

3rd Annual Forum of the EUSDR

The Danube Civil Society Organisations: Stakeholders of the Danube Strategy

Workshop summary			
Date	27.06.2014		
From:	11:15	Until:	12:10
Place:	Vienna City Hall, Room 7		
Facilitation	Anders Bergström , Norden Association, EUSBR		
Panel - Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Margit Waestfelt, Alternate Secretary General of Central European Initiative • Stefan August Lütgenau, Danube Civil Society Forum • Iva Taralezhkova, Chairperson of Citizen Participation Forum, Bulgaria 		
Number of Participants	40		

1. Focus of the Session

Discussion of the situation and specific aspects of the Danube civil society in the context of the EUSDR and related EU policies:

- transnational co-operation
- financing
- participation

Aim: to mobilise participants for active participation in the EUSDR and to initiate a structured bottom-up process, based on the report from the first EUSDR Participation Day.

2. Main Messages of the Speakers

Introduction by Anders Bergström, Norden Association, EUSBR

The latest governance report of the EU Commission highlighted the role of civil society in the macro-regional strategies: The door is open for civil society organisations (CSO).

But how can this involvement develop? CSOs need to get organised at national level by contacting their national interlocutors and establishing national networks/platforms, as basis for international cooperation and action. Macro-regional level platforms are also needed to provide for information and involvement possibilities. Since macro-regional strategies are only known among few people, these organisations can act as interlink and share information through the national platforms.

Margit Waesfelt, Alternate Secretary General of Central European Initiative

The CEI initiative was launched in 1989 by a few countries. After the developments of the last 25 years, the CEI now has 18 member countries, of which 10 are EU Member States. One of the goals is to bring non EU-Member States closer to EU Countries. As the host country, Italy is the biggest contributor. Austria also contributes a lot, e.g. through provision of know-how. There is a cooperation fund, a mobility fund to bring together people who otherwise could not participate in events, e.g. CSO. The new action plan of the CEI is in line with the EU financial framework and CEI participates in EUSDR Steering Groups. It is also involved in 18 EU projects concerning the EUSDR, covering several topics such as economy, media, bio-energy, science and innovation, etc.

Stefan August Lütgenau, Danube Civil Society Forum

Foster Europe is one of the funding members of the Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF), active in the EUSDR already from the planning phase. A network of NGOs, non-partisan and non-profit making groups was established as the DCSF. The DCSF acts as green house of ideas, a connector between the local ground and the strategy and counts 80 members in 14 countries. The latest achievement is the participation Day organised on 25th June in Eisenstadt. The participation day came from the results of a consultation, finalised in a report which shows that local actors are not connected to the strategy, not even to the national contact points. The aim of the event was to have a side-event of the Annual Forum dedicated to the topic of the Civil Society. Such event will be repeated and a structure will be established until 2015. Every stakeholder is invited to take part in the formulation of this structure. As first reaction from the audience, the extension to a two-days event was

proposed, as it offers a unique opportunity for exchange.

Iva Taralezhkova, Chairperson of Citizen Participation Forum, Bulgaria

The citizen participation forum in Bulgaria is a network of 100 NGOs from different fields, whose aim is to foster citizen participation in policy making at all levels. The initiative was started 5 years ago with 5 founding members. An example is participation in the planning and implementation of EU programmes. In the 2007-2013 planning this participation was low and before the new planning process for 2014-2020 started, they established recommendations to the government. As a result, they were integrated into the planning working groups. Though not perfect, this is an important breakthrough and proves that participation and inclusion is possible if you are constructive and proactive.

3. Discussion with the audience

Following challenges and possible solutions were addressed along three steps of participation for the civil society: information, communication, and involvement.

Information and communication: How to spread knowledge about the Strategy among citizens? Information does not reach out to concerned authorities and/or is not correctly interpreted (e.g. “the Danube Strategy is only for municipalities along the river”).

Involvement: Involvement goes a step further but raises the question: how?

- Involvement requires involvement of all parties and level: involvement of CSO without policy level doesn't work.
- A macro-regional strategy is a construct of multi-level governance. The regional and local level is carrying out 75% of the work that has to be done, therefore the local actors MUST be involved in planning, implementation and revision of the EUSDR.
- CSOs must deliver a concrete message to national and EU stakeholders/institutions. The European and the Danubian dimensions must be strengthened and better interlinked. It may be good to strengthen the PA10 working group and convene a meeting in the second semester 2014, to take stock of the annual conference.
- The involvement of the civil society in the governance of the EUSDR would be a great step forward, e.g. by designating a CSO representative as PAC, on the model of the EUSBSR

(Anders Bergström).

- Increased transparency is needed, and it was proposed that European Commission creates a directory of qualified NGOs and CSOs in the region, to be addressed in communication.
- The EUSDR should be a tool for further integration of Europe. It is the most diverse region in Europe with different categories of countries, different levels of development of CSO and different perceptions of democracy. Currently the EU is not equally beneficial for all Member States, hence the European dimension is essential and the EUSDR should be used as driving force to encourage people-to-people actions.
- The political level must open up spaces for involvement. As a first prerequisite, the political level must communicate and inform; policy-makers must also ensure that working and legal conditions for NGOs and CSOs are adequate. Finally capacity building of CSOs must be supported, in order to have the resources necessary to follow policy developments. This can be done e.g. through allocating funding from each Priority Area of the EUSDR to cover travel costs for CSOs.