



INSTITUTE FOR REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE THROUGH ADVOCACY

ANALYTICAL REPORT

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Acknowledgments

This analytical report is a result of IRIS' pilot project aimed at empowering civil societies in Southeastern Europe through introducing advocacy practices, with activities at this stage focused on civil society organizations in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The findings presented herein are based on the vigorous research and observations carried out by IRIS' team in parallel with the provided training and strategy development for non-governmental organizations in these two countries.

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EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE THROUGH ADVOCACY

FRAMING THE PROBLEMS AND THE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The early transition period in the post-communist countries of the 1990s witnessed a process of atomization of the social fabric as a result of disintegration of the state and the public institutions. The transition paradigm prescribed the establishment of a set of institutions and procedures, which qualified a country as “democratic”. However, democracy often proved ineffective, its institutions referred to as “hollow shells”, which failed deliver to the citizen. It became clear that a vital ingredient that could make democracy work is missing– and this is the input of the citizenry in terms of interactions that occur at two levels: *first* between citizens themselves, and *second* – between the citizens and the institutions.

Thus, one of the primary goals of democracy-building became the reconstitution of society, after identifying and employing a workable model that best fit the desired outcomes.

The patriarchal model offered such an alternative, because it seemingly provided the return to traditional values and norms around which the society can be rebuild. However, in the context of rapid modernization the patriarchal model proved counterproductive. While it couldn't fulfill its promise to revive tradition, it rather produced dysfunctional individuals and social groups. The building of modern societies - that is liberal democratic ones *per se* - necessitates formalized relationships, patterns of interaction that the patriarchal model cannot supply.

Hence, the problem called for a substantially new approach that would restore the bonds of civic solidarity and open a functioning channel of interaction between citizens and institutions. The Institute for Regional and International Studies has proposed and employed the advocacy methodology, which could serve this purpose. The goal of rebuilding social relations, however, does not suffice copying advocacy techniques. In the past six years the institute has tested and adapted Western advocacy practices to the socio-political realities of Bulgaria, and has been pursuing the replication of this model further in other post-communist countries.

The rationale behind choosing advocacy is multifold. While in instrumental terms the use of advocacy by civil society organizations refers mainly to NGO activities in pursuit of a policy change, IRIS has accepted a broader conceptual role of advocacy. Along these lines, the non-governmental organizations that employ advocacy are viewed in their capacity as:

- First, social actors, which provide venues of grass-root or constituency mobilization - and consequently for social change;
- Second, policy actors, whereby they have impact on the decision-making process;
- Third - last, but not least - intermediaries between the citizens, the institutions and the businesses.

In this conceptual model, the non-governmental organizations - when employing advocacy - are not only venues that channel citizens' interests. In the process of doing so, they also serve as mediating structures that help develop and sustain a set of values, patterns of interaction and relational networks that underpin a modern, liberal-democratic society.

When acting on community or grass-root level, a NGO-advocates helps create the norms of trust and reciprocity – that is social capital - that are basic for the social fabric. Thus, the very process of collective action adds to successful community building.

In regard to civil society development, advocacy can fill in the gap between an NGO and the constituency it serves. The coalition-building component of advocacy campaigning makes possible the establishment of flexible networks, capable of amplifying civil influence.

With reference to policy-making, advocacy is the pluralist mechanism of interest representation, which functions beyond the cycle of elections. The aggregated social demands, grievances, etc. can be translated into action through advocacy, employing the NGOs (non-profits) as organizational vehicles.

The continuous involvement of civil society organizations sets an additional set of check and balances on the decision-making process. Ultimately, this improves policy-making and implementation, making it more transparent, accountable and accessible to the citizens. The citizens prove able to overcome the dependency culture and provide their feedback into the decision-making process.

When pursuing social change in the Balkans countries, however, there are number of processes at work that have to be taken into account - besides local cultural idiosyncrasies of SEE communities.

First, a general characteristic of the post-communist world is the transition from communism and planned economies to liberal democracy and market economy. Second, the context of the Western Balkans puts additional strain to local societies through the post-conflict rehabilitation of conflict-torn societies. Third, a recently added feature is the process of the so-called “European integration”, which refers to the gradual adoption of EU norms, standards and legislation, preparing the countries for eventual membership.

Therefore, we are witnessing the triple effects of three overlapping processes – transition, post-conflict reconstruction and European integration, acting within the context of complex societies, which - while on the track of modernization - have not entirely departed from their patriarchal background.

Additionally, there is another set of characteristics of the societies of Europe's Southeast, and these are the numerous cleavages that cut across them. Along with the more typical left-right or center-periphery divides, there are the ethnic cleavages that exert enormous influence on civic and political choices and actions. Therefore, there is the challenge in SEE of building "illiberal" civil societies (akin to the relatively recently coined term "illiberal" democracy) that define citizenship in ethnic terms and uphold democracy as far as it applies only to their ethnic group or ascribed affiliation to a nation.

Another major challenge of "embedding" advocacy within Southeast European NGOs stems from the *etatist* tradition that has brought about two opposite, yet equally negative phenomena: the dependency culture, and the anti-institutional radicalism. From the viewpoint of advocacy methodology, this necessitates modifications in advocacy's two main approaches - the "paradigm of partnership" and the "paradigm of conflict" - which prescribe to NGOs either cooperation or confrontation with state institutions.

THE PROJECT

The goal of IRIS' pilot project "*Empowering Civil Society in Southeastern Europe through Advocacy*" was to strengthen democracy in SEE post-conflict societies through introduction of advocacy as an instrument of establishing and reproducing civil solidarity and defending civic interests within a network of legitimate relationships between citizens and institutions of public authority. Advocacy - through interaction, public mobilization, coalition building and exchanges with the authorities - helps create the normative frameworks and procedures inherent to a democratic system.

This project had been designed as the first phase of a longer-term region-wide program for advocacy training and campaigning. One set of activities included transferring advocacy expertise and experience to select civil society organizations in BiH and Macedonia. A second set of activities focused on an assessment of the civil societies' potential in the targeted countries to engage in advocacy activities.

The aim of assessing local civil society organizations was threefold. First, it identified viable organizations, which later on had to be involved in IRIS'-initiated training and consultation sessions and included in IRIS international contact network. Second, it analyzed the existing potential of non-governmental organizations to initiate or engage in advocacy activities. Third, it elicited a number of findings (please, refer to the attached findings from the assessment trips) that served IRIS both in tailoring its activities to local conditions as well as in planning follow-up activities.

As a first step, IRIS' project team conducted two assessment trips to both BiH and Macedonia and carried out assessment in accordance to the previously developed assessment scheme. The assessment methodology included interviews and questionnaires survey - both specially developed to match local political and social idiosyncrasies. The respondents were civil society activists, representing a variety of non-governmental

organizations, from different parts of the countries in focus and a diverse ethnic background. The interviews were also aimed at selecting direct beneficiaries (trainees), which met the selection criteria. This type of activity involved twenty-nine respondents from Macedonia and twenty-five participants from BiH from the two entities of the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska. Consequently, special advocacy training programs and respective materials were developed on the basis of civil societies' assessment in the two countries.

After the assessment trips and the development of tailor-made curriculums IRIS' team conducted training seminars in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The seminar in Skopje took part from May 26 to 28, 2004 with the participation of different non-governmental organizations, working in the field of environmental protection, ethno-cultural, youth and human rights issues. The seminar was interactive with practical exercises, simulation and role-play games that were aimed at imparting knowledge to participants on defining problems and solutions in their communities as well as practical skills in organizing advocacy campaigns.

The seminar in Skopje was aimed at finding solutions through advocacy civil action to pending problems in the country such as youth issues in cross-ethnic communities. The seminar also accentuated on advocacy techniques for building durable coalitions and cross-sectoral partnerships between businesses, authorities and civil organizations.

A three-day training seminar took part in BiH between June 11-13, 2004 with the participation of twelve NGOs representatives based in Sarajevo and Banja Luka. The training in BiH was designed in accordance with the findings of the previously conducted needs-assessment survey and thus met the initial expectations of the civic activists taking part in the training sessions. The thematical emphasis of the seminar was on fostering citizens' motivation when organizing campaigns on municipal level. The participants also acquired practical skills in community problems' identification and in mapping the approach to problem solving through advocacy .

As a result a core group of more than twenty activists from NGOs in Macedonia and BiH was trained in practical advocacy skills. These skills included identification of problems of public significance that affect the civil society organizations' constituencies, developing strategies to achieve advocacy goals; gaining legitimacy through the mass media; building alliances between businesses, civil societies and authorities; approaching decision-makers and to gain political support for advocacy campaign.

The next phase of the project implementation included visiting fellows program to be carried out in Bulgaria. All participants in the training had the chance to apply for program through developing advocacy campaign proposal. As a result of the selection process eight people from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia were enrolled. The visiting fellows program provided civic activists with the opportunity to gain experience from their Bulgarian counterparts in successful advocacy practices and models of civic participation in the decision-making process, thus supplementing the results of the training so-far. The participants had the unique opportunity to meet leading Bulgarian consultants in advocacy and have site-visits throughout the country to some of the most advanced civic organizations working in the area of advocacy.

The last phase of practical training within the project included taking the experience one step further through providing in-office consultations to select non-governmental organizations. At this stage of the project implementation, the local civil society organizations had to develop their own specific advocacy campaigns under the supervision and guidance of IRIS' team.

The aim of the IRIS' strategy planning seminar in Macedonia was to consult the youth NGO "Mladinska" Alliance from Tetovo on developing strategic action-plan for an environmental-protection campaign. The concrete case of the campaign was the construction of a separate scrap-collection facility on the territory of nine municipalities of Poloski region, with about 200,000 citizens as direct beneficiaries of this service and an additional 600,000 people from Tetovo, Gostivar and Skopje could benefit from it. The strategic planning process included basic components such as identifying long and short-term strategic goals, analysis of the situation and existing legislation, coalition-building, working plan for media campaigning, negotiations and evaluation. With the Macedonian youth "Mladinska" NGO at the preparatory stage of this initiative, IRIS is ready and willing to further lend its expertise support in carrying out this advocacy campaign strategy.

The project team organized also a round table discussion in Skopje with several citizens' associations, which focused on the problems and perspectives of Macedonian civil society sector. The discussions were structured around several dimensions, including the interaction between civil society and state institutions in Macedonia; interaction between NGO themselves and with the business sector; communication with media.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the partner organisation "Save the Children" - Sarajevo became the recipient of IRIS' consultation and assistance. IRIS advocacy team organized one-day seminar for "Save the Children" staff, which included several issues: basic definitions, steps and strategies for civic advocacy; budget advocacy campaigning - definitions and steps; as well as media campaigning and evaluation of the advocacy campaign. The concrete case chosen for Save the Children's advocacy campaign was focused on preventing children trafficking. For that purpose, a strategy was developed for citizens' participation in the budget allocation for anti-trafficking initiatives. Furthermore, IRIS' team developed recommendations for carrying out a broad media campaign against child trafficking in BiH.

A round table devoted on advocacy was organised in Banja Luka with representatives of several civic organisations, which discussed the interaction between non-governmental organizations and decision-makers, businesses and media in Republika Srpska. Specific problems concerning NGOs advocacy experience in the context of the post-conflict society of BiH were assessed.

ADVOCACY CAPACITY ASSESSMENT IN BiH AND MACEDONIA

Within the project framework, IRIS has conducted a capacity assessment of selected civil society organizations in BiH and Macedonia in relation to a future sustainable introduction of advocacy practices. The set of assessment criteria were elaborated on the basis of the five major steps of advocacy: analysis; strategic planning; coalition building; media campaign; and evaluation. The criteria for assessment of NGOs' capacity to undertake advocacy campaigns were formulated as follows:

- Human resources' qualification and experience in advocacy;
- Human resources motivation and sustainability;
- Level of NGO collaboration and networking;
- Interaction between NGOs and decision-makers;
- Interaction between NGOs and the business;
- Public image of NGOs and media relations;
- Level of NGO adequacy to civil interests and needs and relationships between NGOs and grass roots communities.

IRIS' team interviewed a number of representatives of civic organizations from Macedonia and BiH during site visits and group discussions in October-November 2004. The methodology included the development of a questionnaire and employing it in interviews and focus group discussions. On the basis of the research and IRIS observations during the course of the project implementation, recommendations for raising NGOs' capacity in designing and managing advocacy campaigns have been elaborated.

MACEDONIA: ADVOCACY CAPACITY OF NGOS

Financial viability

The functioning of citizen's associations in Macedonia is still strongly dependent on external financial aid and the NGOs do not need to search alternative funding sources. Consequently, the decrease of financial support from United States and the EU after 2004 will pose serious challenges to the sustainability of the Macedonian civil society organizations. Hence, they should make an effort to increase their financial sustainability through acquiring a broader knowledge about fundraising mechanisms and alternative sources of funding. Another obstacle to financial sustainability is that NGOs could not be directly engaged in economic activities.

Exploring and enhancing opportunities for support from local communities will also be important factor in this field. According to Art. 61 of the Law on Citizen's Associations and Foundations NGOs are entitled to receive financial support from the state budget, municipal budgets and from Skopje city budget. Therefore, programs and projects could be submitted to the relevant institutions: Macedonian government, ministries, local community councils and the Skopje City Council. The legislative base that has been already adopted sets up favorable conditions for the viability of citizens' organizations if these opportunities are appropriately used.

Organizational capacity and expert potential

According to IRIS' team observations and to Macedonian civil activists the main deficiencies of the civil sector in this field are related to:

- The prevalent climate of "project-to-project" survival;
- The lack of organizational capacities of Macedonian NGOs, including strategic planning;
- Management;
- Constituency building;
- Technical infrastructure in NGOs that are located outside of the capital;
- Small number of permanent staff per organization.

A specific tendency can be observed in the Macedonian civil society sector, whereby a large number of NGOs are operational in several, often unrelated, fields (for example in human rights, environment, gender issues, etc.) as a result of pursuing foreign donors' priorities. At present, initiatives in the spheres such as youth problems, social issues, and ecology seem to be most frequently supported.

There are a large number of citizen's organizations in Macedonia, but few of them are really active, many of them are established without any specific vision, mission and activity focus. In respondents view the sector is often non-efficient and non-effective in its activities. The too large number of low-quality NGOs can lead to unstable climate for cooperation and to lack of confidence in the sector as a whole.

Although civil activists are aware of basic organizational needs and that they have had relevant trainings, they don't always apply systematically this knowledge in practice, calling for strengthening of management capacities of Macedonian NGOs. Further research about areas of specialization of NGOs, of their need for expertise and in which fields could be a step forward.

Target groups are often uninformed about services and programs offered by the NGOs. Improvement of contacts with the target groups for the strengthening of advocacy initiatives' impact on them is vital. Rebuilding of relations and of interaction with constituents and local communities is at great importance for the establishment of the

new type of social relations and institutional procedures in Macedonia's recently established democratic system.

Advocacy

The number of NGOs in Macedonia is progressively growing, especially in the last two years.¹

The external funding - with the European Union and the United States are the two principal sources for financial support – is primarily aimed at the improvement of social problems such as:

- Interethnic relations at local level;
- Initiatives aimed at confidence building among the Macedonian communities;
- Citizen participation in decision-making process.

During the last few years there is a number of active NGO's, which have developed capacities in advocacy in the above-mentioned fields. Despite the fact that most of them have had training in strategic planning and on media campaigning, they need to obtain additional knowledge also in designing advocacy campaigns. IRIS seminars in Macedonia contributed to these skills building, but the participants stated that their organizations have further significant need of training mainly in the following advocacy steps: analysis of the situation and background, strategic planning and evaluation.

There is no sufficient data about civil sector's experience in coalition building, but obviously this practice is not very widespread as a method for influencing public policies in Macedonia. Coalitions are often initiated because of the demand of the foreign donors. Advocacy experience of local NGOs is chaotic and often they do not think of advocacy as a constant process, which supposes organized and well planned civic initiatives. Citizen's associations directly involved in advocacy activities have not acquired yet the necessary potential to initiate social changes, which is due also to their limited ability to establish channels of interaction between NGOs and authorities.

In the opinion of the NGO activists the Macedonian civil sector has a significant potential, and international reports also confirm that the civil society rating in Macedonia is improving in general.² The number of issue-oriented NGOs continued to grow in 2003 and many of them succeeded in the working on essential community problems, especially in the field of improvement of interethnic relations.

Despite of the progress in civil society development in Macedonia, there is a deficit of think tanks in Macedonia, which could provide socio-political analyses and public policy recommendations. There is a need for strengthening the capacities of this sector, in order that it could effectively influence the decision-making process.

¹ Through the European Agency for reconstruction (EAR) and U.S. Agency for International development (USAID).

² *Nations in transit: Macedonia 2004*. – Freedom House, p.7

Web site: <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/NISPAcee/UNPAN016582.pdf>

NGO collaboration and networking

The cooperation and coalition building between the citizen's associations is still weak, which is partly due to the interethnic tensions. Another deficit is that existing networks are often formed on the basis of ethnic ties, political affiliations, or kinship relations. However, there are several examples of good NGOs cooperation on issues that cross ethnic divides such as: NGO coalition working for passage of legislation on domestic violence; the women's political participation initiative; the NGO domestic observation effort, which united NGOs from all over the country to monitor local elections; efforts of SEGA coalition for the creation and implementation of National Youth Strategy and Policy.

Further strengthening of the organizational capacities of the civil sector implies enhancement of coalition building and more collective action initiatives. This could be achieved through civic education and better understanding of channels and mechanisms of NGO cooperation.

Interaction between NGOs and decision-makers

Many NGOs have been active in the government's implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, from issues of local government and the reform of the Ministry of the Interior to small arms collection. The civic sector in Macedonia is currently establishing a dialogue with the state institutions in order to increase the effectiveness of the civil society initiatives and this process becomes more and more visible to the general public.

However, the interviewed NGO activists and participants evaluated the cooperation with the institutions on both local and central level as "unsatisfactory". The support from the state sector is not adequately developed and the interaction between the decision-makers and civil society actors is still weak, without being adequately institutionalized. The civic sector often stays uninformed by the authorities concerning official information, different policies and financial grants allocation and the communication between the civil sector and the administration is often difficult. In the opinion of civic activists another major problem stems from the fact that public institutions are not politically neutral.

The two spheres (public and private) need to inform each other and to cooperate on a regular basis. Establishment of a specific position or units in the administration such as specialist for relations with NGOs could be recommended and encouraged. Public administrative staff could be trained on how to cooperate with the civil society sector.

Government structures seem generally willing to collaborate with citizen's organizations, especially in cases when they need to receive expertise from the NGOs in some particular fields. All activists are aware that NGOs have to make further efforts to improve the communication and interaction with public administration on both local and central levels. The process of integration into the EU and NATO, as well as the decentralization will facilitate this interaction through the introduction of new norms and practices in this area.

Interaction between non-governmental organizations and the business sector

The information about successful models and cases of cooperation between business and NGOs is scarce and further studies are necessary in this field. The general attitude among NGOs is that the business sector is not adequately engaged with civic causes. Business companies, which support financially the NGO sector, do not benefit from tax exemptions and there are no clear rules for involvement in civic causes. The continuing decrease of foreign funds in Macedonia compels the civil society organizations to search for alternative financing sources, including through adopting an effective approach for interaction with the business sector. The transfer of experience and best practices from other countries in SEE concerning successful models of cooperation between the third sector and the business could be employed.

Interaction between non-governmental organizations and the media. Public image of the civic organizations

The civil society sector perceives the interaction with the media as satisfactory, although IRIS partners identified the following problems:

Media are not interested in NGO's activities and the two sectors have different views on priority issues. NGOs themselves apparently experience difficulties in finding the adequate approach when addressing their messages to the media. Moreover, NGOs are trying to access the media through non-formal communication methods by using personal contacts or political influence. Relevant trainings contributed to the formation of general skills, but the majority of organizations unanimously consider that improving their proficiency and know-how in designing media campaign is of primary importance.

In the opinion of Macedonian civil activists the image of the non-governmental organizations among local communities is satisfactory in general. Over the past few years, NGOs have had some success in raising awareness about the role of the civil society sector in their respective areas of operation. Despite of increased media coverage over the past two years NGOs have to make more efforts to prove their effectiveness to the public. They must adopt as principled attitude as well as a professional and formal approach to accessing the media and allow the assistance of PR specialists or media experts.

The above-mentioned tendencies and the following negative factors lead to lack of citizens' confidence towards the civil society sector:

- NGOs are often seen as politicized;
- There are corruption practices in the civil society sector;
- There is lack of visibility of NGO activities;
- NGO activities are not consistent with their missions;
- Citizens still look to the government to solve their problems, and NGOs have not been successful in presenting themselves as an effective alternative for representing organized civil interests.

In order to improve their image Macedonian NGOs should benefit from the general strengths of their position in the society and namely:

- They have direct contact with citizens' problems and with the beneficiaries of their activities;
- They are inside communities and are aware of their actual needs;
- They can define accurately the problems, search the solutions and design the relevant projects and programs.

Recent growth of local-level NGOs may create an enhanced public image for the sector, particularly for those NGOs able to deliver the necessary basic services that government is unable to provide.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: ADVOCACY CAPACITY OF NGOS

Advocacy

While the Bosnian civil society features a number of well-developed NGOs, advocacy techniques are only occasionally employed. While not totally unaware, organizations apply individual advocacy techniques in a not well-organized and coherent manner and it has not become yet an intentionally and purposefully implemented method for strengthening community bonds and for solving societal problems.

Some activists, especially from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, have participated in trainings where advocacy aspects have been covered. However, in both entities of FBiH and Republika Srpska there is a deficit of understanding the aims and mechanisms of this practice. Lack of experience in the practical implementation of a coherent advocacy campaign could also be observed. There are two main obstacles to implementing advocacy know-how:

- Deficit of motivation for civil participation and activism, resulting from two main reasons: lack of trust in the effectiveness of the local decision-making process and disbelief in citizens' capacity to change anything ("dependency culture").
- Insufficient bonds between existing civil sector structures and grass root communities, underlined by two facts: while many existing NGOs cannot mobilize citizens because of their general mistrust and apathy, grass root communities do not form new organizations to answer their needs.

However, NGOs both from FBiH and RS realize and verbalize this problem. During their fellowship visit to Bulgaria the demonstration of best practices that really worked “in life” in other post-communist reality, encouraged their motivation. The general opinion expressed was that a successful implementation of several advocacy campaigns, with an adequate publicity, could demonstrate the strength of civil society and restore its credibility. Hence, there is a strong need of dissemination of good examples and successful campaign results to encourage civic participation and activism.

Another problem is the ethnic encapsulation. Although donors encouraged and often required establishment of branches of supported NGOs in both entities, the civil sector in BiH remains encapsulated within the correspondent ethnic communities. As far as there are ethnically heterogeneous NGOs, this is connected rather with outside factors – donors’ requirements, impact from above, etc. – than with existence of heterogeneous constituencies behind them. Trust between the three ethnic communities is far satisfactory and the idea of common problem solving has not acquired the necessary potential.

Being more responsive to donors’ agendas than to real life problems, BiH NGOs are often alienated from the grass root community, which could hardly qualify grass-root level interaction satisfactory.

The expected decrease in large-scale international funding already has one positive effect – seeking ways of survival, NGOs start to turn to the need of handling existing issues on grass root level. They begin to realize that in the context of higher competition, adequacy to real needs and efficiency in getting problems solved will matter at least as much as the ability to fill in a complicated project application form.

In this context the participants in all IRIS meetings and trainings showed perfect understanding of the significance of advocacy as an effective tool of representing and defending civic interests. The existence of relatively sustainable NGOs on local level can become a favorable ground to improve the interaction with grass-root communities.

NGO collaboration and networking

The international community’s efforts to build the civil sector in BiH encouraged NGOs to establish branches in both entities. International NGOs operating in BiH also opened offices in both the Federation and in RS. However, cooperation between NGO’s from the different entities can be assessed as underdeveloped.

Within the entities there are some emerging coalition structures and their significance for advocacy campaigning have been highlighted by IRIS’ training curriculum. In the course of their operations, NGOs in BiH have accumulated experience in joint work and the respondents from both entities mention this as strength of the civil society in the country. Existing experience and recognition of the necessity to undertake joint initiatives is a positive factor for future coalitions-building as a main step to problem solving through advocacy.

Interaction between NGOs and decision-makers

The interviewed NGO activists are unanimous that interaction between the civic sector and institutions needs further development. The complexity of the state constitutional framework makes difficult the identification of the decision-maker, particularly responsible for a specific issue in order to address him/her in the course of the campaign. Decision-making power is subject to complicated mechanisms of division between representatives of the three ethnic groups and it results in a composite administration, that cannot manage a fast and effective decision-making process.

Respondents assess the cooperation with local institutions is in general relatively more satisfactory, compared to that on entity/central level. Existing cooperation is often based on private relations and not on formally established contacts, which leads to lack of sustainability of relations. This calls for measures aimed at replicating successful models of interaction. The fellowship visit of Macedonian and Bosnian activists to Bulgaria gave them a positive example of long-term sustainability of formal relations between NGOs and local authorities and of concrete results achieved through this type of cooperation.

According to the views of respondents, another reason for the existing problems before this type of partnerships lies in the politisation of society and political affiliation of some civil structures, established especially to meet a specific requirement in order just to get a project approved and funded. However, the practice in other countries demonstrates that such “artificial” NGOs can sometimes evolve and should be encouraged to become a functional bridge between the civil and the public sector.

In all cases, advocacy, due to the nature of the process itself, is a powerful mechanism for effective interaction between the two sectors. Good practices in this sphere could become an important stimulus for improvement of partnership and formalization of relations.

Interaction between NGOs and business sector

The interaction between NGOs and the business can be assessed as underdeveloped, especially on local level. According to the respondents’ views, there are two major obstacles before the cooperation with business:

- Lack of legislative incentives;
- Lack of interest on behalf of the business.

According to IRIS’ team however, the NGOs do not show significant interest either and therefore do not make efforts to make their activities interesting for the business. The reasons for this stem mainly from the fact that the NGO sector has not yet fully recognized: the role that local businesses may have for strengthening local community bonds and the fact that aid is not necessarily financial. Currently there is no available reliable information on the attitudes of the business sector itself towards cooperation with NGOs and its parameters. However, future development of public-private partnerships and public tender procedures in the context of Euro-Atlantic integration generally can be expected to improve the interaction between civil sector and business and to give framework to the cooperation between authorities, businesses and NGOs on local level.

Interaction between NGOs and media. Public image of civil organizations

The problem of NGO's image and their work with the media is important in the context of encouragement of civic activism through implementation of advocacy know-how, as well as of necessity of disseminating successful examples.

Interviewed activists in BiH generally evaluate the access of NGOs to media as difficult. They complain of insufficient coverage due to unsatisfactory interest to their activities. Although some of them, especially those directly engaged in media relations, are aware that this is a two-way process, civic activists in general tend to consider that the main reason is some condescending attitude of the media and the general unfavorable climate for broad publicity of NGOs and their activities.

Certainly, there are some underlying conditions with negative impact. However, media and local newspapers in particular remain the main access channel to local communities. During the implementation of the pilot project the specifics of NGO work with the media have been widely discussed and the understanding for the two-way nature of the process was increased.

A significant number of participants complained that the image of the NGO sector as a whole is not positive. Their logic identifies a vicious circle – negative publications or none – create negative public attitudes, which, on their turn, leave no enough space for positive or sufficient coverage.

Factors that condition the presence of negative attitudes (as in Macedonia, discussed in the previous chapter): political affiliation, corruption practices, underestimation of professional approach to media relation, etc., are valid for BiH to the same extent.

In this context, there are two major steps, which could help to improve NGOs' image and create favorable basis to raise advocacy know-how implementation: 1) raising of skills in media relations and 2) emphasis on direct marketing techniques. These can overcome the negative conditions of the media market and compensate for the deficit of specific expertise necessary in working with broadcasting media and the internet. Moreover, these techniques are originally characteristic of NGO activity. They could improve not only the image itself, but relations with constituents and, in this way, directly to help reestablishment of relations within an authentic public environment.

DESIGNING FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

A number of civil society organizations that were partnering IRIS in this project have had previous experience in or employed advocacy practices – on occasional basis and in most

cases using only rudimentary techniques that have not been integrated into a streamlined strategy with the all necessary components of public mobilization pursuing policy change.

On the basis of the conducted research, needs assessment and training, IRIS has identified several possible problem areas in the Western Balkan societies, which should be addressed through the advocacy methodology:

- The institutional degradation that has followed the collapsed of the socialist states and the consequent civil wars has made institution-building an imperative. Therefore, the civil society organizations should engage in advocacy activities whereby making the decision-making more transparent and effective. In this case, institution-building is not merely a function of government activity but also of citizens' self-conscious interest in improving institutional performance and decision-making. The involvement of civil society organizations in the decision-making – which is the essence of advocacy - is *de facto* a powerful anti-corruption mechanism. Needless to say, corruption has been a cause and effect of the weak institutional infrastructure of the Balkan states.

- There should be a special focus of advocacy activities at municipal level. The two countries, where the activities of this pilot project took place, featured two different patterns of municipal authorities' development.

In BiH, the complex institutional structure makes the higher levels of authority all but dependent on the protectorate from of governance that will be dominant in years to come. Hence, the municipal level is what really matters, where local “ownership” of processes of governance are much more likely to take place.

In Macedonia, until recently one could hardly speak of local-self governance. However, with the decentralization arrangements (envisaged by the Ohrid Framework Agreement) entering into force, the issue of municipal level self-governance becomes a top priority on the societal agenda.

Hence, the municipal-level advocacy should provide for rebuilding of the public private-space and a cornerstone of establishing public-private partnerships.

- Building private-partner partnerships within the triangle of government–civil society-the business, which is essential to the stable infrastructure of a democratic society. In this case, advocacy's “paradigm of partnership” should be put to work, emphasizing cooperational modes of interaction between authorities and the organized civil society.

- Rebuilding communities through employing advocacy's approaches that emphasize bottom-up public mobilization schemes. Moreover, taking up social justice causes as advocacy campaigning targets increases the chances of the emergence of cross-ethnic interests that transcends narrow ethnic boundaries.

- Helping overcome the crisis of representation. In the Balkan context, there are two specific sets of issues pertaining to this problem. First, there are the deficiencies of the party systems, associated with either corrupt, non-transparent practices or featuring narrow ethnic bases. Second, there is the phenomenon of "policy without politics", e.g. whereby external factors (e.g. in the case of international protectorate and semi-protectorates) substitute or subsume local political choices and decision-making. In this case, advocacy creates alternative channels for citizens' interests representation that function beyond the cycle of elections and help express more authentic citizens' interests.

IRIS has identified a number of specific follow-up activities that were designed taking into account three considerations: a) the political and societal environment; b) the general condition of the civil society sector and c) the existing capacity of NGOs in Macedonia and BiH in relation to advocacy. The follow-ups are distributed into four main types of activities:

- Further research activities;
- Training and raising of qualification;
- Activities, aimed at encouraging interaction;
- Publicity-oriented activities and dissemination of success stories.

- Further research activities

A future *institutional capacity assessment*, covering grassroots organizations focused on civic participation. It will give a picture of the capacity built on basis of international donors' activity up to the moment of their withdrawal and provide the necessary starting point for future action. This assessment would include a larger number of organizations and a more detailed set of criteria, providing for more adequacy, focus and effectiveness to practical action.

Elaboration of a design for implementation of *budget advocacy know how* as a method that could increase the civil control over public policies. Budget advocacy initiatives and monitoring of budget allocation procedures will create grounds for raising civil competence, deepening civil participation and reducing corruption.

- Training and raising of qualification

Further advocacy-oriented training of a larger number of local civil activists has been both specified by participants and identified by the team as a key need of the NGO sector in the two countries. Therefore the following set of training-related follow-ups has been formulated:

“Hands-on learning” - launching local level *advocacy campaigns under expert supervision*, for instance: monitoring of the adoption of new legislation in the context of Euro-Atlantic integration (Macedonia) and with initiating legislative changes fostering civil sector development (BiH); and budget advocacy campaigns on municipal/local level fostering establishment of best practices in budget advocacy and developing public-private partnerships.

Training of trainers in advocacy to ensure sustainability and replication. On basis of a specific set of criteria future trainers to be trained. Raising the number of advocacy trainers from local communities would provide a network effect and increase the opportunity of multiplication of practical know how.

Training in *strategic planning, negotiation skills and media relations* on local level with a thoroughly selected small number of participants to encourage professionalism and sustainability of human resources. Professionalism in activities representing main steps of an advocacy campaign will increase the opportunity of success and consecutively contribute to motivation for involvement.

- Activities, aimed at encouraging interaction

There are two directions in which formal interaction should be encouraged in order to promote *public-private partnerships* on local level: local authorities and business. Interaction can be improved by fostering the establishment of formal, specific problem-solving joint groups focused on local issues and joint training. Therefore possible follow-ups include: involvement of civil servants in advocacy training; fostering establishment of steering groups and committees to facilitate interaction between NGOs, local authorities and representatives of the business; team-building for joint groups and coalitions.

Additionally, interaction-encouraging activities should target also improvement of basis for cooperation between civil society structures: supporting better correlation among different programs and projects implemented by non-governmental organizations, having the same goal and target groups on local and central level; for BiH: encouragement of joint advocacy projects between NGOs from the two entities and Brčko district.

- Publicity-oriented activities and dissemination of success stories

These type of activities include: *involvement of journalists* in advocacy trainings; support for launching *public campaigns on advocacy* and dissemination of information about successful advocacy initiatives which would contribute to raising activist motivation and increase general awareness and visibility of advocacy groups and 3) foster better

transmission of messages to the general public; encouragement of *direct marketing activities*, which would encourage constituents' involvement through public discussions and hearings, meetings in the neighborhood, phone calls and e-mails, dissemination of printed materials and including feedback information.

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The project on “Empowering Civil Society in Southeastern Europe through Advocacy” provided IRIS with the opportunity to transfer some of the advocacy experience it has gained in Bulgaria and establish a core network of advocacy-trained NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, IRIS’ team was able to conduct a need-assessment of advocacy capacity in these two countries, which helped elicit tailored solutions to the deficits of civil societies there. Thus, this pilot project served as a first phase of a broader strategy of introducing advocacy as an instrument of establishing and reproducing civil solidarity, defending public, civic interests within a network of legitimate relationships between the citizens and the institutions of public authority. Along these lines, IRIS intends both to extend its work in these countries, as well as expand the geographic scope of its operations in the countries of Southeastern Europe and the democratizing nations further to the East.