



Example for Civil Society engagement in EUSDR

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Vienna, 5 March 2019

Meeting with DG REGIO on 19 Nov 2018

Objectives:

Exchange ideas on and discuss how to overcome marginalized position of civil society in the EUSDR and its implementation (as well as in other MRS) by

- anchoring civil society participation in EUSDR **governance** structures
- **improve EUSDR communication** and popularity by adopting a modern Communication Strategy
- opening the EUSDR fora to **active civil society participation**,
- organize **platforms for interaction** of civil society actors at various levels (e.g. Participation Days)
- **micro-funding**, easy to access and easy to administer

Participants:

- **DG REGIO:** Jean-Pierre Halkin, Csaba Hende, Roland Mayer-Frei
 - **CSOs:** Stefan Lütgenau (Foster Europe and DCSF), Iva Taralezhova (Citizen Participation Forum and DCSF), Irene Lucius (WWF and DCSF), Miklos Barabas (European House and Danubiana Network), Assya Kavrakova (ECAS)
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Main CSO speaking points

- Civil society and DG REGIO (EUSDR) share the same goals of **better governance**, better spending and bringing EU closer to citizens;
 - MRS follow by definition the **multi-level governance concept** and have to be designed and implemented in an inclusive, participative approach build on the EU principles of Subsidiarity and Participation
 - **Active civil society participation can bring the EUSDR closer to people**, develop ownership, making its value more tangible for citizens.
 - **CSOs are challenged by the phenomenon of shrinking civic space** in many if not most EUSDR countries – their access to (EU) funding, justice and media has been continuously decreased over the past couple of years; EU funding is difficult to access for small CSOs because of pre-financing and co-funding needs (with in kind contribution rarely eligible); only some countries have CSO funding programmes and the tradition of supporting CSOs through donations is only slowly growing; many of CSO had to close down because of this; EUSDR and MRS as a whole can be an instrument to counteract this worrying trend.
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Main CSO speaking points

- Danube Participation Day in Sofia called for a) **communication** efforts to make the EUSDR better known among citizens; b) the need for small **grants** for CSO; c) the need of a **more structured CSO involvement in EUSDR evaluation and planning**
 - **so far, CSO participation in EUSDR bodies is ad hoc**, non-transparent, and inconsistent. CSOs invite DG REGIO to communicate good practice in CSO participation and provide guidance on how to involve CSOs in the main bodies and fora of the EUSDR,
 - **Digitalization** can make participation easier and effective Digital platforms can enhance participation of citizens and CSOs at low cost.
 - In particular **young people** need to be mobilized for active participation
 - The **MRS reports issued every second year** are a prime opportunity for highlighting / evaluating CSO participation or a lack of it
 - Opportunity of **European Solidarity Corps**
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DG REGIO response

- Multilevel governance enshrined in DG REGIO but **direct interaction of DG REGIO** with civil society rather rare
- **MRS are owned by governments**; DG REGIO is playing role of strategic advisor, not decision maker;
- **Regional Policy will receive less funding** in the next EU budget, but higher budget allocation for capacity building; CSO have influence in EP
- CSOs are diverse but in critical situations need to **speak with one voice** if they want to have impact,
- When advocating for better regulations, make implementation **simple**
- There is a general openness for stronger CSO participation but the issue is “context sensitive”; **progress can only be incremental**
- Recommendation to **team up with other** players such as business,
- A call for a new EUSDR Communication Strategy should be addressed to the **DSP**
- **Readiness to follow-up** the discussion with CSOs