

Newsletter

PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE SOCIO-ECONOMIC TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

National Convention institutionalises the cooperation between the state and numerous institutions and civil society organisations on all levels, in the joint work on good management and direction of the EU accession process of Serbia.

NATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE EUROPEAN UNION 2014

Nataša Dragojlović, Coordinator of the National Convention on the EU

National Convention on the EU (NCEU) is a permanent body for a thematically structured debate on Serbian accession to the European Union, between representatives of the state administration, political parties, independents bodies, NGOs, experts, business community, trade unions and professional associations.

It was established in 2006 on the initiative of the European Movement Serbia and in cooperation with the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA). In the rich pool of experience of the countries that became EU members, Slovak model for inclusion of the civil society in pre-accession negotiations with the European Union – The National Convention was particularly inspiring. For this stage of negotiation on Stabilisation and Association, 8 working groups were formed, thematically defined with the goal to mobilise and activate a huge and positive professional and moral potential of numerous social actors in Serbia and achieve the broadest possible social consensus on the European future of Serbia. The results of their work in the first 5 years included numerous analyses, recommendations and opinions, all incorporated in the NCEU's Book of Recommendations, as well as the Guides through European Policies. The Government representatives and its (at that time) EU Accession Offices actively participated in the work of the National Convention, and the results of that work and discussions with the representatives of the civil society were used for reporting to the European Commission about the progress of Serbia on the path to European integration, for public discussions about proposed legislation, as well as to inform the broad public about the relations between Serbia

and the European Union. Guests at the sessions of the National Convention's Working Groups were experts and politicians from the countries in the region and the European Union, EU commissioners, ministries and civil society representatives from European countries, and their experiences and advice were considered and used in the formulation of recommendations for improvement of the EU accession process of Serbia.

With the opening of pre-accession negotiations between Serbia and the European Union, the National Convention on the European Union is established as a special platform adapted to the new stage of relations between Serbia and the EU. This institutionalises the cooperation between the state and numerous institutions and civil society organisations on all levels, in the joint work on good management and direction of the EU accession process of Serbia. Our idea is not to limit the authorities and exclusive roles of state bodies in the negotiations and formulation of negotiation positions, but to expand the basis for that process and ensure a creative contribution that can be provided by non-governmental organisations, trade unions, professional associations, universities, chambers and religious communities, as well as the broad public, in raising the quality and accelerating

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the EU accession process. On the other hand, our activities will be focused on providing timely information to citizens about the process and results of the negotiations of our government with the European Union, as well as obligations and privileges ensured by the future EU membership. EU membership is ultimately the decision of the Serbian and EU citizens, and not only their administrations. Therefore, one of the main goals of NCEU is that citizens should be involved all the time in the negotiations process and informed about obligations accepted on their behalf, as well as rights and standards that will, in different areas of life, be improved with the closer membership in the EU.

Due to a determination that the EU negotiations process has to include the society as a whole, the National Convention was organised with the main structure of 21 Working Groups lead by coordinators – civil society organisations, in accordance with their expertise, capacities, references and formed networks. They gather up to 30 experts, representatives of non-governmental organisations, business community, trade unions, institutes, professional organisations, local self-governments, media and other groups relevant and interested in specific topics from the negotiations chapters.

Working groups thematically follow the structure of the EU Negotiating Working Groups, follow the activities of state institutions by negotiation chapters they cover, and provide their proposals and recommendations on how to improve certain negotiation positions and assess the success of reform measures, that result from accepted obligations during the negotiations with the European Union. This year, each group is planned to have two sessions (one in Belgrade and one outside of Belgrade). Constitutive

meetings have already been organised in the first half of July, of the groups monitoring freedom of movement for workers, social policy and employment, WG for Chapter 35 and WG for chapters on consumer and health protection. By the end of the month a meeting will be organised of the WG in charge of agriculture and rural development, food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy and fisheries. During the summer, it is expected to have all the heads of Negotiating Working Groups appointed (state secretaries in the ministries managing 35 Negotiating Working Groups), as well as all the members of the Negotiating Team of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, which would close the institutional mechanism of the Government for negotiations. Leaders of the Negotiating Working Groups will cooperate closely with the coordinators of the NCEU Working Groups on the improvement of Serbian negotiating positions.

Conclusions and recommendations of the Working Groups will be formulated to present a high quality and meaningful contribution, a proposal and addition to the development of negotiating positions during the negotiations, and depending on the stage of negotiations in different chapters, they will present a proposal for corrective measures during the implementation of accepted obligations and establishment of new standards. Conclusions and recommendations are sent to relevant state institutions, the President of the Coordination Body, relevant minister and the chair of the Negotiating Group, the minister in charge of European integration, the Head of the Negotiating Team, president of the European Integration Committee of the National Assembly.



All conclusions, recommendations and proposals are available to the public for the purpose of providing timely, accurate and precise information to the public and raising the level of knowledge about the reforms and measures, as well as consequences these measures will have on people's everyday lives and overall development of Serbia.

NCEU Program Council plays a crucial role in providing program guidelines for a stable work of the National Convention on the EU and its Working Groups. It provides recommendations and guidelines on how to improve the work, and it also has a significant role in advocacy and information provision, for state institutions, as well as citizens and media, about the European Integration of Serbia, negotiations and changes that follow EU membership. Members of the Program Council are representatives of the civil society organisations that coordinate the activities of Working Groups, and the chairman is elected for the period of six months, chairing the meetings organised on monthly basis.

Secretariat of the National Convention is based in the European Movement Serbia. It provides logistical and financial support to Working Groups, manages the media promotion, takes care of the regular communication with the representatives of the Government and the National Assembly, develops international cooperation and establishes partnerships based on the guidelines from the Program Council.

Sessions of the National Convention on the EU are organised in Belgrade throughout the year, in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, as well as in other parts of Serbia, contribut-

ing to an active role of local actors in the negotiation process. NCEU Plenary sessions take place once a year, in cooperation with the National Assembly, aiming to enable a broad public insight in Serbia's accession and negotiation process with the European Union, to compare and evaluate improvement in different chapters and to underline imperfections in the process of creation and enforcement of reform measures.

While expecting the opening of the first negotiating chapters, the basic message of the National Convention is that this process requires engagement and strengthening of all available human resources and capacities on all levels, in order to ensure the synergy of all participants. This will also ensure the strengthening of the state institutions, civil society organisations, as well as better allocation and expedient use of financial resources from the EU pre-accession funds. Only a transparent and inclusive process of Serbia's European integration and the starting negotiations will ensure the understanding and support from citizens in the implementation of reforms and fulfilment of obligations taken on their behalf in the negotiations with the European Union. If there is a true wish that European integration should become a concern, a property and a responsibility of the overall society, and thus provide a full support and legitimacy of the negotiation process, participation of the whole society in that process should be ensured. The National Convention was established with that mission, and it remains open for new members of the Working Groups.

Information and application: www.eukonvent.org.

OTHERS ABOUT NCEU:

„There is no doubt that such an approach would bring three important benefits: first, numerous structures of the society would be much more informed about the European integrations, and they would raise their own capacity to grasp European topics and challenges to a higher level... second, state bodies would have a more substantiated and broader basis for the negotiation process... third, the negotiation with the EU would itself be more legitimated and democratised.“
- Zivorad Kovacevic, president of the European Movement in Serbia (1999-2011)

„Within the Convention, civil society organisations are invited to actively participate and thus carefully follow the negotiation process, submit opinions, recommendations, proposals and solutions in cooperation with the Government representatives. I believe that, for the negotiation stage we are entering, and which includes work on negotiation positions and negotiations within chapters, it is very important that the voice from the civil society is properly articulated and acknowledged. These are the most important reasons why the Convention will have a genuine support from the Negotiating Team.“
- Prof. dr Tanja Mišević, Šef Pregovaračkog tima Vlade RS

“We underline that the recommendations and conclusions emerging from the Convention's work will be of great importance for the establishment of a broader social consensus about the issues concerning the accession of our country to the EU. This way, it will be ensured that the interested public, primarily associations of citizens, representatives of local self-governments and businesses, as well as important partners of the Government of Serbia, give recommendations and opinions about the fulfilment of criteria and conditions for membership in the Union. Also, a transparent and open dialogue will be ensured about the reforms implemented on that road, and at the same time, the public will be better informed of what the EU membership brings to the citizens of Serbia.“
- Srdjan Majstorovic, Deputy Director of the Serbian European Integration Office of the Government of Serbia

At the session held on June 4, 2014, the members of the European Integration Committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Decision about the Procedure for Consideration of Proposals for Negotiating Position in the Negotiation Process for the Accession of Serbia to the European Union, which states that before the consideration of the proposed negotiating position, the Committee's obligation is to consider proposals, additions and recommendations from the civil society representatives, i.e. the National Convention on the European Union (NCEU).

Donors' policy or donors' indolence

Organisations outside of Belgrade receding

Author: Danilo Milic, Program Manager, International Centre Olof Palme

For years, there has been a clear trend of international donors leaving Serbia. In addition, the demands of those who are still active in Serbia are getting more complex and extensive, and the scope for financing of small and medium-sized non-governmental organisations narrows significantly. However, only a glance at the results of the competition for funding of NGO projects gives a clear picture of the disparity in the number of projects approved to organisations based in Belgrade and others. Even though only around a quarter of the total population of Serbia lives in Belgrade, at calls for proposals it often happens that funding is approved to only one or two non-Belgrade organisations (out of twenty organisations that sign a contract).



First, organisations from Belgrade have a better starting position. The capital city offers most opportunities and thus attracts many ambitious (young) people. The University of Belgrade is by far the largest in Serbia, and most of its students decide to continue their life in Belgrade even after graduation. Due to the proximity of their offices, which is often measured in hundreds of meters, and a simpler arrival at conferences and other meetings, regular contacts with the leaders of the central government are noticeably easier. No less important, the same is true for contacts with international and bilateral donors. This does not close the list of benefits.

However, organisations from the “rest” of Serbia do not deserve to be neglected. Quite the contrary. They have close contacts with groups they represent and citizens in general. Good organisations in smaller places, in direct contact with citizens clearly see the problems that do not allow the progress of the society and try to solve them. Grassroots initiatives generally start in smaller towns and they are launched thanks to a close contact and a higher degree of mutual trust between citizens and non-governmental organizations from their communities. Although Belgrade is a city full of contrasts and it is often forgotten that a large number of people live below the poverty line there, it is easier from a non-Belgrade perspective to recognise the many challenges of a society that is so deeply sunk (not only) financially and has lost faith in a better future. It should be noted that local media have better ratings outside of Belgrade, and that citizens' associations relatively easily ensure their attention. Finally, Serbia is big enough to have many local peculiarities and typical problems, and organizations from those communities are the only ones that can try to overcome them with quality.

Organisations from small communities are also struggling with special problems. Young people from most cities in Serbia go to larger communities in search of education and jobs. It is very difficult for organisations to retain employees, given that they are not able to offer them a salary and other work conditions as they can get in Belgrade or abroad. In addition, citizens' associations are under bigger pressure from local authorities. On the one hand, there are a small number of citizens' associations in these communities, and organisations that criticize poor performance of local authorities are easily noticeable. The current degree of democratic development in Serbia is not the one where the government sees the criticism of civil society as constructive, but most often reacts as they are offended and refusing further cooperation. On the other hand, a difficult access to foreign funds and those at the central level “pushes” local NGOs towards the sources of financing from their cities and municipalities. And such a situation is an ideal way for local authorities to make those whose criticism is hard to bear, no matter how constructive, more passive.

International Centre “Olof Palme” is an organisation that has been present in Serbia for twenty years and all that time it has worked actively on providing support to local initiatives and “smaller” citizens' associations. The best illustration for this might be the fact that in 2015, fourteen organisations will be supported, of which four located in Belgrade. Associations from Belgrade will also be active either throughout Serbia or exclusively outside of the capital. The relation between the Palme Centre and citizens' associations is based on the partnership principle between the two equal sides,

and the relation does not end with the approval of project proposals and sent reports. Besides, a part of this cooperation includes regular meetings and coordination, joint implementation of activities, as well as mutual support regardless of specific projects where cooperation is formalised.

In order to illustrate the theses from this article, a few good practice examples from the network of Palme Centre's partners should be mentioned. Citizens' Association Sretenje from Požega has only one full time employee and rarely more than two projects implemented at the same time. However, good planning, quality ideas, as well as a broad network of associates make it possible for them to ensure tangible changes and be recognised in this part of Serbia. One of their latest successes is the fact that, on their initiative and the documents they proposed, the Municipality of Požega, as the first municipality in the country, introduced a programming scheme for financing of local communities. This caught the attention of other communities, and this year, Sretenje will disseminate that model to the Novi Sad neighbouring municipalities.

Narodni parlament (People's Parliament) from Leskovac is an organisation with more than fifteen years of experience and a large number of quality projects. However, the attention drawn by one of their recent projects can only be measured through the results of that project. Legal assistance they offer to citizens in their struggles with administrative problems and illogical issues has quickly overgrown the local level and become available to all the people in Serbia. More than 1600 cases have been processed in only two years of the project duration so far, and the number of followers on Facebook and Twitter has exceeded 30,000. More information can be found on <http://www.netrpimnepravdu.rs/>

Another example of an organisation from the "small" community that presents the potentials outside of Belgrade is also Toplički centar za demokratiju i ljudska prava (Toplica Center for Democracy and Human Rights) from Prokuplje. This organisation, active primarily in anti-corruption has long since been present on the national level and very much determined to use all available ways to deal with this issue that significantly slows down the society development. However, they have not forgotten the community in which they work, and their office is the place where people from Prokuplje and the neighbouring places come every day and present their problems. In most cases, Toplica Center is not the one that can solve those problems, but they are ready to listen and at least refer them to the right address, or offer a proposal for the solution of their problem.

Serbia is a significantly centralised country and Belgrade is often the only address authorised to make the final decision. In the last twenty years, the central Government has not demonstrated good will and sincere intention to change such a situation. Financing of the civil sector in Serbia additionally strengthens such a picture of the situation. However, experiences from Sweden, Palme Centre's country of origin, probably the most centralised country in Europe, as well as some examples mentioned previously, support the need for decentralisation in Serbia, and the need for additional support to local communities. To the south, east, west, or north – the differences are constantly decreasing.

Results of the Strategy on Capitalisation of Tourism Potentials of the Begej Channel presented

On December 12, 2014, the final press conference was organised in Zrenjanin, where the results were presented, as well as the preparation process for the joint study on capitalisation of the tourism potentials of the Romanian - Serbian channel Begej. Participants were addressed by the representatives of the City of Zrenjanin, Branislav Knezevic and Dusko Radisic, Regional Chamber of Commerce Milan Radovanovic, representative of the Regional Development Agency Dragana Dorozan, as well as representative of InTER, Vera Jovanovic.

InTER was contracted by the Regional Centre for Socio-Economic Development BANAT to provide technical assistance in the development of the Strategy implemented within the project: Joint development of Romanian - Serbian Bega Channel tourism potential capitalization Study and promotion of cross - border foreground investments, jointly implemented by the Agency for Socio-Economic Development Timjisoara (ADETIM), Regional Centre for Socio-Economic development Banat and Regional Chamber of Commerce Zrenjanin and funded from the CBC Romania-Serbia Programme. ■

InTER at the 14th Quality Conference in Zrenjanin

InTER's researcher, Vesela Curkovic PhD, presented the paper "Environmental Protection and Management of Communal Waste in Serbia – the Road to European Integration" at the 14th Quality Conference, organised on November 6, 2014 in Zrenjanin by the Regional Chamber of Commerce Zrenjanin and the Quality Board.

Goal of the conference was to provide and improve knowledge in the field of quality management systems, environmental protection, standards for production of healthy and safe food, health at work, and exchange of experiences in the implementation of those systems. ■



A round table "Does Serbia need territorial projects and why?" organised by InTER

On November 12, 2014, InTER organised a round table "Does Serbia need territorial projects and why?". The round table was organised in Impact Hub in 21 Makedonska Street in Belgrade. Before the round table, InTER presented the results of the research: Achievements of local economic development initiatives in Serbia: Area-based development approach) versus sectoral/issue-based development approach, implemented within the cooperation with the Open Society Foundation from Budapest.

After the presentation, a round table was organised, which was moderated by Dragisa Mijacic, Director of InTER, and the participants included Irena Fiket, researcher, Marko Vujacic, EU PROGRES Deputy Project Manager, Slavko Lukic, Director of RDA Zlatibor and Andrej Horvat, expert in regional development. ■



OUTDOOR In - Zubin Potok Tourism Development

On Friday, December 5, 2014, InTER organised a press conference in the Media Centre Caglavica with the presentation of the main project results and the premiere of the film:

Get ready for the adventure! A presenter at the conference was also Christof Stock, Head of Operations at the EU Office in Kosovo. The film can be viewed on the website www.ibarski-kolasin.org.

Within the project, a winter hiking tour "Kurilo 2014" was also organised in December. The event was organised in cooperation with the Mountaneering Clubs PK Berim and PEK Gora Kragujevac, in honour of December 11 - International Mountain Day. ■



Policy paper "Achievements of local economic development initiatives in Serbia: Area-based development approach versus sectoral/issue-based development approach"



This paper analyses two main families of development approaches implemented in Serbia, Area-Based Development approach (ABD) and sectoral/issue-based approach. The study tries to answer the following questions: Does ABD approach, when compared to sector/issue approach, prove to be better in terms of improved administrative capacities of local governments and participatory policy making? Author of the paper is Irena Fiket.

This publication was published in Serbian and English language and it can be downloaded from InTER's website www.regionalnirazvoj.org.

Policy brief: Environmental protection and communal waste management



Environmental protection and communal waste management are some of the biggest challenges in the negotiation process for EU membership. Five years after the adoption of the Strategy for Waste Management 2010-2019, only seven out of planned 26 regional centres for communal waste disposal operate in Serbia. In this policy brief we analysed the results of policies in the field of environmental protection and communal waste management and drawn the key recommendations for the following period. Author of the paper is Vesela Curkovic.

This publication was published in Serbian and English language and it can be downloaded from InTER's website www.regionalnirazvoj.org.



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