



Discussion paper: strategic civil society involvement in the EUSDR and other MRS

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Introduction

At present, civil society is not considered a major player in the implementation of the EUSDR. Where they are involved it is largely due to the perseverance of certain civil society actors and /or commitment of a few governmental EUSDR players to the principles of public participation. Example of the first group is Stefan Lütgenau, the President of the Danube Civil Society Forum, and of the second group Florian Ballnus, the PAC6 who invited NGOs to his Steering Group from the beginning. In countries such as Ukraine and Moldova, where governmental engagement in the EUSDR is particularly weak, civil society action sometimes is the only active player.

We suspect that the low value given to civil society participation is among the more important reasons why the EUSDR is not well known among the public and suffers from a lack of innovation and drive.

This paper outlines some mechanisms how to achieve meaningful civil society participation and ownership of the EUSDR. We believe that impact can only be achieved if civil society involvement takes place at all levels and thereby becomes an integral part of this MRS.

Involvement of civil society in the different layers of EUSDR governance

- 1) The High Level Group (HLG) : creation of 1-3 Observer functions; the mandate of these observers is to be agreed, e.g. to which sessions and session documents they have access; in principle, this access should be as broad as possible in order to build trust and ownership.
- 2) EUSDR Forum: There should be room for at least one civil society keynote speech per Forum; civil society should be invited to comment on the draft Ministerial Statement; Session Chairs should be encouraged to invite civil society speakers to their panels.
- 3) EUSDR Presidency: When preparing the EUSDR Presidency of a country, civil society organisations of that country should be invited to a hearing for an open discussion of priorities and programme; minutes of these meetings should be published.
- 4) Each Priority Area Steering Group should reserve 2-5 seats for civil society observers who participate in meetings on the same conditions as governmental representatives.

5) The National Coordinators (NCs) should invite civil society representatives to a hearing once a year to present progress, discuss ideas for bringing EUSDR activities closer to people and for answering questions. National Participation Days as organised by the Danube Civil Society Forum and PA 10 in several countries over the past years have tested a successful format for such hearings.

6) Civil Society should have easy access to funding earmarked under EU funding programmes for EUSDR support; this is currently the case for the DTP, but is more limited and difficult for e.g. structural funds. Micro funding (\leq € 100.000.-) with simple administrative requirements would be an important prerequisite for stronger and more professional participation.

Successful models for Civil Society representation

Civil Society involvement has to be as inclusive and representative as possible. In order to have observer positions filled with civil society representatives that have the mandate of a large constituency and are experienced in this representative role, the best would be to bring together civil society networks from the Danube basin countries and have them vote on a rotational basis their representative, who will be accountable to their peers. A good basis for establishing such a platform of networks is the Danube Civil Society Forum. However, it would need to renew its membership and recruit in a determined manner the top civil society network representatives of the region.

Special emphasis should be put on recruiting representatives of youth networks in order to tap into their creative capacity and make the EUSDR "future proof".

EUSDR Participation Days at national and regional level organised on the initiative of the Danube Civil Society Forum and national NGOs have proven to be an excellent instrument for strengthening institutional, human and expert capacities for EUSDR involvement of non-state actors. It is high time that these events receive official recognition and support by the European Commission and EUSDR bodies.

Models for participation

The ICPDR is very inclusive when it comes to granting observers, including civil society actors, access to meetings and documents and providing them a stage for sharing opinions. Civil society players enjoy broad support and trust among the governmental representatives, which surely has had impact on relations with civil society at country level as well. Observers are only excluded from sessions dealing with staff and budgetary matters. One or more representatives of civil society have been invited to give a statement at the Ministerial Meetings.

The EBRD: As part of its Annual General Meeting, the EBRD has developed a Civil Society Programme where the agenda is shaped together with key groups that the EBRD engages with. The Program is key for discussing concretely about EBRD projects and upcoming policy revision and civil society has the chance of raising their concerns directly with management staff, experts and directors that attend the civil society programme.

The EIB holds an annual Civil Society Day where projects and policies are discussed in plenary and where civil society can ask direct questions to the board of directors of the bank. Also, both the EBRD and the EIB hold several workshops throughout the year for the purpose of informing communities and local groups on their policies and complaint mechanism. Also,

for each policy revision, both banks organize public hearing in capitals of countries with most operations.

The Espoo Convention: The Espoo Convention Meeting of Parties is granting civil society the right to send delegates that can attend all the negotiations of the parties and can suggest amendments to draft decisions and sustain positions during all negotiations sessions. Civil society can also participate as observers during the working group meetings set under the body of the convention and during the meetings of the implementation committee that take place throughout the year.

The Bern Convention: Similarly to the Espoo Convention Meeting of Parties, civil society representatives can take part in the Standing Committee meetings of the Bern Convention where they can make interventions and sustain positions.

Conditions

Civil society organisations can be expected to cover the costs of their own time/capacity, but a fund should be established to cover coordination, capacity building measures, travel and other expenses such as facilitation or interpretation, where necessary.