



To: Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations in the Western Balkans and Turkey (TACSO)

Subject: **Contribution by Foundation Open Society- Macedonia to the IPA III consultations**

Date: 2.3.2020

Dear colleagues,

Foundation Open Society – Macedonia (hereinafter FOSM) welcomes this initiative and submits the following contribution to the consultation of civil society organizations in the preparation of the instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA III).

**Referring to the question “if there are other priority areas or important elements that can still be included in the proposal of the IPA III programme?” FOSM recommends the following thematic priorities or aspects to be included in the structure for programing:**

- *Youth should be included as a crosscutting theme in the IPA III Programing*

According to a recent survey, 80% of young people in North Macedonia believe authorities do not care or only partially care about their needs and problems. Concerning the EU perspective of the country, 60% of young people in the country believe the country will become a member of the EU, of which a large percentage (70%) anticipate it will happen within the next 5 years. A cause for concern is the fact that young people tend to describe themselves as socially inactive citizens (71%), and even larger percentage has stated they have never been part of a civic/non-governmental organization or initiative that works on social issues (90%). Only 20% of them see themselves joining one of the activities of a civic/ non-governmental organization or initiatives in the future<sup>1</sup>.

In line with the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027<sup>2</sup>, we believe it is important to provide opportunity and support to our youth to engage, connect and be empowered. Including youth as a crosscutting theme and as one of the most visible beneficiaries of the designed support, can assist in reaching these objectives. Actions that could potentially be part of the programming include: encouraging youth participation in

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<sup>1</sup> M. Galevski 'Socio-Political Participation of Youth in North Macedonia: Optimism, Apathy or Disappointment?', December, 2019, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, North Macedonia <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WFD-Youth-NMK.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, *Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy*, Brussels 2018 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0269&from=en>

democratic decision-making processes; volunteering; supporting youth employment through effective labour market policies; etc.

- *Fighting disinformation and media support should be included visibly in the IPA III Programming*

The Western Balkan region, including the citizens of North Macedonia are largely exposed to misleading or false information. Addressing disinformation requires political determination and unified action, mobilising all parts of governments (including counter-hybrid, cybersecurity, intelligence and strategic communication communities, data protection, electoral, law enforcement and media authorities), as stated in the EU Action Plan against Disinformation (2018)<sup>3</sup>.

To counteract these negative tendencies, the work of independent and professional media seems crucial. We recommend this programing to support media pluralism and improving capacities of institutions to fight disinformation; but also, mobilization of relevant stakeholders to increase disinformation resistance.

Actions that could potentially be part of the programming include: fighting online disinformation and fake news; actions for increasing confidence in the digital service market; media literacy; introduction of legislation that contributes to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media; media as a platform for democratic discourse; building professional capacities and support institutions that promote freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity; etc.

- *The IPA III Programming should developed a specific strategic objective “Health” within the window “Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth”*

The “Health” component is included in the thematic priorities, within the window “Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth”, but to raise the importance of health to the level of strategic objective, will only contribute to a more well refined approach and a substantial debate on a number of meaningful aspects that can be part of the IPA III programming.

To add to urgency, public health institutions lack resources and capacities to maintain the satisfactory level of public health. Actions that could potentially be part of the programming include: available resources for progressive and non-discriminatory enforcement of health rights; support health policy reforms and participation of affected communities in decision-making processes.

**In relation to the question “if we have any specific suggestions in relation to the preparation process of the strategic response by IPA III beneficiaries?”, FOSM would like to recommend:**

- *Organizing national consultations for a national strategic response for IPA III from civil society (civil society’ paper)*

The process should be initiated and run by the civil society, with the Secretariat for European Affairs and Delegation of European Union kindly invited to observe. The process should engage variety of non-state actors including non-governmental organizations, foundations, grass-root movements, academia and other relevant stakeholders. The strategic response paper prepared by civil society, should serve as an advocacy tool, taken into serious consideration by the country when preparing its official position.

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission, *Action Plan against Disinformation*, Brussels 2018, p.5 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/action-plan-against-disinformation>

Finally, in regards to question “if we have any specific suggestions related to civil society support being reflected in the programming framework and what can be added or changed to increase that support?”, FOSM notes the following:

Civil society is regarded as a vital component of democracy and is an asset in itself. It represents and fosters pluralism and contributes to more effective policies, equitable and sustainable development and inclusive growth<sup>4</sup>. In a regional context of weak democracies with limited administrative capacities, straightening of civil society through both material and political support has therefore become one of the cornerstones of a more comprehensive approach to enlargement policy (European Commission 2007). Civil society in Republic of North Macedonia has repeatedly proven to be a protector and promotor of democratic values; a watchdog over state institutions and policies; advocate for citizens’ needs and interests. The following recommendations seek to equip civil society with resources and support within IPA III Programming as a way of providing continuity to its work:

- Civil society organizations should be engaged in the programming as a horizontal obligatory mainstream measure, but also as a specific direct beneficiary of the EU support;
- Civil society organizations should be included in the IPA III programing as part of the bodies/committees that will monitor the absorption of the IPA III funds and the proper implementation of projects institutions bear the responsibility to conduct;
- CSOs should not be evaluated by the principle of state performance, but by the principle of participation and capacity of civil society. CSOs should participate in capacity building of the state and be subject to specific allocation criteria, which do not depend on the institutional capacity of the state, but on the performance for constructive democratic processes and advocacy of constituents' demands.

Kind regards,  
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<sup>4</sup> European Commission, *The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe’s engagement with Civil Society in external relations*, Brussels 2012, p.1 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0492:FIN:EN:PDF>