

*Study Tour of the Government Unit for Cooperation with NGOs of the Republic of Macedonia to the Office for Cooperation with NGOs of the Government of Republic of Croatia (GOfNGOs)
“Civil Society Grant Schemes Management”
20-22 July 2010, Zagreb*

Group	6 participants
Title	<i>Civil Society Grant Schemes Management</i>
City, Country	Zagreb, Croatia
Type of visit	Study tour General education, transferring knowledge and experience
Reporter	Ms. Mirjana Pehcevska Pop-Iliev (TACSO Macedonian Office)

Participants:

1. Ljupka Gaceva - Unit for Cooperation with NGO, General Secretariat
2. Jovan Petreski - Unit for Cooperation with NGO, General Secretariat
3. David Berat - Unit for Cooperation with NGO, General Secretariat
4. Darko Nastevski - Unit for Cooperation with NGO, General Secretariat
5. Marjan Sumracki - Unit for Cooperation with NGO, General Secretariat
6. Mirjana Pehcevska Pop-Iliev - TACSO Macedonian office, Project officer

Scope of study visit

In the period from 19 to 22 July 2010, representatives from the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs realized a study visit to the Office for Cooperation with NGOs of the Republic of Croatia.

The aim of the study visit was to familiarize the participants with the grant schemes management system intended for the CSOs, the activities of the institutions in the Republic of Croatia that implement the projects financed by EU funds (IPA program), and introduction of centralized and decentralized implementation system.

Meetings and lessons learned during the study visit

Representatives of the Unit for Cooperation with CSOs on their arrival day, held a meeting with representatives of the project Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organizations (TACSO) in Croatia, Ms. Aida Bagich, Resident Advisor, Ms. Irena Slunjski, Project Officer and Ms. Natalia Gojkovich, Administration and financial assistant, who presented their work, activities and role of TACSO Croatia.

Day one: 20, July 2010

Location: Office for cooperation with NGOs of the Government of the Republic of Croatia

Speakers:

1. **Mr. Igor Vidacak**, Head of Croatian Office for Cooperation with NGOs, presented the activities, role and responsibilities of the Office. Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs was founded by the Regulation on Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs in 1998 with the aim of performing expert work in the domain of the Croatian Government with regards to creating conditions for cooperation and partnership with non-governmental, non-profit sector, especially with citizen associations in the Republic of Croatia. The Office has a wide scope of activities, from cooperation in creating and proposing new legislative frameworks for the activity of non-governmental, non-profit sector in the Republic of Croatia, monitoring the implementation of the National Strategy for the creation of an enabling environment for Civil Society development and measures of the operational implementation plan for the strategy to forming a programme, standards and recommendations for financing the activity of civil society organizations from the state budget and other public funds, as well as pre-accession and structural funds of the European Union.

According to the effective regulation on Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs, the task of the Office is to coordinate the work of ministries, central state offices, Croatian Government offices and state administrative organizations, as well as administrative bodies at local level in connection with monitoring and improving the cooperation with the non-governmental, non-profit sector in the Republic of Croatia. The office implemented projects supporting civil society development funded from the European Commission programmes such as CARDS and PHARE, implements projects financed by IPA Operational Programme and also is responsible for the implementation of the community programme Europe for Citizens. Under the code of good practice, standards and benchmarks for the allocation of funding for programmes and projects of NGOs adopted by the Parliament in February 2007, the office works on improving the standards for financing organizations' programmes from the state budget. In the implementation of the above mentioned tasks, the office closely cooperates with the Council for Civil Society Development and at the same time provides technical, administrative, professional and financial support in its work.

2. **Ms. Marina Buza-Vidas**, Project manager, presented the decentralized implementation system. Decentralised implementation system where responsibility and project management are transferred to the beneficiary country was established in 2004 (for projects within the pre-accession assistance CARDS programme). In this system European Commission Delegation maintained *ex-ante* control which

includes: approving competition documents before the announcement of the competition, approving members of the Evaluation Committee, checking and approving reports during the process of evaluation of received offers, co-signing of the financing contract by the Head of the Delegation of the European Commission, and deciding on the course of further decentralisation based on the regular monitoring of implementation, decentralised projects and the functioning of the implementation system in total. There are several institutions in the decentralised implementation system of EU projects in Croatia, among which are: Central Office for Development Strategy and Coordination of EU Funds (CODEF), Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA), Senior Programme Officer (SPO) and Project Implementation Unit (PIU). The Head of the Croatian Office for Cooperation with NGOs is also a Senior Programme Officer (SPO).

3. *Mr. Jasa Jarec*, Project manager, and *Mr. Ivica Bogdanic*, Project manager, presented the role and responsibilities of the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) for civil society sector of the Governmental Office for Cooperation with NGOs. Project Implementation Unit (PIU) is the authority structured within the office and it reports to the Senior Programme Officer (SPO) for technical implementation of decentralised projects. PIU's duties include: implementation of the process of programming grant schemes; preparation of guidelines for applicants; proposing members for the evaluation committee; writing monitoring reports for CFCA, Sectoral Sub-committee and Joint Monitoring Committee; monitoring implementation results of all EU projects and programmes under its jurisdiction through field trips and regular reporting by the beneficiaries, and preparation of reports for CFCA and CODEF based on the collected data, with the aim of monitoring the implementation at different stages. After full implementation of EU financed projects, the Croatian Office for Cooperation with NGOs organizes a final event in order to present the achieved results and publishes brochures on implemented projects.

IPA Programme exists in Croatia since 2007. IPA Operational Programme 2008 provides support to civil society organizations through grants in three priority areas, such as: enhancing the participation of the NGOs in monitoring of the implementation of the EU Acquis, in the field of fight against corruption and the overall transparency, openness and accountability of public administration bodies; strengthening capacities/roles of the NGOs related to the monitoring of the implementation of the comprehensive anti-discrimination strategy as well as developing capacities of NGOs for systematic monitoring and advocacy of sustainable development policies and integrated approaches to waste and water management, transport, regional development, sustainable use of natural resources and environmental safety.

IPA Operational Programme 2009 provides support to civil society organizations through grants in two priority areas, such as: building capacities of the NGOs for monitoring and advocacy in the field of democratization, human rights, minority integration and

sustainable refugee return in the areas of special state concern as well as building capacities of NGOs for implementing innovative social service delivery programmes in the areas of special state concern. In the period when the study visit was realized the Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA) had already announced the Open Call for Proposals for IPA Operational Programme 2009.

Monthly monitoring meetings are held between representatives from the EU Delegation, Project Implementation Unit (PIU), Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCD) and Central State Office for Development Strategy and Coordination of EU Funds (CODEF) in order to discuss the technical implementation of the EU projects.

During the study visit representatives from the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs had the opportunity to learn about the structure, activities and role of the Council for Civil Society Development.

4. *Ms. Marina Lochert*, Expert Assistant, presented the structure, activities and role of the Council for Civil Society Development in managing of EU funds for civil society sector. The Council for Civil Society Development was founded in 2002. The Council is an advisory and expert body of the Republic of Croatia whose responsibility is to encourage an efficient implementation of the national strategy for the creation of an enabling environment for the development of civil society, development of philanthropy, social capital, partner relations and cross-sector cooperation. The Council's tasks include: continuous monitoring and analyzing of public politics, reporting to the Croatian Government on the drafted regulations referring to civil society development and encouraging the inclusion of the civil society organizations in decision-making processes, cooperation in planning the priorities of the national programmes for awarding grants from the state budget funds to projects and programmes of civil society organizations, gathering and analysis of annual reports from state administrative bodies on grants awarded to civil society organizations and cooperation in programming and establishing priorities in the use of EU pre-accession programmes and funds. The council has 27 members including: 12 representatives of relevant state administrative bodies and the Croatian Government offices, 12 representatives of non-governmental organizations and 3 representatives of the unions, foundations and employers' associations. The Council has a President and Vice President. The President of the Council is chosen among the representatives of NGOs and other non-governmental legal persons and the Vice President is chosen among the representatives of the state administrative bodies and the Croatian Government offices. The President and the members of the council are nominated for 3 years with the possibility of re-election. Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs performs expert and administrative tasks of the Council.

Representatives from the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs have shown special interest in learning about the activities and role of the National Foundation for Civil Society Development.

Ms. Marina Lochert, briefly presented the work of the National Foundation. The National Foundation for the civil society development was founded in 2003. National Foundation for civil society development is a public foundation founded by the Croatian Parliament and acting outside the structures of central and local administration. The National Foundation offers expert and financial support to programs which encourage the sustainability of non-for-profit sector, inter - sector cooperation, civil initiatives, philanthropy, voluntary work and which improve the democratic institutions of society and other programs which fulfil the basic aims of the Foundation. The Foundation is funded from the state budget, games of chance and competitions, revenues generated by its own economic activities as well as from private and foreign donations.

Representatives from the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs held a meeting with a representative of the Central Office for Development Strategy and Coordination of EU Funds (CODEF) and were introduced with the tasks, roles and responsibilities of the Office.

5. *Ms. Vlatka Marcan*, Expert Assistant, presented the structure, activities and role of the Central Office for Development Strategy and Coordination of EU Funds (CODEF). Central Office for Development Strategy and Coordination of EU Funds (CODEF) is in charge of the entire coordination and especially for preparation, monitoring and evaluation of EU programmes. The department for coordinating projects in the field of political criteria, civil society, judiciary and internal affairs performs expert and administrative tasks in relation to the use of EU pre-accession assistance programmes (CARDS, PHARE, IPA) in the domain of meeting political criteria for EU membership, development of civil society, judiciary and fundamental rights, freedom, security and internal affairs.

Day two: 21, July 2010

Location: Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA)

Representatives from the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs held a meeting with representatives from the Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA) and were introduced with the tasks and responsibilities of the agency in the different stages of contracting and implementation of projects financed by EU funds.

Speakers:

1. **Ms. Emina Bacevina**, Financial Specialist, presented the tasks and responsibilities of the Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA). As an implementing agency, the CFCA is responsible for the overall budgeting, tendering, contracting, payments, accounting and financial reporting aspects of all procurement in the context of the decentralised EU funded programmes in Croatia. The Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA) carry out the tendering and contracting elements for institution building programmes and investment support. The CFCA operates in close cooperation with the SPOs and Line Ministries and governmental bodies which are the final beneficiaries of the projects. The CFCA is also the specialised agency for the administrative and financial management of twinning operations. The CFCA is the main promoter of the EU rules and procedures on procurement and link between the Delegation of the European Commission in Croatia and other national authorities. The CFCA delegates technical procedure to line ministries, namely national authorities. Project managers and project implementing units in all public administration, are responsible to the CFCA. The main tasks of the CFCA include: receiving and review of the tender documentation for grant contracts; receiving proposals for appointment of evaluation committee members, review of composition and establishment of the evaluation committee; performing the role of chairman/secretary/observer at tender evaluations; drafting evaluation reports; preparation and submission of contracts for endorsement by the Programme Authorising Officer, by contracting parties and the EC Delegation; budget cleaning for grant contracts; preparing monthly reports on the status of project implementation to the Project Implementation Units, the National Aid Coordinator (NAC), the EC Delegation and Commission Services; review and approval of contract reports; participation on meetings and other events related to each project; regular communication and coordination of all stakeholders during project implementation; conduction of the on-the-spot checks; preparation of financial reports; legislative, arithmetic and formal control of incoming invoices, guarantees and other supporting documents; keeping records on contracts, invoices and bank guarantees; monitoring of contract realization as well as preparation and execution of payment orders.
2. **Mr. Ivan Miljak**, Tender Evaluation and Contracting Officer, introduced the tasks and responsibilities of the Contracting Directorate of the CFCA. The main tasks of the Contracting Directorate include evaluation of offers received, contracting, education of employees in other public administration bodies involved in implementation of EU programmes and cooperation with officials from other public administration bodies or final beneficiaries. Specifically, the Contracting Directorate organizes and implements tendering and evaluation procedures, drafts contracts according to procurement rules for all types of contracts: services, supplies, works and grants, prepares tender documentation, prepares corresponding written

instructions and clarifications concerning tendering procedure, contracting or evaluation, organizes and implements trainings of public administration or final beneficiary employees relating to the work they do, participates in drafting and implementation of methodology instructions, coordinates relating units and officials in the bodies of public administration in executing before mentioned activities. According to the rules and regulations, the Delegation of the EC conducts ex-ante control of procurement procedures. Contracting Directorate consists of department for grants and framework contracts and department for supplies and twinnings.

Location 2: EU Delegation Office

Representatives of the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs also held a meeting with a representative of the Delegation of the European Union in the Republic of Croatia and were introduced with the role of the EU Delegation in the decentralized implementation system.

Speakers:

Mr. Davor Percan, Task Manager for Environment, Energy and Natural Resources, introduced the role of the EC Delegation in the decentralized implementation system in Republic of Croatia. The decentralized implementation system basically represents a transfer of obligations of tender and contracting procedures from the Delegation of the European Commission to a beneficiary country, whilst the Commission retains the final responsibility under the EC Treaties. In this particular case, the EC Delegation preserves the right for ex-ante control, that is approves all the activities in contracting procedure. The EC Delegation provides ex-ante control over project selection, tendering and contracting, but not over payments. It is important to emphasize that, although the Commission Delegation endorses the contracts, it is not a contracting party. This means that the national administration has all the rights and duties as the full contracting party. The procedures under the decentralised implementation system are as follows: before the tender procedure is launched, the CFCA submits tender dossiers to the European Commission for approval. On the basis of decisions thus approved, the CFCA is responsible for issuing invitations to tender, receiving tenders, chairing tender Evaluation Committees and deciding on the results of tender procedures. The CFCA then submits the result of the evaluation for approval and at a second step, after having notified the contractor, received and analysed the proofs regarding exclusion and selection criteria the contract award proposal to the European Commission for endorsement. Once the CFCA has received this endorsement, it signs and awards the contracts. As a general rule, the European Commission is represented when tenders are opened and evaluated. The CFCA submits procurement notices and award notices to the EC Delegation for publication.

Representatives from the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs held a meeting with representatives of two CSOs in Croatia: GONG and Volunteer Centre Zagreb and had the opportunity to learn about the experience of these CSOs in the process of implementation of grant schemes, beginning with programming through the process of applying and evaluation to the implementation of approved projects.

Location 3: "Gong Association" office

Speaker:

Ms. Sandra Pernar, Executive Director, presented the tasks and activities of GONG. GONG is a non-partisan citizens' organization founded in 1997 to encourage citizens to actively participate in political processes. GONG conducts non-partisan monitoring of the election process, educates citizens about their rights and duties, encourages mutual communication between citizens and their elected representatives, promotes transparency of work within public services, and manages public advocacy campaigns and encourages and helps citizens in self-organizing initiatives. GONG has applied and implemented several projects funded by PHARE and CARDS programmes, and also has applied to the Open Call for Proposals from IPA 2008 Operational Programme in the area of democratization and human rights. Grants from the European Union are very important for GONG because they constitute 70% of its total budget.

The Executive Director of Gong is a member of Local Advisory Group of TACSO project in Croatia.

Day three: 22, July 2010

Location: Volunteers Centre office

Speaker:

Ms. Raffaella D'Apolito, Coordinator of International camps, presented the tasks and activities of the Volunteers' Centre Zagreb. Volunteers' Centre Zagreb which is a non-governmental, non-profit organization founded in 1998. It has seven employees, 20 active members and over 2500 registered volunteers. The core activities of the Volunteers' Centre Zagreb aimed at developing volunteering through two programmes, including: Zagreb Volunteer Service, which includes volunteering in the local community and International Volunteers' Exchange, which includes the international exchange of volunteers. So far Volunteers' Centre Zagreb has applied and implemented two grants from the PHARE programme, and has also applied to the Open Call for Proposals from IPA 2008 Operational Programme.

Representatives of GONG and Volunteers' Centre Zagreb expressed great satisfaction with the cooperation with the Office for Cooperation with NGOs and Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA) in the field of implementation of projects financed by the EU funds.

Conclusions:

Considering that the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs is involved in the process of programming the IPA Operational Programme, Component I, this study visit helped in understanding the decentralized system of implementation of projects funded by the EU funds, as well as closer acquaintance with the activities and role of the institutions that are involved in the process of implementation of the above-mentioned projects. Capacities of the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs will additionally be built by two projects, including: "Technical assistance to the General Secretariat, Sector of Policy Analysis and Coordination - Unit for Cooperation with NGOs and Unit for Public Administration Reform" as part of the IPA 2007 Operational Programme and project "Technical Assistance to assist the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs in the General Secretariat with the implementation of the Strategy for cooperation of the Government with the Civil Sector, with specific attention to building capacities for effective and efficient management of the grant schemes", Component 1 of the IPA 2008 Operational Programme.