

## STUDY VISIT TO CROATIA

### **a) Croatian experiences – practices applicable in BiH – TACSO BiH Local Advisory Group (LAG) and TACSO BiH team initiatives**

TACSO BiH LAG and TACSO BiH Team Study visit to Croatian Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs, TACSO Croatia and Council for Civil Society Development related to the NGO days concept (origin of proposal, history, achievements) and mechanisms of the Council

### **b) Opening Conference of Civil Society Facility (CSF): Partnership Action - Empowerment of Women**

15-17 February 2012, Zagreb

The purpose of the study visit was to create an action plan by LAG and TACSO BiH Team members for the process of preparing ground to establish NGO Council in BiH (along with the process of developing a Strategy for Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development in BiH) and preparation of government institutions, businesses and CSOs for organizing NGO days in BiH (to be held in 2013).

Additional objective for the team, who organized four info events promoting CSF Partnership Actions-Empowerment of Women Open call in 2011, was to participate at the kick-off event, meet CSOs – MB applicants and partners from BiH and exchange experience regarding NGO days concept and organization with Croatian team as well as Croatian NGO Council for Civil Society Development.

On the basis of TACSO BiH Work Plan for 2011-2013 period (learning and exchange of experience study visit was planned for LAG and team members), minutes from the LAG meeting held on 2 December, 2011 (conditions to found NGO Council considered by LAG members and appropriate timing identified for implementation of Strategy for Enabling Environment for Civil Society, following the preparation of NGO Council founding) and contextual factors (the process of generating Strategy for Enabling Environment for Civil Society is ongoing), study visit is anticipated as an impetus to the TACSO BiH LAG commitment and future activities related to institutional framework building for civil society organizations in BiH.

Action Plan is to be based on the study visit and should be presented and built upon at the two-day LAG workshop scheduled for mid-April 2012 (optionally including participation of guests – key actors – who are to be invited as per LAG members' suggestions).

The agreed upon plan is that all LAG members, who are also members of the Working Group for the Strategy for Enabling Environment for Civil Society in BiH (Ms. Sadeta Škaljić - Ministry of Justice BiH, Sector for Civil Society, Mr. Entoni Šeperić - Federation Ministry of Justice, Mr. Darko Vučenović –RS Ministry of Administration and Local Self-Government, Ms. Snježana Ivandić

Ninković - CSO Association of Democratic Initiatives) would participate in the study visit, including Ms. Ranka Ninković Papić - Foundation for Social Inclusion in BiH.

### VISIT SCHEDULE

15.02.2012		
Time	Event	Remarks
20.00h	Working dinner with DG Enlargement representatives and TACSO Croatia team	TACSO BiH LAG member, Ms. Amra Selesković also joined the meeting (CSO Vesta among MB grantees)
16.02.2012		
14.00-16.00h	Meeting with Office for Cooperation with NGOs, Government of the Republic of Croatia	Office for Cooperation with NGOs was represented by Mr. Igor Vidačak - Head of Office and Ms. Vesna Lendić Kasalo - Head of Office Department for Programs and Strategies  Discussion on experience in initiating NGO Days and its importance for Civil Society over a decade long
9.00-17.00 h	Opening Conference of Civil Society Facility (CSF): Partnership Action - Empowerment of Women  Organizer - DG Enlargement	Among the grant recipients are five civil society organizations from BiH (Applicants/Partners)  TACSO BiH staff participated in the event
17.02.2012		
9.30-11.00h	Presentation and discussion with representatives of the Council for Civil Society Development	Presentation by Ms. Emina Bužimkić - Council member, representing youth sector activities
	Meeting with TACSO Croatia	Reflections on the visit - TACSO LAG members and

13.30-16.30h	team  Meeting with TM of TACSO project – Mr. Henk Visser	TACSO team potential activities; exchange of experience with TACSO Cro team
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TACSO BiH Team and LAG relevant questions, sent in advance via TACSO Croatia, to the Government Office for Cooperation with NGO and NGO Council representatives reflected the following:

1) NGOs Days Concept

- Who initiates NGO Days, who invites organizations, how TACSO and Office for Cooperation with NGOs communicate in planning process?
- Do you have an example of business community participating in this event?
- How do you create financial structure, what are approximate/relative contributions of public and/or private sector?
- What are the most important issues that you as Civil Society in Croatia actualized and handled through NGO Days?
- How to nominate NGO Days topics?
- How are CSOs involved in questions preparation for the event?
- How can Ministry of Justice - Sector for Civil Society and entity ministries take part in organizing the BiH NGOs Days (based on the model of CRO-questions for TACSO LAG and team)?
- How are members of TACSO Croatia LAG involved in the preparation?

2) Question about founding and functioning of the Council for Civil Society Development:

- How did development of the Council for Civil Society Development run?
- The most important phases and lessons (lessons learned)
- Relationship between CSOs and government institutions, the composition of the Council
- Mode (regularity of meetings, main roles and responsibilities, members' mandate)
- TACSO Croatia LAG membership in the Council
- Selection of CSOs/individual candidates in the Council.
- Communication TACSO - Council for Civil Society Development

3) Additional questions by TACSO BiH LAG members:

- Type and extent of information contained in Association's electronic (state level) registry;
- Software analytic solutions (report generation; analytical needs of the Office for Cooperation with NGOs);

- Are there one-stop-shop points or points for NGOs' registration, cutting administrative procedures, on-line registration, etc.?
- Financial control and control of funds for assistance allocation;
- Capacity of the Office for Cooperation with NGOs (systematization of jobs);
- The process of shaping association of public or general interest, association with special status (establishing criteria for status acquisition and registration process);
- Carriers and mechanisms created for CSOS national strategies implementation, how is the relationship between NGOs and Office for Cooperation with NGOs formally established (is there a separate body or a committee supervising implementation of the strategy and other issues related to its implementation);
- Who and how sets CSOs funding priorities at national and local levels?
- What are the benefits or incentives for private sector investment in civil society?



Meeting of TACSO BiH LAG, TACSO BiH Team and representatives of the Croatian Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs



Presentation of the work of the Council for Civil Society Development

**Feedback from LAG members who participated in the study visit:**

**Mr. Darko Vučenović, Republika Srpska Ministry for Government and Local-Self Government:**

I would like to take this opportunity and thank you once again for well organised study visit to Zagreb.

Information we have received from representatives of the Office for Cooperation with NGOs and Council for Civil Society Development are very useful - from the NGO Days organisation aspect and for the process of drafting a Strategy for Enabling Environment for Civil Society, which I am involved in.

I would particularly highlight information related to the work of the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs regarding, primarily - how they were founded, competency issues, procedures of grants allocation and investment control for their associations, relations with other ministries, cooperation with government at local level, etc.  
Equally useful information was offered at Council for Civil Society Development presentation, which should be well used and adapted to our conditions.

**Ms. Ranka Ninković-Papić, Foundation for Social Inclusions in BiH**

THANK YOU very much for all the work, efforts and energy invested; for all opportunities and possibilities provided to us, LAG members and CSO in BiH, including extremely useful study visit to Croatia in the period 15-17 February 2012.

I hope you will not hold my genuinely honest approach, reflecting my worries, against me and I do hope you can use some of it in any context. This is my opinion and attitude.

This was an impressive visit, just as everything else we heard during the meeting and visit to Croatia – Office for Cooperation with NGOs– originally created preconditions and conditions to achieve success avoiding unnecessary risks, amazingly reflective work (over many years) – thus the results accomplished by Republic of Croatia Office for Cooperation with NGOs– (meeting with Dr Igor Vidačak – head of Office for Cooperation with NGOs and Ms. Vesna Lendić-Kasalo – chief of Section for Youth and Strategies) and the advisory body –Council for Civil Society Development in Croatia (presentation of Ms. Emina Bužimkić – representative of youth operations at the Council). It was very inspiring for future work.

I am afraid that there is nothing new I can tell or suggest you, that you are not already aware of – why we have been struggling for so many years in our civil society circle. It is rather painful to see how straightforwardly things get to be resolved elsewhere. There are thousands of answers why we do or do not do things that way (while others run to the future) but the solution is only one. Do we want and do we see ourselves strategically joined into PUBLIC-PRIVATE-CIVIL PARTNERSHIP in achieving any of our common goals; do we have that goal defined at any level (the Republic of Croatia is a positive example)? I am not a pessimist; I am only in touch with our reality, with images of growing poverty and exclusion all around us every day.

There are many similarities and many differences with the Republic of Croatia in the context of civil society development and progress. There is always something new to see, learn and adopt – it seems to be possible and applicable, until we run into BiH context and reality. General notion of civil society and society and its practices in general is utterly misguided. That is why even simple things seem so unrealistic and unacceptable.

During the visit we were informed about the institutional and normative framework for cooperation with Government of the Republic of Croatia and civil society organisations; about success of the Office both nationally and internationally, activities and functioning of the Council and current stage of civil society development in Croatia. The model of cooperation established in the Republic of Croatia is a good example of practice which has been recognised in the region.

We could try to apply it in BiH, adjusted to our needs and working habits.

We could try?!

WE NEED TO:

- Introduce the principle of TRANSPARENCY in all segments

- Conduct analysis of granted international donor funds to BiH NGOs, approach and donor policy in BiH
  - Work on separating NGOs or CSOs from political parties and influences
  - Days of Associations or our NGO Days are very good initiatives with good results. We had it in April 2010, thanks to TACSO, who organised this event – NGO achievements, etc. This approach can be continued with minor modifications. This was truly professionally created and organised – and very well accepted by CSOs. TACSO makes a good mechanism to enable and assist many steps and changes in civil society. However, the process itself should be “owned” by BiH institutions and CSOs.
  - The development of BiH civil society and strengthening CSOs capacity asks for full involvement and inclusion of all civil society segments, rather than NGOs solely.
  - Creating a Strategy for Enabling Environment for Civil Society asks for functional PUBLIC-PRIVATE-CIVIL PARTNERSHIP.
  - Responsible institutions should guide and support initiatives to found a body for civil society in BiH, including development and implementation of the Strategy
  - Have clear idea about the needs of BiH CSO institutions and escape from writing documents for the sake of writing, getting closer to the EU and because everybody else has them
  - Improve quality of CSOs services and create mechanisms of quality control
  - Have single registry of NGOs and supporting information
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- Create mechanism of financial and reporting control regarding funds from government sector to NGO sector for each year, including comparative analyses (e.g. research “Half way to...” for 2010, 114 million KM planned, which is a huge sum, however, it has not been properly distributed nor consistent to the current needs of BiH society and users)
  - Establish funding criteria at all levels and introduce priority areas and projects to be finance by the government, including control mechanisms, in order to prevent one project being funded by different administration levels
  - Harmonize laws

### **Ms. Snježana Ivandić-Ninković, Association of Democratic Initiatives**

As part of the study visit for members of the TACSO BiH Advisory Group, organised by TACSO BiH, four LAG members had the opportunity to visit Office for Cooperation with NGOs of the Republic of Croatia and Council for Civil Society Development. The objective of the visit was to provide additional information to LAG members about organisation and actions of civil society in the Republic of Croatia, including existing institutional mechanisms for creating supportive environment for CS.

The first meeting was held on the premises of Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs of the Republic of Croatia, facilitated by TACSO Croatia representatives. The head of the Office, Mr. Igor Vidačak and head of the Department for Strategic Planning, Programming and Informing, Ms. Vesna Lendić-Kasalo informed us in the introductory part about the history and how the Office was established. LAG members could ask questions primarily regarding the mandate of the Office, how the Office functions, role of the Office in planning CS priorities and coordination of projects financed from the state budget. The meeting was extremely useful, particularly for

LAG members, who are also members of the WG for Strategy for Enabling Environment for Civil Society in BiH.

The second meeting was held in the TACSO Croatia premises with chief of CS Council, Ms. Emina Bužimkić. Within an hour, the Council representative presented the structure, mandate and the concept of Council's work. Council representative also answered many questions of the LAG members.

All LAG members also had the opportunity to meet Mr. Henk Viser, who, in an informal discussion, presented his perception of the CS role, options for efficient CSO actions in the region and provided information about citizen activism in the EU countries.

On behalf of LAG representatives and my personal behalf I would like to thank TACSO BiH office for giving us the opportunity to learn many new things about CS organisation in Croatia. Information provided will be excellent foundation for opening a constructive dialogue between CS representatives and CS representatives and BiH institutions with the objective to create the best framework for CS actions in BiH.

#### **Mr. Entoni Šeperić, Federation Ministry of Justice FBiH**

I had an opportunity to take part in a study visit to the Republic of Croatia organised by TACSO BiH Office in order to get more information about the work of the Croatian Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs and Council for Civil Society Development.

Discussions were extremely useful in the sense of collecting new information, learning about key processes in institutional and partner relations between government of the Republic of Croatia and civil society organisations. The quality and expertise of our host and the possibility to hear answers to some of my dilemmas about institutional solutions first hand were particularly welcome in the period of creating BiH Strategy for Enabling Environment for Civil Society.

Also, an opportunity to discuss about issues and experiences with colleagues from the region, with whom we share the same legal tradition and some of the problems, is always welcome, because it opens floor to create positive contacts and possibilities of additional networking, which can have additional positive effect in the sense of special, or consultant services at different stages.

The experience of the Republic of Croatia, which is about to become a member of the EU is of particular importance for BiH, because it helps identify fundamental differences and avoid unwanted effects, which Croatia could not have avoided or reduced their influence. For all above said and a number of other things, I find this study visit extremely useful and successful, which could not have been possible without a good preparation by the TACSO BiH office, which I am most grateful for.