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JOINT DECLARATION OF CIVIL SOCIETIES AND PUBLIC AUTHORITIES OF THE COUNTRIES OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

„BALKAN VOICE“

Introduction

Civil society has been playing a crucial role in the social, economic and political transition of the Western Balkans and along with (and often in front of) the public institutions, it was always taking a leading position in the process of European Integration and overall democratization processes.

Within this leading role, civil society has repeatedly demonstrated to be highly competent to handle and address complex and sensitive issues like fighting corruption and organised crime, strenghtening regional integration and cooperation, solving bilateral issues, reconciliation and confidence-building, supporting independent media, promoting social inclusion etc.

Through lobbyng, advocacy, research and monitoring activities at the national and local levels civil society in the Western Balkans have made a substantial contribution towards creating demand for enhanced transparency, accountability and effectiveness from public institutions and facilitate a greater focus on the needs of citizens' in policy making.

However, there is still significant space for improvement of the coopera-



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tion between civil society and governmental structures of the countries of the WB region and the process of European Integration is the most significant field for advancement of this cooperation.

In that context, regardless of the stages of advancement in the EU integration process, civil society structures and public institutions of the countries of the region should strengthen their cooperation in the spirit of openness and constructive collaboration.

This constructive model of cooperation and its outputs will bring benefits for both sides, where public institutions will get a new impetus from advice, analysis, opinions and remarks coming from CSOs, strengthening reliability of its own positions and data.

On the other hand, civil society actors will also have multiplied benefits: an opportunity for direct exchange of information with representatives of public administrations and EU stakeholders; more detailed information about envisaged measures and activities of the public bodies in relevant areas; a new opportunity for learning and their capacities building in all relevant areas and an opportunity to influence, launch and initiate numerous public policies.

Through respecting of these mutual benefits, all EU Integration related structures should increase the effectiveness and quality of their results, as well as results of the entire EU Integration process.



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Considering all of the aforementioned, Civil Society in the Western Balkans calls upon the national governments to:

1. Fully and thoroughly ensure the freedom of civil society organisations in the Western Balkans, especially freedom of expression and freedom of association,
2. Ensure that appropriate legal, judicial and administrative environment conducive to the work of the civil society is in place;
3. Establish and fully implement procedures for mandatory public debates, including public hearing during development of public policies, drafting of legislative acts and assures CSOs participation in it;
4. Ensure that sustainable mechanisms of comprehensive and effective cooperation and consultation between governments and civil society are in place and fully functional.
5. Strengthen accountability of government institutions to establish and sustaining efficient coordination and consultative processes with civil society actors and accordingly allocates and strenghtes human and financial capacities
6. Ensure free clear and accessible flow of information on matters of public interest through structured and durable mechanisms.
7. Continuously creates enabling environment for development of CSOs as well as public promotion of joint efforts and results achieved.



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Civil Society of the Western Balkans commits to:

1. Dedication to creation of unified attitudes and harmonized messages and joint actions in order to increase civil society contribution and effectiveness in sharing critical and analytical thinking and concrete policy expertise within EU Integration related reforms;
2. Improve efforts to strengthen independent monitoring and evaluation of EU Integration related policy implementation in order to provide governments with meaningful contribution in an evidence-based manner;
3. Build stronger partnerships with governments in line with democratic standards, solidarity and EU integration;
4. Improve effectiveness by increasing its own capacities for monitoring, advocacy, networking, partnership, coalition building and active involvement in the EU Integration policy making;
5. Uphold the highest standards of accountability and transparency by strengthening internal governance standards and financial management transparency.



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In order to achieve these standards of communication and cooperation with- in all areas of mutual work, with specific attention to EU Integration, both civil society actors and public institutions should respect following principles:

1. Public institutions and civil society actors commit themselves to cooperation based on **increased level of information sharing** practices on both sides with mutual and/or individual efforts for contribution to efficiency in realization of all the duties and obligations that are deriving from the EU negotiations
2. Respecting of the basic principle of **timely and efficient communication** from both sides, public and civil sector, will include appropriate and mutually adequate timing of the meetings related to cooperation, adequate structure of cooperation models and their methodology of work, with emphasis to timely distribution of all necessary documents and information that are relevant for the functioning and work of the EU Integration structures.
3. Both sides will invest efforts that any existing and/or future platform for cooperation between CSOs and public institution be **organized in the most efficient manner** in order to provide the most reliable and sustainable outputs that will lead to the increase of the efficiency of the work and results of the respective EU integration structures.
4. To provide such results, both sides should not use any defined or undefined methods and/or acts that might be seen as obstruction of the efficiency of the functioning of the EU Integration structures. In line with that, both CSOs and public institutions should **sustain from any accidental or intentional acts** that might lead to negative consequences for any of the stakeholders in the context of efficiency of EU Integration process.
5. In addition, any cooperation mechanism between CSOs and public institutions in the process of European Integration should provide for a **formal system for timely consultations and interventions** prior to creation of outputs and results from the scope of work of relevant EU Integration structures. That system

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should enable CSOs to obtain relevant document and working materials on time and to prepare their own positions on the subject of consultation but also to submit their own documents, analysis, opinions, comments, advices, suggestions and other relevant information from their field of work, so that public institutions might use them or take them in consideration during decision making process within the EU integration process.

6. Both sides should also dedicate themselves to **establishing eventual communication and cooperation agreements** on implementation of duties and obligations that are deriving from various obligations within the EU Integration process and public institutions should take in consideration any eventual capacity of CSOs that might be used in the process of realization of related activities.

In Podgorica, August 2020

