



Si vis pacem et securitatem, defende

**BLACK SEA REGION
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION (NGO) FORUM**

“Enabling Environment for CSOs: Towards a Strategy of Civil Society in the Black Sea Region”

VENUE: Kiev, Ukraine

ASSISTANT: Alexandra Issacovitch Benegas, SWIIS Coordinator

I was invited to the Black Sea Region NGO Forum that took place in Kiev, Ukraine, 8th-10th December 2014, as coordinator of the Spanish chapter of Women in International Security (SWIIS) and to give voice also to WIIS Belgium who could not attend the Forum.

It was the first meeting of the Forum that took place outside Rumania, country who coordinates the Forum since its creation in 2007. Rumanian FOND is a platform of 36 Romanian NGOs working for international development and is an active member of the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD).

This year's Forum: *“Enabling Environment for CSOs: Towards a Strategy of Civil Society in the Black Sea Region”* was organized with the financial support and active participation of the European Commission, the CSO (Civil Society Organization) Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) and local support of the Ukrainian Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

The Forum main objective was to debate on the essential role of CSOs in the region at a time of great and common challenges, but also opportunities, in the countries invited and represented by NGOs from Romania, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, Moldova, Albania, Bulgaria and Ukraine. The conference looked into three dimensions:



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1. Universally accepted human rights and freedoms affecting CSOs
2. Policy influencing
3. Donor – CSOs relationships

The 3 days encounter was very well organized, with different panels, some as plenaries with speakers from EU External Action and the European Commission, CONCORD, CPDE and many other CSOs initiatives and platforms. All of them, aiming to create a Strategy of Civil Society in the Black Sea Region. Several workshops were also structured where we could work in smaller groups on this issue and also in thematic issues such as Democracy and Human Rights, Local Development, Child Protection, Social Economy... As Coordinator of SWIIS, I missed somehow more on the gender perspective in the thematic workshops. One interesting panel dealt with Donor's involvement in the region; mainly EU, EBRD and EED, but also larger NGOs from EU countries and US.

In Busan it was agreed CSOs as Independent Development Partners, and the Forum tried to work as a follow up for CSOs work.

This type of forums helps to create networking, reinforces the legitimacy of CSOs and the multiplier effect of their work. Some common spaces of the different countries were also mentioned, as global trends, such as, restrictions to foreign funding, difficulties for some NGOs to register and restriction to freedom of expression (Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey).

Important to develop and share best practices and lessons learned and a feedback mechanism, the analysis of the CSOs is done by the EU Delegation in each country, where also EU priorities is taken into account. With this input roadmaps for different countries are created. The challenges are based on the lack of institutional capacity of some of these NGOs, questions to their advocacy work, unwillingness of governments to work with NGOs (when they do, their independency is questioned), policy influencing and financial sustainability. Another main issue mentioned is the culture of democracy not enough in some of these countries to develop a serious role. One barrier stated related to receiving foreign funding is the poor use of English language, when projects mainly have to be presented in English and also the conflicts in some countries.



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I brought back home many different developments and ideas, the work of CSOs in peace building and monitoring, CSOs as watchdogs, service providers and closer to more vulnerable people. Many cross borders programs are in place in the region working safely. Some needs and challenges were discussed in all parallel groups and the role of CSOs in tackling those challenges.

As a conclusion and follow up the need to enhance cooperation and the democratic institutions building. I am thankful to have been able to participate in such a forum as SWIIS coordinator.

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