

EU TACSO 3 Regional Event

30 – 31 March 2023, Tirana, Albania

The Role of Civil Society in the EU Accession Negotiation Process: Learning Exchange between CSOs from Montenegro and Serbia with CSOs from Albania and North Macedonia

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Centre for Civic Education (CCE)



Centre for Civic Education (CCE) is a non-governmental and nonprofit organization, established in 2002.



Vision of the CCE is Montenegro as a democratic society of responsible citizens.



Mission of the CCE is to contribute to the development of civil society and participation of citizens in policy shaping and decision-making through the education of various actors in the field of democracy, human rights and European integration.



Centar za
građansko
obrazovanje

Centre
for Civic
Education

CCE's objectives

Enhancement of citizens' education in the field of democracy, human rights and European integration of Montenegro;

Encouragement of citizens to actively participate in decision-making processes and building an open society based on the rule of law and equal opportunities for all;

Increase of transparency, accountability and efficiency of institutions' work;

Monitoring and promotion of anti-corruption policies;

Research, analysis and representation of solutions and policies that are leading to further democratization and Europeanisation of Montenegro;

Documenting of and advocating for fact-finding on human rights violation, especially those which are relevant to the process of dealing with the past;

Affirmation of freedom of expression and media freedoms;

Improvement of the status of minorities and marginalized groups (LGBTIQ, women, people with disabilities, national minorities, religious minorities, Roma, juvenile delinquents, political opponents, etc.), advocacy for gender equality and fight against discrimination;

Strengthening of democratic processes as preventive mechanism against radicalization and extreme violence in the society;

Protection of consumers' rights and interests;

Informing and empowering young people for their personal development and social activism;

Encouragement of citizens' initiatives.

Key dates for Montenegro's path to the EU

15 October 2007 –
Stabilisation and
Association
Agreement
(SAA) signed

1 May 2010 –
Stabilisation
and
Association
Agreement
(SAA) entered
into force

17 December 2010 – The
European
Council
granted
Montenegro
candidate
status

2 February 2012
– Government
of Montenegro
adopted the
Decision
Establishing the
Negotiating
Structure for the
Accession of
Montenegro to
the EU

15 December 2008 –
Montenegro
submitted a
request for EU
membership

9 November 2010 – The
European
Commission
adopted the
Opinion on
Montenegro's
request to join
the EU

9 December 2011 – The
European
Council
welcomed the
Commission's
assessment of
the good
progress made
by Montenegro

29 June 2012 –
EU-Montenegro
Intergovernmen-
tal Conference
in Brussels
formally
launched
accession
negotiations

Montenegrin model of CSOs engagement in the EU accession negotiations

Legal Framework

- Decree on the election of representatives of NGOs in the working bodies of state administration authorities and conducting of public hearings in the preparation of laws and strategies
- Decision on establishing the negotiation structure for Montenegro's accession to the European Union

**CSOs
representatives
are directly
engaged in the
process
through:**

- **Negotiation Structure**
- **Rule of Law Council** – 1 member of NGOs
- **33 working groups** for 33 negotiating chapters of *Acquis* (two NGO members per working group)

- **Joint Consultative Committee between Montenegro and the EU** (representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, the Union of Employers and two trade union associations, representatives of two NGOs from Montenegro)
- **JCC** is civil society platform established between the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and Montenegrin civil society and allows CSOs on both sides to monitor the country's accession negotiations; a platform to discuss issues of common interest and to inform the public on the challenges ahead

The role of CSOs in the EU accession negotiations process

CSOs continuously contribute to the process of Europeanization and accession negotiations, through participation in WGs, through various analyses, policy recommendations, organization of events, communicating the importance of the EU, through the inputs for the EC's annual reports, JCC etc.



CSOs contribute to change on a daily basis, raising important issues that the public would not otherwise hear about, helping those in need, protecting the environment, and other vital rights and values for every society



Raising issues in the field of judicial reform, the fight against corruption, freedom of expression, disclosure of affairs or irregularities in the work of institutions etc.



CSOs influence the whole process to be more transparent and open, continuously point out all deficiencies, through monitoring, through inputs for EC reports, but are also public and direct in their criticism of pointing out bad practices

CCE's engagement in the EU accession negotiations



Involvement in the accession negotiations on the basis of external contribution, through the development of practical policy proposals, various analyses, providing recommendations and suggestions to the authorities, organization of events, communicating the importance of the EU to the citizens, through the inputs for the EC's annual reports, sub-granting and CSOs' capacity buildings etc.



Within its field of interest, CCE's representatives continuously take part in the working groups of the Government of Montenegro, which are tasked to create certain legal texts, strategies and action plans



Previously, the CCE representatives used to contribute to the public policy shaping through their active engagement within several working groups for negotiations with the EU (Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights; Chapter 28 – Consumer and Health Protection; Chapter 25 – Science and Research; Chapter 26 – Education and Culture)



CCE has its representative in the Consultative body of MFAEI that monitors and evaluates the implementation of activities from Communication Strategy for EU



CCE used to have its representative in the Joint Consultative Committee of Montenegro and European Economic and Social Committee



Strengths of the Montenegrin model

MNE the first country to include NGOs representatives directly into the negotiation structure (working groups and later RoW Council)

The framework for organizing public hearings and the participation of NGO representatives in WG for drafting laws and regulations is satisfactory, *but...*

Positive effect in the first phase, but relatively quickly turned out to be formal inclusiveness...

Weaknesses of the Montenegrin model

In practice, NGO representatives faced various challenges when it comes to **access to documents, building of trust, work dynamics**, etc, and over time the **meetings of those WGs became significantly rarer**

Consultations with civil society actors are not meaningful enough, there is **no serious and inclusive policy dialogue**

Their inclusion is deficient and **uneven in practice, varying from one WG to another**

CSOs are **not given sufficient information** to be able to contribute meaningfully to the process; **their contributions are ignored**

Consultation practices **require better planning, transparency and openness to CSOs' suggestions**

The impact on public policies is limited and mainly comes down to technical refinements during public hearings – both when it comes to participation in legislative change WGs and negotiating WGs

Representatives of the civil sector are very often **over-voted** in these bodies

The proposals are not measured by whether they are constructive or not, but whether they **threaten the interests of the ruling structure**

Lessons learnt & advices for CSOs in Albania and North Macedonia



- There is no one-size-fits-all model for all the WB6 countries - necessary to assess within the state what is the best model of action
- The most important thing is that the system is fully functional and that generates interest from both sides, while the authorities recognize how important it is for the voice of CSOs to be heard
- CSOs should be vigilant, participate as much and meaningfully as possible
- Should be very dedicated to monitoring, strongly warn when see that there is a certain stagnation or regression
- Should influence the process to be as transparent and communicative as possible
- The process must not be perceived as too technical and citizens should understand the real benefits of accession
- CSOs should unite and coordinate more thematically, the effect is stronger if they react together, as a group of NGOs

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Thank you for your attention!



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