



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Participation day for civil society actors in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

28 October 2015, Ulm, Germany

The 2<sup>nd</sup> participation day for civil society actors took place on 28 October 2015 in Ulm, Germany, a day prior the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Participation Day was organised by the Institut für virtuelles und reales Lernen in der Erwachsenenbildung an der Universität Ulm (ILEU) e.V. (Institute for virtual and face-to-face learning in adult education at Ulm University) in close cooperation with a Steering Committee consisting of representatives of the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF) of the EUSDR, ILEU e.V., the Priority Area 10 Institutional Capacity and Cooperation of the EUSDR and Agapedia gGmbH.

At the opening of the event, Mrs. Gisela Erler (State Counsellor for Civil Society and Civic Participation of the State Government Baden-Württemberg) and Mr. Stefan August Lütgenau (President of Danube Civil Society Forum) talked about what actually a civil society means and how it is pronounced today in the states' administrative structures. A civil society is an open and tolerant society, a greenhouse for creating and developing human capital, which is created outside the state institutions. However, the latter need to establish institutional framework to cooperate with civil society organization.

Mr. Jan W. van Deth (Professor of Political Science and International Comparative Social Research, Mannheim University) presented empirical results in relation to participation and civil society in South-East Europe. The civil society is in the center of developing democracy. However, there is a huge gap between European Union (EU) Member States when it comes to the involvement of citizens in civil society organizations. In EUSDR countries 48 % of the population is involved in such structures.

Prof. van Deth highlighted that democracy and civil society are mutually enforcing mechanisms. However, when democracy is not functioning, civil society also cannot function and this leads to a downward spiral process. The result of this is an uncivil society, unfavorable state interventions in the regulation of civil society organisations and lack of grass-root organisations. Most explanations for the relatively modest size of civil society in South-East Europe stress the shared history of these countries, referring both to experiences under communism and to more recent experiences with democracy and Western initiatives. Prof. van Deth ended his speech by saying that instead of relying on international support for civil society (which leads to a boomerang effect), the focus in South-East Europe should be on supporting grass-root organisations.

Roberts Ķīlis (Associate professor, Stockholm School of Economics in Riga) provided some lessons from the creation of the Long term strategy Latvia 2030 during 2007-2010 from a citizens' participation point. He stressed that when we talk about civic engagement, we should think not only

in terms of NGOs but also in terms of ordinary citizens who can participate through online tools or other platforms. The strategy has been developed as a deliberative process through the inclusion of citizens in regional forum discussions, online participation, involvement of youth and pupils, surveys.

In the more interactive part of the event working groups were formed where participants could discuss the following topics with assigned to every group moderator:

1. Social entrepreneurship.
2. Participation and governance.
3. Lifelong learning for individual benefit and social participation.
4. Financing.
5. Open data.
6. Participation and civil society and Ukraine.
7. Media.
8. Small towns and cultural landscapes.
9. Roma and vulnerable groups.
10. Danube Social Service & Education Cluster.
11. Youth.
12. Migration.

Most of the working groups highlighted that the discussions were fruitful and that the members were able to establish possible solutions or recommendations.

For the closing remarks the floor was given to Mr. Kurt Puchinger (Priority Area Coordinator, Priority Area 10 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region) and Mrs. Gisela Erler (State Counsellor for Civil Society and Civic Participation of the State Government Baden-Württemberg). **It has been stressed that the EUSDR cannot be implemented without involving the civil society, including NGOs and local authorities. The civil society involvement and the interface between it and the governmental institutions is what holds the social cohesion that is necessary for economic and territorial cohesion.**

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