

BALKAN CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Feedback on the CONSULTATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN THE PREPARATION OF THE INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE (IPA III)

- Do you think that there are other priority areas or important elements that can still be included in the proposal of the IPA III programme?

No. We also think it is important that civil society will be mainstreamed in all areas.

- Do you have any specific suggestions in relation to the preparation process of the strategic response by IPA III beneficiaries?

The principle the Strategic Response to be Prepared by each IPA III beneficiary, should not concern the IPA support to civil society, especially for civil society development (for ex. current IPA Civil Society Facility) but be prepared in consultation and based on the needs of the civil society in the Enlargement country, corresponding to findings from monitoring of civil society environment (Ex. Guidelines for EU support to civil society in Enlargement countries, and other relevant monitoring reports).

Do you 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?

In order to fulfill its role and contribute towards improved government accountability, and sustainability of democratic reforms, civil society needs continuous and effective support of the EU. There is ongoing trend in most of the Enlargement countries of closing space for democracy and shrinking the space for civil society organizations which the IPA should be equipped to adequately respond, if such trend continues, or increases.

The IPA implementing mechanisms should provide clear basis for defending the civic space and for responding to its immediate threats. Investment **in civic education, more enabling environment, civil society infrastructure and joint action** would be crucial to achieve this. An effective response to the shrinking of civic space could be provided through applying the newly introduced principle of performance to support civil society action. Instead of simply withdrawing allocations from countries that regress in their democratic development, **the funds could be re-allocated as civil society support aimed at fighting back democratic backsliding in the same country**. While doing this, the EU can still make a strong political message and 'punish' unacceptable government behavior, without penalizing the whole society. Furthermore, in a situation of increasing undemocratic and illiberal sentiments, and - what it seems - decreasing transformative power of EU, introducing such response mechanism to support civil society resilience, might be the long-term investment the EU is looking for in safeguarding rule of law and good governance in the enlargement countries.

- Do you have any other comments or suggestion?

There was talk of considerations of thinking about delegating management of EU funds for Civil Society to national governments. BCSDN thinks that introducing such practice would be dangerous, especially since in the WB countries there are tendencies of government to limit the space for CSO operations (especially of the CSOs critical to governments) by misusing funds for CSOs.

