



European Economic and Social Committee

**Third Regional Civil Society Seminar
on
Mechanisms for a Structured Regional Dialogue
Between Civil Society, Authorities and the EU
Amman, 13 October 2014**

REPORT

The Regional Civil Society Seminar was hosted by Commissioner Štefan Füle and arranged in consultation with civil society organisations and in cooperation between the EU Delegation in Jordan and the Inter-Institutional Steering Group on Civil Society (EEAS, EC, EESC and input from the Anna Lind Foundation). This is not a formal EU report.

3rd Regional Civil Society Seminar on 'Mechanisms for a Structured Regional Dialogue'

Amman, Jordan, 13 October 2014

This report contains a summary of the regional civil society seminar as well as, in the Annex, the reports of three working groups, drafted by civil society participants. The report does not intend to reflect all relevant aspects of EU policy and support to civil society, but to summarise discussions of the main issue at the seminar: A continued dialogue with Commissioner Füle and the beginning of policy discussion on the three themes identified at the previous civil society seminar in Tunis. Minor editing in form of the Working Group reports was necessary.

The 3rd Regional Civil Society Seminar within the initiative to create suitable mechanisms for a structured regional dialogue between civil society, authorities and the EU was hosted by Commissioner Füle in Amman, on 13 October 2014. Among the approximately 55 participants were mainly civil society representatives from Jordan and the Southern Neighbourhood, a few European CSOs and experts, as well as members of the EU diplomatic corps in Jordan. The format included tried and tested plenary and working group sessions.

The seminar marked the beginning of the 12-months operational pilot phase of the initiative. Focusing on policy dialogue, the seminar was the first of five sets of pilot phase activities that the Commissioner announced at the EU-Southern Neighbourhood Civil Society Forum, held in Brussels, on 29-30 April 2014, and it provided the opportunity for the Commissioner to fulfil the promise he made at the Brussels Forum to continue the dialogue with civil society before the end of his term of office. In addition, civil society organisations began the process of establishing thematic communities and had the initial dialogue on three policy themes identified during the consultation process (see below).

Following the opening of the seminar by the Head of the EU Delegation, Ambassador Joanna Wronecka, Commissioner Füle gave a short speech before opening the floor for an interactive dialogue with civil society representatives. In his speech the Commissioner underlined the need for a regional approach to the dialogue, but not a dialogue at the cost of national dialogues in the region. He also emphasised the need for the dialogue to be sustained and interactive, rather than ad hoc in nature; that dialogue primarily should be among civil society itself; and that ownership of the regional dialogue should rest with civil society. The Commissioner stressed that the dialogue should not be driven by the EU and that the framework to be established for the dialogue should be one that civil society feels best suited to address its needs. He pointed in this respect at the Anna Lindh Foundation as an example of a good framework. The Commissioner reassured the participants of his successor, Mr. Hahn's keen interest in the subject and was confident that the incoming EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms Mogherini, would be supporting this.

During the inter-active dialogue with Commissioner Füle a number of points were made to which the Commissioner reacted positively. These included the necessity of a dialogue at regional level to complement the national dialogues; the need for an open space where both the national and the regional dimension can be present; a suggestion to establish a regional civil society council; the importance of visibility of the dialogue; and the need for continuity, sustainability and resources (funds and staff). In his response, the Commissioner underlined that only a dialogue process driven by civil society can be sustainable. An important element that was missing at the moment in the region was the

South-South CSO dialogue. The Commissioner welcomed the idea of a regional civil society council and stressed again the need for an open and dynamic space where the regional dialogue can take place. This should also be a virtual space. It should be structured, but the structure should neither be too rigid nor too loose. Constructing the space should not be guided by the assumption that what works in the Eastern Neighbourhood also would work in the Southern Neighbourhood. With regard to the resources to create the dialogue mechanisms, the Commissioner pointed out that the instruments were identified and that delivery on the milestones now had begun, with the present seminar being the first of these milestones. On the tripartite nature of the dialogue the Commissioner stressed that the issues the EU discusses with authorities should also be discussed with civil society. Eventually, they should be reflected in the ENP action plans. The Commissioner wished that civil society holds the EU to account on delivering on its policies. With regard to the policy framework the Commissioner pointed at the combination of values and EU interests in the revised Neighbourhood Policy and hoped strongly that these two dimensions would not be separated again.

Following their dialogue with Commissioner Füle, civil society participants formed three working groups to commence discussions on mobility, inequalities and shrinking space for civil society. These were the three themes agreed at the regional seminar in Tunis that was devoted to the planning of pilot phase activities. Focus was on framing the policy themes, i.e. on identifying the key aspects, key actors, etc., and on managing the dialogue process in thematic communities. Several of the points made and recommendations put forward echoed elements of the dialogue with the Commissioner. For example the need was expressed to continue the thematic dialogue on line, in a virtual space, but also to meet again face-to face. The EU instruments should facilitate and enhance CSO participation. At national level, civil society should be involved in processes formulating ENP action plans and in assessment of progress in their implementation. Measures to facilitate mobility should focus on certain segments of civil society, starting with students. The role of the media to create awareness and give the dialogue visibility was highlighted.

The seminar concluded with a strong appreciation of the opportunity it provided to continue the dialogue with Commissioner Füle and an appetite to continue the discussions of the policy themes. This will be facilitated by the on-line communication platform that will be constructed as one of the five components of the regional dialogue mechanisms pilot phase. Until this platform is constructed an interim solution will need to be put in place.

In addition to the thematic communities several learning, knowledge and trust building events are envisaged over the coming 12 months in the framework of the pilot phase. The next event is the workshop on civil society and media on 28 October in Naples, in which Commissioner Füle will also participate.

ANNEX - WORKING GROUP REPORTS

Working Group 1 - MOBILITY

KEY ISSUES:

The group discussed all the major aspects of this topic, keeping in mind the different perceptions that this issue engenders in the EU with respect to the countries of the Southern shore of the Mediterranean; it then proceeded to the identification of the most important stakeholders in the mobility issue; it finally worked with the perspective of isolating those few proposals that could be presented to the EU authorities in order to get the support necessary to continue on the road to inter-regional dialogue.

The group agreed on the fact that Mobility --with its most immediate and visible corollary represented by migration --is a greatly controversial issue for many EU member countries and commands a lot of public perception in the Region as a whole, i.e. both North and South. On the other hand, Mobility intended as a freedom --with its most immediate corollary represented by visas --is on the top of the desiderata by many Southern population segments, especially the youth.

Deepening the discussion on the subject, the group identified also the most visible subsets of the Mobility theme, identifying them with issues like the refugees, the basic freedom of movement and the desirable mobility partnerships to be set in motion.

The group decided to build a matrix representing on one axis the horizontal aspects cutting across all aspects of mobility and, on the other, the vertical aspects signifying specific sub-issues under the general heading of mobility. The group also considered who the Stakeholders are and the possible dialogue initiatives that could contribute to a better inter-regional understanding of this thorny issue. In order to better identify the subject of Mobility, the group also isolated the following basic variables:

- Internal Mobility, i.e. movement of people across states being part of a homogenous region, and Intra-regional mobility, i.e. movement of people across different and non-homogeneous regions.
- Voluntary Mobility as the independent decision of a subject to freely travel across states for any purpose, including that of seeking better living opportunities, versus Involuntary mobility, i.e. the often chaotic and even life threatening displacement of people escaping war, persecution or even genocide.

The group considered also unanimously that, when Mobility stems out of necessity, it has to be inserted into the category of basic human rights.

KEY ACTORS / PARTICIPANTS:

The principal Civil Society sectors that should be involved in the dialogue on Mobility are, according to the participants to the discussion:

- Human right's organisations
- Gender organisations and, especially in the countries of the Southern shore, women organisations that have a better and more social oriented vision of the problems generated by Mobility.

- Cultural organisations, including researchers and sociologists able to extract all the various aspects of Mobility in its different manifestations. The researchers could also help to identify the criminal activities (from drugs smuggling to human trafficking) that sometime hide behind the more general aspect of Mobility. On another perspective, the community of artists, who are capable of speaking with a common language to the general public of both Northern and Southern countries.
- The Media --including media specialised in specific sectors of the Civil Society --intended as the glue that has to keep together the whole dialogue exercise, creating the necessary communication network around it and bringing its fruits to the knowledge of the general public.
- Business people, including SME owners/operators, who, in the ongoing EU dialogue with Eastern partners, have demonstrated their usefulness not only as economic operators but also as carriers of a significant social message.
- It should be noted that the group has discussed the possible participation of religious groups, both single and inter-faith, and has decided not to include them in the list of stakeholders on Mobility.

ISSUES FOR ATTENTION:

The issues that could benefit from immediate support include in the first place are:

-- Gender-related: this was agreed by the group to be the main horizontal aspect of mobility, cutting across all vertical or sectoral issues. Gender issues are often the root of economic poverty and mobility, lack of educational and economic potential, they also often appear in various forms of organised crime, trafficking, refugee movements and human rights abuses;

-- Students and education: this was one of the main vertical elements since mobility of education has both practical but also social network benefits. Exposure of young people to different approaches to issues breeds understanding, tolerance and reform. ERASMUS type exchanges, as well as more specific R&D and innovation opportunities should be explored. Any such funding should encourage the mobility of young people across borders for educational/research purposes as an investment in the long term stability of the region;

-- Media: the role of the media was deemed critical in fostering awareness of mobility issues and their multifarious effects. Mobility programmes for media, along with appropriate training, would assist the EU and the region in highlighting not only the nature of mobility problems, but potential solutions;

-- Social entrepreneurship: Mobility offers both opportunities but may also represent impediments to business growth. The provision of funding to understand business opportunities, especially in border areas, should be encouraged by means of applied research and pilot projects;

-- Cultural: Various forms of culture (arts, drama, narration, music) are valuable in highlighting the cultural dimensions of mobility. Specific programmes should be considered to foster understanding of the cultural bias that can hinder the mobility of culture. Acceptance of other forms of culture was deemed important to building tolerance in a mobility context.

REFUGEES: Refugee issues were discussed, since they are linked to more general mobility issues. But, these issues are often subject to different legal regimes and raise different questions about involuntary mobility and human rights, than some of the more voluntary forms of mobility. With this in mind, special

funding should be made available to understand the wider impact of refugee flows, both upon the local populace (case studies in Jordan and Lebanon would be valuable) and the refugees themselves. This could then contribute to EU-related policies on refugees and associated issues (gender, human rights, etc).

Working Group 2 - INEQUALITIES

KEY PRINCIPLES:

Inequality should be addressed with an “inclusive” approach based on the principles of “citizenship”; justice can’t be achieved without the adoption of a new “social contract” between the citizen and the state, enhancing the institutional building, the separation of power and the adoption of a Human Rights approach

“Political will” is a prerequisite to address inequality. It should be underlined that the commitment to face inequality is not a choice or an option but rather an obligation and a must. Inequality is the root cause of the political instability; thus the lack of security and conflicts in the region. Consequently, addressing inequality is for the benefit and interest of the different national and regional actors from various classes.

Political will should be reflected by adopting a series of measures, policies, strategies and plans. Resources are a key element for the implementation of these commitments; whereby “redistribution of wealth” in a just and fair way should be one of the main resource generating.

Accessibility is an important element of justice and not only affordability of justice; whereby “empowerment” is a key tool to address inequality; inequality is equal to inclusivity which in turn means that “no one should be left behind”

“Partnership” is a prerequisite in addressing inequalities; partnership should be based on the key principles such as democratic national ownership, the respect of the national system, mutual accountability. These principles take into consideration the diversity and the different realities among the different partners.

Addressing inequality should be at two levels, National and regional. The national actors should be held accountable, including the decision makers and the actors from the executive authorities. The regional actors should be accountable as well, specifically the EU and its institutions and member states.

Effective participation to address inequality requires the enabling environment including the relevant legal framework transparency, access to information, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and of associations

KEY ISSUES:

Inequality should be addressed by implementing a comprehensive approach taking into consideration the interrelation between the effective political participation, full and active citizenship, economic, social and cultural justice as well as sustainability; it is thus imperative that the dialogue includes all these different dimensions at a time.

More specifically, issues related to inequality start from political and institutional reforms, this includes the respect of all kind of individual and collective freedoms and to enhance participation. This depends also on the adoption of the relevant economic and social policies leading to justice, enhancing cultural exchange and promoting dialogue as well as policies related to sustainability

PARTICIPANTS:

By civil society we understand the wider definition which is taking civil society as a concept at large; this means that civil society is besides NGO, trade and labour unions, social movements, academia, media etc. however, three main groups remain problematic; the faith based organisation particularly the Islamic groups, the organizations affiliated to the ruling people in power and the political parties so there should be a strictly respected criteria of selection of the actors to participate in the dialogue: to adopt explicitly and without any abstention the human rights system, to be fully independent from the state, at the political, financial resources and strategies

Civil society from the north as a main partner should be part of the process. CSO from the both sides of the Mediterranean can exchange and try to elaborate common visions and perspectives; they can also help in outreaching EU instances and member states

Parliamentarians should be outreached by CSO and, in certain moments they should be included in the dialogue; they have to be aware of the different developments and part of policy formulation and assessment

Officials from the executive institutions should be outreached and included in the dialogue as well

EU institutions at various levels; council, commission and the parliament as well as the various other institutions such as EIB, EBRD and so on

HOW THE DIALOGUE SHOULD ORGANISED

It is clear from the debate on the structured dialogue that took place so far (since Malta) that no new structures should be created so the structure becomes the objective itself. However the dialogue should not be loose; there is a need to build on the existing structures; however, there is a need to assess and to evaluate them and reform them accordingly, or simply neglect them.

The dialogue should start from the national level where CSOs should be part of the formulation of the National Action Plans, and participate in their assessment; to the regional level in order to exchange experiences among the southern CSO but also to assess the EU commitments towards the national and regional process.

CSO should benefit from the instruments and facilities created by the EU with aim to facilitate and enhance the CSO participation.

Working Group 3 - SHRINKING SPACES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

KEY ISSUES:

The group agreed that shrinking space does not mean only restrictions by authorities, although that is definitely happening in a number of countries; it can also mean restrictive environment or restrictions from CSOs themselves. This context varies from country to country.

The EU definition of CSOs was found to be useful: Organisations independent from government. But what about private companies, newly privatised state organisations, media or parliamentarians? These issues require more discussion and debate.

There is a lack of trust between CSOs and the authorities. Hence, the group believed it is vital that there are direct talks between the two. These can take place in the setting of a structured regional dialogue, as well as at national level. First it will be necessary to establish a regional network of CSOs to create effective organisation and clarify demands. The EU will need to insist on a role for CS dialogue with governments at regional and national levels if the credibility of CSOs is to be established and enhanced.

Nationalistic fervour fuels anti-CSO sentiment, with allegations of treachery, foreign agents, espionage. Some of this is fuelled by fear of Gulf funding for Islamist groups, but is extended to the EU and other European sources of funding. The media too often fuel fear and mistrust of CSOs in many of the countries south of the Mediterranean. Another problem is that governments create their own NGOs. The group agreed that EU funding going directly to ministries limits the role of CSOs. When the EU channels funds through ministries they restrict the work of CSOs.

Another problem identified by the participants: restrictive laws governing NGOs. These can be extremely harsh, as in Egypt. But restrictions are also there in Jordan and Tunisia, concerning registration, extent and objectives of the CSO work, membership. There are widespread legal moves against foreign funding, including from the EU. There is a need to monitor this shrinking legal space and for CSOs to discuss it in a regional network.

The group therefore urged the creation of a regional network to strengthen information exchange between CSOs (both South-South and North-South) and negotiations between the EU and governments.

Civic action is needed: people with common goals must come together!

PARTICIPANTS:

The group decided to relate participation to the themes, so that those involved will vary according to the subjects being considered.

The priority themes identified were:

- Security and freedoms. CSOs need to respond to minimise the impact of security measures and to create trust so they are not considered security threats. Careful attention needs to be given to CSOs considered security threats by authorities but not by other CSOs independent of government, i.e. Islamist organisations.

- Enlarging the legal space for civil society action. This needs regular monitoring, probably by budgeted staff within a structured regional dialogue. This would avoid duplication with other similar work but feed into the dialogue.
- Media. They are part of civil society but are also autonomous because they cover the work of CSOs. There will be more discussion of media in Naples so we did not devote a lot of attention to them here. But they are definitely a prominent theme for the dialogue.
- Corporate governance (NGOs learning how to manage themselves, CSOs collaborating, government learning how to cooperate with CSOs).

Participation will vary according to themes. More discussion needed on the representativity of the CSOs participating.

ORGANISING THE DIALOGUE:

Dialogue on the above themes will be through virtual communications platform (as an organisational tool), but also through direct meetings.

Participants will differ according to themes with OPEN ACCESS AND TIGHT FOCUS.

By structured we mean budgeted, funded, and staffed to cover political, editorial, research, communication functions and management logistics.

The result of this work will be a dialogue with the authorities and EU, at regional and national levels.