



# Civil Society Forum Trieste

## of the Western Balkans Summit Series

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#### Workshop conclusions

Civil Society Forum Trieste, Workshop 1

#### Environment, energy and climate change

*Nenad Šebek and Srđan Sušić*

#### Conclusions

- The consultative process for WB6 CSOs to deliberate on environmental priorities has to be a continuous one. The existing Loomio platform, used for the preparations for the CSF in Trieste, could be used for this purpose. The discussion should be moderated and conducted in the most transparent way.
- Preparatory activities of for upcoming CSF, if these are to be organized, would have to be structurally coherent and entail at least two coordination meetings prior to the actual CSF. This is particularly important if some concrete results are to be shown at the next CSF to be organized in London in July 2018, along with the upcoming Berlin Process/WB6 Summit.
- It is worth considering having WB6 environmental CSOs focused on monitoring the implementation of nation, regional and international commitments of WB6 countries. It was suggested that one or two processes should be selected, in order to reduce overlapping with other similar initiatives and to decrease the risk of “spreading too thin” over a number of processes.
- WB6 environmental CSOs are willing to assist the WB6 governments to define a shared vision for the region. This can be done with higher political involvement of the CSF with the Berlin Process Summits and a more structured dialogue between representatives of WB6 government and the EU with the representatives of CSOs. It is advisable to have this a structural element of all upcoming WB6 Summits and avoid the situation where CSO recommendations would be heard by the Summit participants on an *ad hoc* Heinrich Boell Foundation could be instrumental in bringing the recommendations of WB6 environmental CSOs closer to the Berlin Summit participants and potentially ensuring a continued presence of environmental issues on the agendas of the future Summits.
- It would be important to streamline efforts of different donors with the recommendations of environmental CSOs and try to align their strategies with these.
- Preparatory actions should precede events like this, in order to enable representatives of WB6 CSOs to deliberate on possible conclusions and recommendations.



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- A number of recommendations for immediate actions were adopted and delivered to the European Fund for the Balkans, as the main organizer of the CSF in Trieste.
- It was stressed that gender balance should be monitored and implemented in practice. Both panels at this event were participated only by male moderators and panelists, and this should not be repeated. More careful planning and additional inputs from the organizing parties are welcome.
- A follow-up meeting with interested CSOs should be organized in 2017 in order to define a precise roadmap of activities for the period until July 2018 and the next WB6 Summit in London, bearing in mind concrete results of the processes involving WB6 CSOs.

### Civil Society Forum Trieste, Workshop 2

## Communicating the Berlin Process in the times of rising populism – possible roles of civil society

*Ana Marjanović Rudan and Marko Drajić*

### Conclusions

- **The communications of the Berlin Process should be understood and employed as an instrument to support the Process's efficiency**, which requires strategic (not occasional or situational), expert approach.
- Considering their expertise and track record in promoting European values, and their commitment to regional cooperation, **organisations gathered in the Civil Society Forum (CSF) should: (a) provide support to governments of the Western Balkans and other implementers of the Berlin Process initiatives** (i.e. WBF, RYCO, CIF etc.) in strategic planning and implementation of communications, so to facilitate the attainment of the Berlin Process long-term goals (Europeanization and regional cooperation) and the implementation of “soft measures”; **and they should (b) more intensively engage** in promotional campaigns to help the attainment of the Berlin Process goals, in proliferation of information helpful to attainment of the Process goals through 3<sup>rd</sup> sector media, and in raising awareness and debunking of propaganda and false news through own projects.
- **CSF, as a regional platform**, should put together **a small team/office to coordinate the provision of expert support to governments/other initiatives' implementers** and to **promote an intensified engagement of CSOs** in the region in the Berlin Process communications (through initiation and coordination of networking and of joint projects, and through support to their fundraising and advocacy efforts).
- In its work **the CSF team should particularly consider the need to include as many non-governmental actors as possible** – not only think tanks and policy-oriented



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organizations, but also trade unions, business associations, 3<sup>rd</sup> sector media and others – and it should encourage and facilitate their access to the future CSF activities.

- **CSF team** should:
- **Encourage regional organisations** to not only engage in affirmative communication of the Berlin Process, but **to also produce and widely communicate critical analyses and advocate for concrete alternatives**; CSF should provide **help in** regard to efficient **targeting and dissemination** of the messages, for increased impact.
- Provide **assistance and know-how related to policy advocacy to regional civil sector organisations** taking part in communications of the Berlin Process, in order for them **to increase the political weight of their communication efforts**.
- CSF team/office should **encourage regional civil sector organisations to explain to citizens and other stakeholders that their pressure on the governments can speed up the implementation of “soft measures”**
- In order to be able to **provide support to the efforts of the Western Balkans governments**, the CSF should **work with the respective local organisations to develop good communication channels**, thus ensuring a more prominent role in the Berlin Process.

### Civil Society Forum Trieste, Workshop 3

## **The challenging opportunity of migrations: further strengthening the role of civil society organizations in humanitarian aid and social and economic resilience**

*Ugo Poli*

### **Conclusions**

- The evolving presence of migrants along the Western Balkans Route faces a policy stuck on emergency approaches by the Governments in the region
- The growing capacity of the CSOs in the management of migration flows generates new entrepreneurship skilled in the production of social values (welfare services, knowledge-based activities, lacking linkages for the circular economy in many sectors, etc.)
- The current centralized allocation of IPA funds created a very negative lack of accessible funding from EU and International Organizations that hinders the development of also more effective actions of Local Authorities and CSOs on the field.
- There is no causal relationship between brain-drain/unemployment in the WB region and immigration: the WB Countries not developing tools for migrants integration policy are going to lose the opportunities arising from their assessed input to growth.



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Civil Society Forum Trieste, Workshop 4

### **What's next? The British Presidency of the Berlin Process in the time of Brexit**

*Eleonora Poli & Francesca Voce*

#### **Conclusive Remarks**

Organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) within the framework of the Trieste Civil Society Forum and the support of the European Balkan Fund, the workshop aimed at discussing the future of the EU enlargement towards the Western Balkans (WB6) by particularly focusing on the impact of the next British Presidency of the Berlin Process in the time of Brexit.

The Balkans have always been an area of interest for the United Kingdom and, despite Brexit, Britain will continue to play a great role in the region by favouring regional stability, economic development and cultural cooperation. However, the aim of the Berlin Process is to facilitate the European Union enlargement path towards the Western Balkan countries (WB6), and next year British Presidency might well undermine the effectiveness of such an intent. Indeed, according to experts intervening in the workshop, while negotiating its exit from the Union, the UK might profit of the Presidency of the Berlin Process to promote the idea of new forms of integration, beyond traditional enlargement, for the benefit of a future EU-UK new relationship. At the same time, the Berlin process has been also criticised for its scarce effectiveness. To date, only few of the economic and infrastructural projects, aimed at facilitating integration with the EU, have been developed.

Yet, as underlined by the European Global Strategy, the Western Balkans are at the top of the European priorities and their future is to be formally part of the European Union. Certainly, WB6 are not to become spectators of the enlargement process as such, but they need to be actively involved in a common discussion on European integration and the future of the Union as well. According to experts in the workshop, if anything Brexit, which can be interpreted as a failure of EU enlargement, has stimulated a constructive dialogue on the need for reforming the European Union and its process of integration. Hence, the success of the Berlin Process and the EU enlargement path towards the Balkans depends on an effective joint effort by both member states and the WB6. In particular, from being an instrument of EU foreign policy, the enlargement process should be interpreted as a domestic project, where the Western Balkan countries are at the same time beneficiaries and active promoters.



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*The workshop, which witnessed active participation by representatives of a vast array of Civil Society Organisations, was chaired by Eleonora Poli, Research Fellow at the Istituto Affari Internazionali. Guest speakers were Nathalie Tocci, Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali, Lejla Ramic-Mesihovic, Executive Director, Foreign Policy Initiative BH, Tobias Flessenkemper, Senior Fellow and Balkans Project Director at the Centre International de Formation Européenne (CIFE), Srdjan Cvijic, Senior Policy Analyst, Open Society European Policy Institute and Steven Blockmans, Senior Research Fellow & Head of EU Foreign Policy, CEPS.*

### Civil Society Forum Trieste, Workshop 5

#### **Media and journalism in the WB6: a very European issue**

*Andrea Stocchiero*

#### **Conclusive Remarks**

Media freedom has been at the centre of EU agenda for democratic transformation in the WB6, yet despite reforms in the legal frameworks, critical factors persist and progress seem to have stalled. Direct and indirect political pressures on editorial policies, poor working conditions for journalists as well as opaque media ownership are jeopardizing media capacity to act as public watchdogs. At the same time, these factors increase public distrusts towards media.

Captured media across the region not only fail to fulfill their public and democratic role, but they become playing-field for confrontation by political and economic powers, by both external and internal agents. Captured media, turned into instruments in the polarization of public opinion, contribute spreading disinformation, polarizing societies, fuelling bilateral disputes as happened in recent political crisis across the region.

It has been argued that the crucial role of media requires to move beyond the checklist approach so far adopted by the EU, in favour of a more substantial engagement in framing media freedom as a truly European issue with fundamental impact on the democratic debate, on the fight against corruption and on European perspectives of these countries.

These issues were at the core of the workshop held in Trieste on July 11<sup>th</sup> 2017 during the Civil Society Forum, hosted by Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT) and Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI). The workshop, moderated by Andrea Stocchiero (CeSPI) was animated by Dragana Obradovic (Serbia, BIRN), Dragan Janjic (Serbia, BETA), Bardhyl Jashari (Macedonia, Metamorphosis), Arman Fazlić (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Journalists' Association) and



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Chiara Sighele (Italy, OBCT). The speakers offered an overview of the situation in the region as well as in the countries where they work; the public debate that followed their speeches allowed to further enrich the picture of experiences from the region, in terms of current difficulties for media freedom and possible future scenarios.

The workshop concluded that media freedom still remains a key challenge in the region, as recommendations formulated at the WB CSF in 2015 have not been met yet and the situation has even worsened. Lack of trust to media, points to a more worrying lack of trust towards democratic institutions.

To contrast this, according to the workshop participants, the EU shall first of all acknowledge that there is a media freedom problem in the region, and develop a new decided strategy to tackle it. Specific attention should be devoted to financial pressures on editorial policies, safeguards and decent working conditions for journalists, media literacy for citizens. Full implementation of existing regulatory frameworks should be guaranteed and relevant fields such as the digital sphere should be regulated in all countries of the region. Citizens and media, in both member states and candidates, should feel that the EU is on their side when it comes to media freedom, both in terms of political and financial support. Finally, when dealing with the EU engagement in the region, one should keep in mind the role of Member States in formulating the agenda, and the need to foster an informed debate, also within EU countries, about the WB6. This can be achieved by reinforcing EU-WB transnational networks of independent media.