-exacerbates-challenges-civil-society-faces>

[45] Foundation Open Society – Macedonia. "Guide on Institutional Mechanisms for Civil Society Participation in Policy Making Related to EU Integrations", August 2021. URL: <https://bit.ly/3szzXTv>

[46] Ibid

[47] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, SEA – Strategic Plan 2019-2021. URL: https://www.sep.gov.mk/data/file/Dokumenti/strateski_19_21.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations based on relevant experiences from Montenegro, Serbia and Croatia that should be taken into consideration in work of civil society organizations, state institutions and other key factors in EU integrations[48] [49]

01

The model should be selected by means of consensus between government institutions and civil society organizations and should be upgraded in the course of accession negotiations;

Civil society should be involved in the overall process of EU accession negotiations;

02

03

Public figures should be involved in implementation of joint activities by civil society organizations and state institutions for promotion of EU integrations, by participating in conferences, panel discussions, workshops and visits to local communities;

Sector-wide communication and cooperation should be enhanced in the context of accession negotiations and implementation of IPA projects at sectoral and local level;

04

05

Due recognition and understanding is needed about the complexity and dynamics of accession negotiations, including involvement of all capacity available, with a view to enhance and complement analytical and expert capacity in the public administration.

General recommendations to be taken into account as helpful and applicable in development of the Macedonian approach to building the national strategy for EU accession

Recommendations for the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia

01

To regularly disseminate information for the broader public about current policies and novelties under the negotiating process, in order to maintain and promote public trust in EU integration policies;

To facilitate dialogue beyond political party lines, by involving representatives of all political parties, in order to ensure their engagement in the negotiating process;

02

03

To stimulate effective discussion and exchange of views among civil society representatives, state administration, expert public, academic community and the media, and networking of experts for relevant EU policies under the accession negotiations process;

[48] Center for Democracy and Human Rights – CEDEM, “Comparative Analysis of Cooperation Experiences between Civil Society and State Institutions and Bodies in EU Integrations of Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia”, March 2020. URL:

https://www.cedem.me/images/Uporedna_analiza_iskustava_saradnje_civilnog_sektora_i_dr%C5%BEavnih_institucija_i_tijela_u_procesu_evropske_integracije_u_Crnoj_Gori_Hrvatskoj_i_Srbiji-compressed.pdf

[49] Marovic, Stefanovski and Ivanovic, “Comparative Study – Civil Society in the Western Balkans – Monitoring Accession Negotiations and EU Integrations – From Initiatives to Dialogue Built”. April 2019. URL: <http://www.centaronline.org/userfiles/files/publikacije/komparativna-studija-civilno-drustvo-zapadnog-balkana.pdf>

04

To conduct an intra-institutional analysis on available expert resources at state institutions and organize a transparent public call for civil society representatives and other groups of citizens that could join the negotiations working groups;

05

To establish an inclusive, effective and transparent process for selection of civil society members in the working groups;

06

To provide access to relevant documents, analyses and data for civil society representatives as members of the working groups;

07

To define the mandate of bodies within the negotiating structure, in order to avoid creation of parallelism within this structure and ineffective implementation of the EU integration process;

08

To allocate funds as technical support for civil society participation in the working groups, in order to facilitate and stimulate their engagement in EU accession negotiations.

Recommendations for civil society organizations

01

To conduct public opinion surveys on the EU integration process, with special focus on youth in the society;

02

To conduct in-depth analyses of relevant policies per chapter under the EU *acquis*, with engagement of experts, including key recommendations that could later serve as key documents for formulation of negotiating positions and strategies for alignment of national legislation with the EU *acquis*;

03

To organize regular trainings and workshops with representatives from state institutions, civil society organizations, academic community, business sector and other groups of citizens on the EU integration process and its importance for the country;

04

To pursue membership in regional and European networks for the purpose of lobbying and advocacy for their interests, creation and maintenance of strategic partnerships and contacts, exchange of relevant and timely information and targeted dissemination of key messages to decision makers at regional and at EU level.

