



The Missing Link: CSO-Media Relations

Research on relations and opinions that media has towards CSOs,
CSO visibility in the media and the opinion of CSOs
on the role of the media in the Western Balkans and Turkey





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Preface

Missing link – CSO and Media Relations

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) region are dealing with numerous challenges in their working environments. Due to the nature of their day-to-day work, and fast paced information society, one of the most significant challenges for CSOs are media relations.

The Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO) project is aware of the importance of encouraging members of the CSO community to develop their own links to the media; the project is continuously trying to widen its approach in assisting CSOs to get their message across to their publics. On the other hand, TACSO is also aware of the constraints the media have towards the CSOs and in turn TACSO has supported the media's contact with CSOs.

Throughout the establishment of the TACSO project, it has been noted that there are missing links in regards to the relations between CSOs on the one side and media on the other. In order to provide more structured assistance, the project has decided to investigate this missing link.

A focus group methodology was chosen as it allows for important and complicated questions to be answered with formulated and varied responses. Both members of CSOs and the media were included as participants in the groups. This report is a presentation of the focus group findings.

The findings clearly indicate a missing link, which is shown to be a lack of understanding and miscommunication between the CSOs and media and vice versa.

During the remaining time of the second phase of the project, TACSO will continue to work with CSOs and the media on the national and regional level by emphasising joint meetings and education of CSO and media representatives while using an interactive approach and open dialogue.

Sarajevo August 2012

Sanela Tunovic
PR and communication officer
TACSO

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Acknowledgments

Research is an exceptionally interesting and stimulating activity for all of us who are seeking a deeper knowledge of the world and its laws; it is an everyday activity in which we participate since the moment human kind left the caves. The experience, knowledge and pleasure that INFOHOUSE gained when they were selected to conduct the research on media and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in all eight of the IPA countries is rare and precious.

During this economic crisis, it is an honour and pleasure to have the opportunity to conduct a focus group research study in several countries, and gain personal insight into many topics that unfortunately are not often discussed.

Implementation of focus group research in eight countries so similar, but so different, and with such various social and political conditions, is not a simple task. However, thanks to the professionalism and expertise of many people, the process was made easier and was successfully conducted.

The research authors would like to thank to Mr Palle Westergaard, Team Leader of TACSO, who had the courage to envisage the primary research about the relations of the two major groups within civil society – the media and CSOs. In each country TACSO is working on capacity building of society and organisations. In addition, without the assistance of Sanela Tunović, TACSO Public Relations and Communications Advisor, the formation of these research groups and communication would not be successful. The researchers have received a great deal of assistance from the national TACSO teams in all eight countries and we would like to thank them as well.

INFOHOUSE would like to express their gratitude for the enthusiasm and hard work of their researchers Emina Bečić and Bojan Pavlović, and also to Armin Hubijar for technical assistance.

The monitoring and supervision of the research, in the professional sense, has reached a new dimension due to the involvement of Mr Saša Madacki, who generously accepted to be our outside expert in the monitoring of the process and research results.

We hope that this primary research will be a step forward to a better understanding of the complex relations which exist in each society, including the civil society, and that it might serve as baseline to other research and studies. Information is the oxygen of democratic society.

*Dženana Alađuz,
on behalf of INFOHOUSE*



Acronyms

- EU** - European Union
- TACSO** - The project Capacity Building of Civil Society Organisations in the Western Balkans and Turkey (EuropeAid/127427/C/SER/Multi-additional services), referred to as Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO)
- IPA** - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
- CSOs** - Civil Society Organisations
- LAG** - Local Advisory Groups TACSO
- NVO/NGO** - Non-governmental organisations (one of the synonyms for CSOs)
- B&H/BiH** - Bosnia and Herzegovina
- PR** - Public Relations
- CFS** - Civil Society Facility
- PR&CO** - Public Relations and Communication Officer

Summary

The relationship between the media and civil society organisations (CSOs) today is a very complex and dynamic one, especially in the societies which are still striving towards further democratization, this relationship is out of crucial importance, not only for the improvement of the capacities of both parties but also for the overall socio-economic development. Thus, this kind of research, with detailed and precise recommendations can help additional development and progress of entire societies. The research outlines basic problems that burden this relationship, which are mainly based on a lack of knowledge and understanding about each other and usual prejudgments, but also indicates that concerns in this relationship are, by and large, the consequences of the weak capacities of the media and CSOs and other unregulated or insufficiently regulated public spheres in the examined countries. Nonetheless, very an important finding of the research is the fact that a majority of the two sides acknowledge the importance and the role of the other party and express a firm readiness to take a step forward and for a closer future cooperation, which, alongside with the research's recommendations, it is a solid basis for future improvement.

Many answers which describe the perception of CSOs towards the media and vice versa as well as some introspections clearly show that, in the first place, there are immense problems in the internal functioning of both parties; CSOs' representatives are aware that they do not have the knowledge or capacities to deal with the media in a proper way and with less obvious self-criticism on the media's side, there is a confession that the media do not approach CSOs always in the most professional manner like the one when a media representative from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) admits that due to time limitations and other circumstances, sometimes CSOs' events/actions are covered by junior journalists, who lack the knowledge and sensibility for CSOs' work.

The research outlines a very important conclusion that both parties are lacking in their procedures, standards and strategies on how to approach the media/CSOs. CSOs admit that they do not have a systematic or strategic approach towards the media while the media does not have a comprehensive knowledge of CSOs and therefore have a general mistrust towards CSOs. It is promising to see that CSOs acknowledge some of their own responsibilities like neglecting the need for a long-term cooperation with the media and adjustments to media communication needs, but also the statement that many CSOs are ready to adopt more to the media's needs. CSOs are also starting to be aware of the fact that the media are on the market which means they have to follow strict market rules. The Western Balkans is also combating growing media commercialization and CSOs are fighting for media attention in the same arena with commercial and political PR experts who win over the CSOs. The media's attention is gained not only through direct media buying results; but it is also a result of strategically designed PR experts' efforts. At the same time, CSOs do not have the know-how or the funds to engage professional PR staff.

However, among media representatives' responses it is hard to see any observation on the negative side of the fast commercialization and tabloidization of the media in the region, and their constant need for sensational headlines whose victims, sometimes, are CSOs. The total timing/space in the media dedicated to any social topic becomes more and more limited and thus CSOs can get even less space for their deeds.

It is important to note that the media and CSOs in many of the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey do function in generally unstable political systems where transitional processes and EU integrations are still undergoing. A lack of legislations effects the basic functioning of CSOs and the

media. In some of the examined countries, media strategies or strategies on CSOs' development are either not adopted and/or implemented or require substantial improvement e.g. media strategy in Serbia, media laws in Kosovo* (hereinafter referred to as Kosovo), and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (hereinafter referred to as Macedonia), central NGO register in Montenegro and so on.

Nonetheless, the research on relations and opinions that the media has towards CSOs, CSOs' visibility in the media and the opinion of CSOs on the role of the media besides identification of all burdening elements recognize a readiness for the improvement on both the CSO and media side. Both parties find that closer cooperation is the key next step which will help gain a better mutual understanding and will help both sides to address the main challenges that their societies face.

The main conclusions of this report are to be grouped in four main clusters: **media and CSO mutual visibility, awareness, communication, trust and cooperation**, resulting with three main groups of conclusions.

First and foremost is the conclusion that the media are not aware of the full potential, capacity, usefulness for society, and relevancy of most of the CSOs.

The media values the information and opinions of the CSOs, they are openly portraying them as money making organisations, and the only public acknowledgement media will give to CSOs is related to the CSOs' work in the area of reconciliation.

The media is aware of numerous CSOs, they quote CSOs representatives as relevant speakers, but the general conclusion about CSOs is full of prejudices and stereotypes, because of which steps towards better cooperation are not made.

Second, CSOs openly question the independence of media from politics and business, and the sensibility of journalists towards civil society topics.

The situation is identical with CSOs. According to the research, listed in the following text, the CSOs openly question the independence of media from politics and business, the sensibility of journalists towards civil society topics and in addition claim that CSOs' action are observed through financial value. Although they know journalists and media outlets which want and manage to report on CSOs in a professional manner, they are very inclined to observe the media in general terms and through the stereotypes which are blocking them from forming a positive cooperation.

Third, the main obstacles for communication and increasing mutual visibility are the lack of a systematic approach to the "other" groups.

The CSOs or the media are lacking the procedures, standards, and strategies on how to approach the media/CSOs, which and what kind of information they need/should publish, how to measure their impact on public/users and how to increase their influence in cooperation.

Based on this and many other findings the title of the research imposed itself. The media and CSOs are working next to each other, they talk to each other, fight for peace and justice in the society, but everything is done with their "eyes wide shut".

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Report structure

The research report on relations and opinions that the media has towards CSOs, CSOs' visibility in the media and the opinion of CSOs on the role of the media in the Western Balkans and Turkey is divided into two substantive parts comprising of 26 topics that have been discussed in 16 focus groups with 83 participants of which 47 were CSOs and LAG representative and 36 came from media outlets. Interviewees are coming from eight countries from the Balkan area: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia and from Turkey, from the following cities: Tirana, Sarajevo, Zagreb, Skopje, Priština, Podgorica, Belgrade and Istanbul.

The first substantive part of the report is dealing with the question **How CSOs see media outlets**, which was deeply investigated through 14 subtopics: Sources of information that are being used by CSOs, Trust Level of those Sources, Media's role in the democratic process, Media's role in the transitional country (for ex-Yugoslavia countries), The desirable role of the media in society, Media and CSOs relationship – general overview, CSOs' visibility in the media, Media as a channel for the CSO message, Media and CSO relations improvement – opportunities and challenges, Communicating the message to the public, Communication challenges – dissemination, evaluation and visibility, Media outlets influence, Media outlets as a generator of opinions towards CSOs, and finally participants closing remarks and recommendations.

The second substantive part is dealing with the question **How media outlets see CSOs**, which was deeply investigated through 12 subtopics: Source of information about CSOs that the media are using, Trust level of those sources, CSOs' role in the democratic process, CSOs' roles in transitional societies, the desirable role of CSOs in society, Media and CSOs relationship – general overview and visibility, Media as a channel for the CSO message, Media and CSO relations improvement – opportunities and challenges, Communication challenges – dissemination, evaluation and visibility, Media outlets influence, Good relationships as a crucial for democratization processes and finally closing remarks and recommendations.

These two parts are combined with an introductory section including the research methodology, and a section on the conclusions and recommendations.

Annexes are also given at the end of the report, where we would like to stress that the questionnaires are available for future researchers that would like to use a similar methodology.



I Introduction: About TACSO

The project Capacity Building of Civil Society Organisations in the Western Balkans and Turkey (EuropeAid/127427/C/SER/Multi-additional services), referred to as Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO), forms part of the Civil Society Facility (CSF) that aims to strengthen civil society within a participative democracy, as well as to stimulate a civil society-friendly “environment” and culture. TACSO works in all the IPA beneficiary countries, i.e. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

The project’s general objective is to strengthen the overall capacities and accountability of CSOs within the beneficiaries of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and to guarantee the quality of services of CSOs and a sustainable role of CSOs in the democratic process.

Phase one of the project was implemented for a period of two years, from 17 August 2009 to 16 August 2011, while phase two started on 17 August 2011, with the end date set for 16 August 2013.

Why Civil Society Organisations and TACSO? One major aspect of European integration is the role that CSOs can play. CSOs can help push for reforms. They represent a wider audience and specific areas of interest while being part of change in societies and in the lives of citizens. Essential to the road to the European Union (EU) is establishing a strong and capable civil society that is able to fulfill its role.

In this second phase of TACSO, capacity building measures and resources will overlap with a greater focus on policy areas, networking and partnership, dialogue between CSOs and other institutions as well as CSO visibility.





II Methodology

Research goals

Important TACSO activities in the second phase are raising visibility, increasing knowledge and gaining insight **on relations and opinions that media has towards CSOs, CSO visibility in the media and the opinion of CSOs on the role of the media.**

To gain a deeper insight into the media/CSO relationship, TACSO announced in January 2012 the Public Call for developing and conducting focus group research in the countries in which TACSO is active. Based on criteria and bidding procedures, TACSO decided to engage a Bosnian CSO, **INFOHOUSE**, for that task. The proposed research goal was accepted: *to determine a clear picture and perception that media has towards CSOs, CSO visibility in the media, and the opinion of CSOs on the role of the media.* The word "insight" is chosen because of its definition that clearly represents the overall goal of this paper: *insight is an understanding of relationships that sheds light on or helps solve a problem.*

Methodology

The research was conducted between March and June 2012. Developed methodology included focus group research in 8 countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey, specifically in: Tirana, Sarajevo, Zagreb, Skopje, Priština, Podgorica, Belgrade and Istanbul.

Sample

The sample was composed of CSOs, media and Local Advisory Groups (LAG) representatives from the eight countries mentioned above. The total sample consisted of 16 focus groups, 2 per country: one from CSOs/LAG (hereinafter mentioned as a CSO focus groups) representatives and other from media representatives. In total, 83 persons participated in the focus group research, while 47 were CSOs and LAG representative and 36 came from media outlets.

Selection criterion for media representatives were based on:

- Popularity/influence of a particular media;
- Available media database (a media database of the National TACSO offices);
- Availability during focus group research;
- Willingness to cooperate.

Selection criterion for CSOs were based on:

- Type of the organisations' wide range of activities;
- Available CSO database (CSO database of the Regional and National TACSO Office);
- Availability during focus group research;
- Willingness to cooperate.

Selection criterion for Local Advisory Groups:

- TACSO Regional Office's database;
- Availability during focus group research.

Questionnaire

The researchers determined the aims of the research and designed questionnaires based on achieving these goals. Due to the different types of focus groups that will need to be discussed, two questionnaires were created (one for civil society representatives, one for media representatives) in order to:

- Discover problems, challenges and achievements of CSOs and the media;
- Record the level of contact between CSOs and the media;
- Determine the level of cooperation and the satisfaction level of cooperation between CSOs and the media;
- Determine the advantages and disadvantages of a partnership between CSOs and the media.

The amount of time to set aside for each focus group was from 90 to 120 minutes.

Added value – online focus groups

Traditionally, focus groups have been conducted in-person using the face-to-face format. Additionally, researchers suggested using improvements in technology: when 2 or more planned group participants were not able to attend focus group discussion, researchers used Skype group call options and formed so-called online focus groups, with all of the participants having discussion in real time.

Collection of research materials

Each researcher submitted reports to the research manager. All questionnaires, records and notes of the focus group discussions were added to the research database and filed. The information collected was analysed and sorted according to subject to be used appropriately while writing the research report.

Research limitations

Several factors threatened to affect the implementation of the focus groups. Two were specifically identified as the most difficult to overcome. Firstly, the pressure of daily tasks sometimes resulted in a smaller number of expected participants, especially for media focus groups. Secondly, it was challenging to gather the CSOs representatives that live and work in different cities in one place at the same time due to schedule conflicts.

Thanks to the TACSO regional and national offices and their staff, the focus groups were created in the best possible manner and these limitations did not become obstacles for completing the research.

III Research findings

"It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible."
Oscar Wilde (Irish Poet, Novelist, Dramatist and Critic)

III.1 How CSOs see media outlets?

General overview on situation in countries related to media and information



Source of information

When asked what sources of information they rely upon when seeking information about conditions in their own state and society in general, most of the focus group participants replied that they turn to internet news portals; social networks, Facebook and Twitter; then to prominent daily newspapers, public television and radio services. A minority of participants also stated that they check Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) web sites (domestic and international) and government bodies as relevant sources of information. However, these persons have specific areas of work (i.e. if they are working in the area of women rights, information is searched from similar organisations), or they might include specific information/opinions/statistical data of international communities or governments into their reports.

However, almost all focus group participants, regardless of their country of origin, share the experience of having to comb through information in various sources simultaneously, as one source cannot be trusted, regardless of whether the source is a CSO or the media.

Even in the case where a group has singled out one daily newspaper – Koha Ditore – as the most honest daily newspaper, it is out of the question to trust only one source. The following quotes are illustrative: *"On a daily basis I follow three to four dailies, three news portals..."* (Croatia); *"In order to know what is happening in the state, we need to read two...three newspapers"* (Montenegro).

Trust level of sources

Besides sharing the knowledge about various sources of information and using most of it in their work, almost 100% of respondents from all eight countries share a certain mistrust towards information sources, especially media outlets, as evidenced in the following: *"90% of media in Turkey is government controlled"* (Turkey); *"With regards to the current situation in Macedonia, it is very important to know which media has published the information, as different media outlets publish*

information differently" (Macedonia); *"I would say that newspapers are more for interpretation rather than for information"* (Montenegro); *"We are all checking the sources as no source is credible, as there is always another perspective"* (Serbia).

The media's role in the democratic process

The overwhelming opinion of CSO representatives, albeit generalized, is that media are not fully contributing to the democratization processes in the countries concerned, due to political ideological projects that have policy of determining media content.

The respondents have emphasized that there is a lack of investigative journalism as a model of truth finding; and the fact that commercial journalism is stronger is a consequence of a high level of involvement of business people in the media in the role of owners or advertisers. *"The media is a tool of the business sector which is using them to fulfil various needs"* (Kosovo); *"They are the largest advertisers and they are conditioning the way of writing as well as topics"* (Croatia); *"Democracy is around us, but its level is questionable...the level of democracy depends on the level of money..."* (Turkey). *"State owned media is in love with government as they are being paid, while the non-state media is not in love with government"* (Macedonia). *"It is a triangle, bewitched triangle: media, government and the business sector"* (Albania).

In the opinion of the participants, the passive role of the media in the activities of CSOs, whose actions are asking the important questions for the society, is also a factor that is not contributing to the societal development. This opinion can be illustrated with the following examples.

"I would give an example of women who were the victim of violence. The press conference was organised in the street, and the journalists never came" (Turkey). Although the media's strength to ask some of the more important questions for the democratisation of society is not questionable, focus group participants are of the opinion that the media "resistance" to the governing establishment is very weak: *"In the city of Osijek, politicians have control over local newspapers and radio". When the biggest accident in Albania happened, where 20 cars crashed, I found out that one of my friends was hurt. This news was available in the morning, but not later, as the government had ordered the media not to run the information. The road where the accident happened was the responsibility of the government, and one of the most important roads."* (Croatia)

Media role in the transitional country (for ex-Yugoslavia countries)

Knowing that the overwhelming majority of respondents believe that the media is not assisting in the democratisation of the Balkan countries, it is not surprising that all respondents are of the opinion that the media could assist more in the reconciliation processes in the post conflict countries (this refers to the countries created after the breakup of Yugoslavia.)

"They have missed the opportunity to recognise the NGOs, who are the corrective of social activities, and have not given them the space in the process of democratisation" (B&H); *"During the last four or five years there is no debate about essential social issues in the media"* (Serbia). *"Many of the issues that are traumatic, and which should be opened and discussed, are missing; like rapes..."* (Croatia).

Media's desirable role in society

Most of the respondents clearly stated that they would like for the media to take on the role of a public voice, and corrective of governments. They would like the media to be in the “*service of people*” and not of the government. “*...Primetime news broadcasts last 30 minutes, and half of the time is spent explaining Prime Minister whereabouts...Kosovo is not just the Prime Minister; and he is not the only one who lives in Kosovo... There are 35 municipalities and it would be good to have information broadcast from those municipalities as well*” (Kosovo).

Some of the focus group participants clearly stated that they believe that journalists are not currently in the position to fulfil their real calling, having in mind that the journalists are not protected either: “*How can I expect journalist to write something about the rights of workers when they themselves do not have those rights, and have no right to ask for them, since they will be fired*” (Croatia).

Media and CSO relationship – general overview

CSOs' visibility in media

When it comes to the presentation and reporting about the work of CSOs, all comments and examples given by the participants demonstrate that they feel there is a huge presence of stereotypes, which affects the wide spectrum of their work, from visibility to reputation. In the opinion of a majority of the participants, the visibility of CSOs in the media is a reflection of their visibility in society, which affects their image. This concept can be illustrated by the following quote: “*People will ask you: Where do you work? And you will tell them that you are working in an NGO. We fight for democratisation, against corruption...and their reply will be: When will you find a real job?*” (Kosovo).

Another stereotype emphasised is that the media is broadcasting the image of CSOs as “*money launderers*”; which “*should not finance CSOs, as they are non-governmental*” (Croatia).

All participants expressed their frustration with the fact that CSO representatives and the media do not share the same opinion about what or who is important, but rather claim that media space is unevenly dispersed, “to the same organisations and persons”, and that territorial discrimination is present – CSOs from the “periphery” do not have the same treatment as those from capital cities. The participants are of the opinion that their visibility in media is rather low, except in the cases when some event is opened by a prime minister, or some other prominent person. In cases where the media decides to incorrect or insufficient publish information about an activity. “*...I was shocked when I saw the report from the press conference. The media only reported some information and a half-minute of images. I was at the event, and I was confused, as I did not know what had happened*” (B&H).

According to some participants, one of the reasons for weak CSO visibility in the media is that CSOs and media relations are not based on a partnership. “*...There is a responsibility from both sides. Regardless of how good the journalists are, the media does not have enough knowledge about civil society; about the role of civil society and how it functions...*” (Serbia). The opinion of majority is that the governing principle for the media is “bad news is actually good news for the press”, and it is difficult to find someone who will publish positive stories.

Some of the participants admitted that they are aware that CSOs do carry part of the responsibility. They are using the media only for projects and activities. They do not work systematically on building relations that will guarantee a better understanding of projects and activities.

The participants, especially the ones who have good relationships with the media, or are aware of basic public relations, believe that part of the reason for the low visibility of CSOs is the fact that CSOs do not know how to present information in a way that is adjusted to the needs of the media - essential, attractive, and with data, "civil society speaks in a specific way, using words and communication that is not understandable to the audience." (Macedonia) This problem is enlarged by the fact that most of the CSOs do not have people who handle public relations within the organisations, and who can take over communication with the media. The reason for this is that they do not have money for additional salaries.

Focus group participants from each state expressed their concern about the poor professional capacities of CSOs when it comes to communication with the media. However, they have also shown that there is a great need to professionalise the CSOs' approach to the media. This information can be passed to journalists during their education and training.

Media as a channel for the CSO message

The visibility of CSOs in the public and in the media depends on whether the media and its editors want to publish the news or information received from CSOs, thereby enabling them to be the so-called communication channel.

The participants have given numerous examples of when the media published information received from CSOs; *"...in daily newspapers, there is some space foreseen for NGO..."* (Kosovo). However, there is still a priority in reporting the information coming from politicians and governing structures.

According to some of the participants, the media does not have enough technical capacity to follow the events happening on a daily basis, so they do not have time to publish all CSO activities.

Media and CSO relations improvement – opportunities and challenges

One of the final questions in the questionnaire, related to the relations between the media and CSOs is: What are the challenges and opportunities to improve the CSO and media relations? This is the million dollar question and is, therefore, categorised as very complex. Adherence to existing ethical and professional codexes is one of the ways to overcome communication noises that happen, often due to the need to have a sensationalistic approach in reporting. *"I remember the example about The Hague. The title was something along the lines of, Drašković in The Hague, (innuendo to the imprisonment of Serbian politician Vuk Drašković by the ICTY) while in fact the whole thing was that Drašković went to The Hague to present a lecture to university students"* (Serbia).

As one of the obstacles, it was also pointed out, that the media see CSOs as *"small ants"* which are *"not taken seriously"* and CSOs give irrelevant data: *"one journalist called me monthly... 'give me some new scandal related to NGOs.' I would tell her, 'I can tell you what we are doing in support to other NGOs...' there are so many other things you can write about that are valuable to society... and she said that she was given the task by her editor..."* (Kosovo).

As their own shortcomings have become obstacles to a better understanding of the media and CSOs, participants have confirmed the issue of not having public relations officers who work on media relations. There is also the fact that CSOs might have projects that are not interesting to media.



Communicating the message to the public

Communication challenges – dissemination, evaluation and visibility

The intent of the following set of questions from the CSO groups is to find out if communication and public relations are (users, general public, media) systematic. This is referred to as the creation of media strategy; adoption of internal guidelines about communication; adoption of a follow up methodology with an evaluation of the strength/influence of the message on the users/public; and setting up the media relations. Although there are differing opinions when it comes to the challenges CSOs face in using communication to promote their work, the joint conclusion is that none of the CSOs' participation in focus groups has a systematised approach to communication as a tool. Part of the CSOs have ad hoc communication plans, some of them exclude the media. This can be illustrated with the following quote: *"We are small organisations that have no membership and we do not have major problems in communication with our users"* (Turkey); *"In the field we do not use the media to communicate with target groups. Most of the time we are working with our users on a daily basis and they know us"* (Kosovo).

Almost 100% of participants stated that only the highest levels of the organisations are deciding what will be visible to the public (which information, what project and when), such as directors or management boards. Only in the case of Turkey is such a decision made by the team and not by the management. The decision making process is simple, it is based exclusively on the needs of the project and donor conditions, and information is given visibility by the person or persons who are deciding if the information should be presented to the public, representatives of the management or director.

Also, no organisation represented at the focus group has a detailed system for follow up and monitoring. This would show them if the communicated message to the public is accepted and understood. *"We just issue a press release and that is all"* (Montenegro). Their major sources of information in this sense are the data and statistics from their own web-hosting providers. Effectiveness is measured by web site visits or by how many other organisations and institutions call them *"when talking about gender issues..."* (Turkey). Organised collection and analyses of data on how the public, and more specifically the users, are accepting and understating their messages can be used in the analyses of their own work and success or for strategic planning done by any of the organisations. *"Is the message understood correctly? We can only assume based on the articles we will read in the newspapers the following day, or the interviews we see on television"* (Albania).

Media outlets' influence

According to focus group participants, cooperation with the media, especially with the media that is selected to carry messages to the public, is not systematic or the result of strategic planning. Rather, in most of the cases it is on an ad hoc basis, except in one case, Turkey, where media representatives and a CSO in a meeting agreed upon cooperation. *"They have asked us if we want be more active, and told us that we need to cooperate, and since then the cooperation has improved." In general, most of the cooperation begins and ends with the distribution of the press release. "We just send the press release. Sometimes they publish it, sometimes they do not. It is all up to their estimate"* (Turkey). Furthermore, CSOs are often using their personal connections in the media to ensure their presence at the activities.

It was clear that the lack of mutual understanding creates the feeling of something being dictated by media.

In addition, the media is “dictating” how CSOs should do their job, as they are dictating the moment the information should be published. – we will paraphrase the opinion of the participant from the Macedonian CSO group who said *that what CSO do has to be done latest by 13:00 hours in order to get the information to the media or to organise something over the weekend and holidays when the institutions are not working and when there is less information so the news about CSO can get more than 20 lines or over one minute* (Macedonia).

Media deadlines are not any kind of dictation but rather a must of media’s functioning. In addition since media should have its freedom on when and how something will be published. On the other hand the issue of media need for sensational texts versus sensibility CSOs are mentioning is visible.

Media outlets as a generator of opinions towards CSOs

Is the image of CSOs in the general public influenced by the headlines and stories in the media? Can the media generate certain opinions about CSOs? Not all of the participants replied to these questions. Those who did reply were affirmative. *“Of course they can influence... they have the power to take down any kind of coalition of organisations”* (Kosovo).

The respondents also believe that, even in cases of manipulative reporting, the media cannot influence the existence of CSOs. *“Of course they can influence, but do not think they can stop the work of the NGO...the work you have done cannot be erased.”* (Kosovo).

According to the respondents, good relations with the media are the key (*“Absolutely yes”* Kosovo); although some of them believe that regardless of good relations the joint influence on society is not that great.

Participants’ closing remarks and recommendations

One of the last questions given to the focus groups is: How can CSO visibility be improved? Many respondents propose additional education of journalists, when it comes to the work of CSOs, and in general training of journalists so they are more sensible and they can “inform the public in a neutral way”. This can be accomplished through education or round tables. A majority of participants emphasised that joint meetings and forums of media representatives and CSOs should be organised for better cooperation.

Both sides should improve their approach. The participants understand the argument for this because, while the media is in the market, and they have to respect the market laws, they also condition CSOs to send information to the media in a way that is digestible and attractive to the market. *“We should be doing this for them; prepare the information for them. Sometimes they do not have time”* (Kosovo). It is necessary to work on the trust building of CSOs as, *“the trust in the institutions and civil society sector is very low”* (Serbia).

The recommendation for the media to show CSOs their “essential role in the society” is also very clear. *“If we, as CSOs manage to involve not only media, but the citizens as well, the media will be there. In order to do this we need inventions, different way for CSOs to take action, different than so far”* (Macedonia).

Participants commented on the work of TACSO in their countries and on a regional level. Although not all participants are very knowledgeable about TACSO’s work, most of them had information

about TACSO offices in their countries, and this is especially reflected through trainings that TACSO organised for CSOs.

One respondent was critical of TACSO as an organisation. TACSO is *"...one intervention of the EU, which created artificial competition to those organisations that provide service for CSOs"* (Macedonia).

Most of the participants, however, see TACSO as a *"facilitating instrument"*, which provides an increased information flow for CSOs and improves and builds upon capacities of CSOs and the media (Albania). Participants considers information provided by TACSO to be *"visible and, above all, useful"* (B&H). Most of the participants believe that TACSO should be dealing with the education part of media relations, and that they should organise thematic seminars where the media should show interest in CSOs (Turkey), or seminars for CSOs how to use the social media (Turkey).

Lastly, participants were asked their opinion about the topic of the research. All participants confirmed that this topic is extremely important; especially for improvements in the CSO sector (Montenegro). They have expressed their hope that they will receive a copy of this research so they could consider their visibility and future media relations strategies.

III.2 How do media outlets see CSOs?

A general overview of the situation in the countries related to media and information



"I fear three newspapers more than a hundred thousand bayonets."
Napoleon

Source of information

In each of the focus groups, in all eight countries, media representatives have shown extraordinary knowledge related to information relevant to their work. In some cases they have even come up with certain categories. The sources of information mainly mentioned were other media; government institutions and their web sites; Facebook and Twitter, especially in Turkey; specialised portals; and of course, the CSOs, both domestic and international, through their press releases, personal contacts and press conferences.

As this is qualitative and not quantitative research, it is impossible to measure the effects. However, while there is a notable decrease in the usage of television stations as a source of data, there is an increase in the usage of social networks for information gathering. *"...Televisions cannot brag really, I find them annoying"* (B&H).

The use of personal contacts is ever present. Journalists aim to solidify a minimum of three sources to represent the various angles of a story. The opinion of the majority is that the *"primary source is the man; the conversation; e-mail; phone; meetings; sometimes even secret meetings with potential reporters"* (Croatia).

Trust level of sources

Based on the participants' statements, it is imperative to trust a source of information. Every participant of the eight media groups unanimously agreed that this trust is not endless; it does not exclude the need to verify information with other sources. *"Being a journalist means to rely on more than just one information source. I believe the time has passed when someone could/should ask an Albanian journalist how much he/she trusts the source of information."* (Albania). *"Internet portals are the least trusted media sources by the participants, as they have to correct their information often."* (B&H).

Participants of media focus groups often mentioned that, in the search for information, the decision process as to which source one should believe and what information can be taken as correct, demands constant consulting of various sources. *"In Croatia, five daily newspapers are issued. In order to figure out what has happened yesterday, I need to go through all five papers, as they all have different versions of the same thing"* (Croatia).

Lack of confidence is caused by bad experiences in the publication of false information by some media or *"because of the way the media has reported about a story"* (B&H). Besides the trust towards the government institutions as information sources, there is a lot of trust given to the report and press releases of CSOs. *"Statements of CSOs are based on their research, and I do not have a reason to doubt them" because as the another participant said, "in the ten years that I have been following the civil society in Serbia, there has never been a false or incorrect press release"* (Serbia).

Some of the participants using the information sent by the CSOs remarked that it saddens them that *"most of the information from civil society is not relevant...is too boring, and can hardly makes the news"* (Serbia).

CSOs' role in the democratic process

All participants are very positive towards the CSOs role in societal development when asked how they see the involvement of CSOs in democratic processes, and what they estimate the relations to be between the CSOs and governments, especially in the segment of control, censorship and auto-censorship, if there is any.

None of the participants mentions a visible or frequent occurrence of direct censorship of CSOs by the governments. Participants in all the focus groups agree that the role of CSOs' in the democratic process is large, but it did not avoid the trap of general politics in all segments of life. Political structures are "mining" the civil society by creating various organisations in order to create various perspectives on a particular problem. *"If there is a certain report by some organisations, i.e. on ecology, where the CSO is critical of state institutions, in a matter of a few days another CSO, that no one knows of, will issue another report with different data, only to make sure the public is aware that there are different point of views on the subject"* (Macedonia).

Some of the respondents believe that CSOs have addressed numerous issues, which should have been addressed by the appropriate authorities. However, they also believe that they have recognised a number of NGOs, which belong to the governments. Despite the fact that it is not possible to prove the following finding in a measurable way, due to the methodology of the research in this document, the researchers have noted, in comparing statements, that the expected role of CSOs varies from country to country and that it also depends on the economic development of each society. In more developed and economically stronger states, media representatives expect CSOs to take the leading role in the process of European integration, while in the societies where

national tensions are an everyday occurrence; CSOs still need to maintain the central role in the reconciliation process.

Besides the fact that CSO representatives are viewed in the media as a *“voice of opposition, voice of reason or as supporters of those who criticise the government”* (Serbia), individual participants in the focus groups were of the opinion that in order to have CSOs be true representatives of citizens and their needs, CSOs must be created to fulfil the citizens needs and not as a “resistance”. Although the participants have emphasised that in their societies they are facing improvements in the field of democracy, *“10 years ago it was difficult to hear the voices of several CSOs regarding certain political issues, and it is different today”* (Turkey). The role CSOs are “playing” in the democratic process should be more “daring” to provoke the governments and the citizens to start a dialogue about the problems (B&H).

One of the participants emphasised, *“I believe that the civil society which is dealing with real democratic changes and issues does not exist because of the media, but rather despite the media”* (Croatia).

CSO roles in transitional societies

None of the participants expressed their doubt in the need for CSOs to exist and work in transitional societies. Many of the participants from ex-Yugoslavian republics describe the current social-political life as being in constant conflict, especially the participants from B&H, where *“the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty is constantly revived”* (B&H); *“There is no present, and no future”* (B&H); *“I do not know if the war is over or if it is about to start”* (B&H).

A majority of the participants believe that CSOs are very useful in reconciliation and dialogue in their countries, even on the regional level. *“The first ones to make steps towards some sort of reconciliation were CSOs...they are NGOs. A majority of these CSOs have failed...due to projects like ‘let us express our condolences in some of the former war zones where there were lots of victims,’ and for this they were marked as foreign mercenaries and domestic traitors”* (Serbia).

On the other hand, most of the participants questioned the influence CSOs have in society and the reason of their existence. *“It is interesting that in all post conflict countries, the number of NGOs has increased dramatically, and it is very important to determine the intent of each organisation.”* (Macedonia). Since the participants have emphasised that their multi-ethnic and multinational states are still governed by *“highly nationalistic rhetoric, where the civil sector cannot show the people that this is not OK”*, they estimate that the influence of CSOs is not very great. They have even quoted some CSOs with whom they have communicated at conferences in order to emphasise that the involvement of CSOs, even after a decade of work, has failed in accomplishing actual reconciliation.

Besides the political establishment, which is the obstacle to successful work of CSOs, some of the participants have recognised the politics of media. *“Media is not assisting in the strengthening of the civil concept of our society or in emphasising the role of NGOs and their work in aiding to build a different society... We have a divided and superficial media”* (Macedonia).



Desirable role of CSO in society

When asked what would be the desirable role of CSOs in society, most of the participants replied that the time is right for CSOs to think about their identity and the role they play. *“When it was needed the CSOs have taken on major projects, but some of them simply have not realised that things are slowly changing and they have stayed in same the position they were in during the wars in the 1990’s, which is not good at all”* (Serbia).

According to the participants, the opinion and awareness of the public about the role of CSOs, as to what they do and who they are, is at a low level. This is also influenced by a “lack of transparency of CSOs” and an inability to provide a person/user with their own story, which will, when published through the media, keep the attention of both editors and the audiences.

To gain success in their work, the participants believe that CSOs should have more capacity and potential. *“... (CSOs) cannot keep the tensions for long time on one problem. They cannot mobilise citizens, when there is no critical mass to support the issue.”* (Macedonia).

CSOs often *“take on issues that should be addressed by governments,”* instead of having specific projects with specific results, *“to avoid the situations where we have hundreds of CSOs dealing with democracy and EU integrations without anyone knowing what it is that they really do”* (B&H).

Media and CSO relationship – general overview and visibility

In order to set the perception of media relations and CSOs, participants were asked following questions: Are the media and CSO relations event based when it comes to press conferences or public events? Does the media, on its own, follow the activities of CSOs, or do they have some resistance because they have a negative opinion about CSOs? They were also asked to provide examples for their commentaries.

Most of the participants do consider CSOs as valuable sources of information. They follow events that have valuable results. The partnership between the media and CSOs, especially in campaigns, is a natural thing that should soon become part of everyday life. However, they emphasise that CSOs should work more on their media component. *“I have worked with civil society and have seen so many interesting activities that never reached the main stream media, because they do not know how to approach the media, or to develop the media component in their programme”* (Macedonia).

Participants from Turkey have emphasised that, in their opinion, cooperation between these two groups is mainly event based. *“If the issues are related to Turkey’s accession to the EU, the media will cover the CSOs organised events.”*

Participants also emphasised that it is important to determine which media will be invited to which event so that journalists can be prepared. *“If an event is happening today, then whoever is on duty will attend the event. Those are, in most cases, junior colleagues who might not know enough. It is necessary to arrange this in advance especially when television coverage is in question”* (B&H).

When asked how they would mark the visibility of CSOs in media (i.e. visible enough, not visible, or some CSOs are privileged compared to others) participants replied that they are not aware of privileged organisations, and that CSOs are not present in media enough due to the inadequate language they use in press releases.

Although in certain countries CSOs have some advantages and are visible in the media due to the *“popularity of the topic”* (Turkey), media representatives in the focus groups believe that CSOs are invisible due to a *“lack of action.”* *“When an organisation recognises an important problem in society, and insists on the response and reaction by the appropriate institution...that would be considered a success for them and for their citizens, and the media would find that interesting, thus making CSOs more present in media”* (B&H).

According to some participants, the issue of visibility will be solved in a satisfactory way for CSOs when they *“accept that the media will cover what is newsworthy. NGOs must accept that their press conferences will not be covered if nothing attractive is offered...or if all they simply state is that they are planning vacations”* (Macedonia).

Although media representatives stated that CSOs are valuable sources of information, their general impression of CSOs is that CSOs simply exist to make money; the so-called *“money making perception”* (Albania). That is why CSOs need to go through *“small media opportunities like the radio show, Halter and Cenzura. Some journalists understand current issues, but their articles are not being printed because they are not utilising the correct media format. In the end, all that is heard is shows talking about the CSOs that need to dissolved”* (Croatia).

When talking about visibility in the media, one of the respondents took the position that it is related to the presence of NGOs in primetime news. *“The competition is great there and the issue is how many of their activities are attractive”* (Macedonia).

Media as a channel for CSO message

An opinion shared by a majority of participants is that, *“if you want a voice to be heard, media is the key”* (Turkey). At the same time the participants have emphasised the need for CSOs to be more serious and credible sources of information, and that they should develop a media component in any possible sense. *“In general, the media will publish their messages; although we can say that CSOs’ messages are not for cover pages or for one page articles”* (Albania).

Media and CSO relations improvement – opportunities and challenges

The general conclusion of the participants is that there is room for improvement between media and CSO relations, but that the CSOs should be the ones to initiate the changes in those relations. Some of the participants believe *“that the media does not have a good reason to talk to CSOs because CSOs exist in their own little world”* (Albania). Other participants are of the opinion that *“cooperation on a joint project, with a shared interest in creating public accountability”* would significantly improve cooperation between the media and CSOs (B&H).

The main obstacle is that *“NGOs do not have an understanding, or a concept of how the media function. The main way of communicating with the media is through press releases, and 99% of the time they are not understandable or readable”* (Serbia).

Communication challenges – dissemination, evaluation and visibility

What are the challenges that CSOs face when they want to use the media as a communication channel? This question posed results in replies that focus on the fact that CSOs do not have the capacities to deal with media. *“CSOs in Turkey have no capacities to cooperate with media. Event based*

relations are currently very important for the media and CSOs" (Turkey). On the other hand, some of the participants believe that the media needs to be open in order to *"take risks, and not to be so ideologically oriented in regards to some topics especially, in regards to the issue of human rights"* (Turkey). In this set of questions respondents mainly restated their responses from previous questions. They reiterate the need for CSOs to understand and to educate on ways the media functions, and the importance of having staff that can facilitate these relations.

Few respondents replied to the question regarding the verification of information received by CSOs. Examination of the information issued by CSOs is based on the assessment of the legitimacy of the organisation and its previous experiences. It is based on their personal estimate, not on standards or procedures.

When media outlets are deciding what to publish based on the assessment of the editors and/or the media owners, a personal evaluation is the most frequent argument and explanation given, which sometimes even depends on a "higher force." *"It all depends on what the day will bring"* (Macedonia). The decision is made based upon the information's relevance to society, how interesting the information is, and if it is germane to the interest of the consumer.

Media outlets' influence

Are the media or journalists influencing the CSOs' decision as to what will be and what will not be published? Few participants reply to this question in several different ways. Some believe that the media cannot influence the decision of CSOs, except in cases *"when the right questions are asked about what CSOs are not planning to publish"* (B&H). Others participants believe that *"the media has a strong influence on decision making processes within CSOs, primarily due to the way the news or information is written. One must adjust their articles and data for the media and journalists so they can publish it"* (Turkey).

Similarly, when participants are asked about the influence journalists' opinions and the media, regarding the actions, work and credibility of CSOs, media representatives claim that it is impossible to ruin the existing credibility and reputation of an organisation. As one of the participants said, *"If someone is sceptical in regards to an organisation's transparency, but still manages to get quality information, it will be published. Information is a message meant for the public and not an organisation"* (Albania).

Good relationships – crucial for the democratisation processes

When asked if there is need to start building strong relations between the media and CSOs, with the goal being to improve democratic processes in society, most of the respondents replied in the affirmative. *"Absolutely, quality relations are crucial as they improve democratic processes"* (Albania). Participants from the Turkish media group stated, *"We do not see how it is possible to defend the rights of minorities without cooperation of both CSOs and the media. Having quality relations between the media and CSOs allows many different voices to be heard in society"* (Turkey).

Closing remarks and recommendations

In the final session, most of the respondents reflected on recommendations that arose during the discussion. Some of the participants wanted to emphasise that CSOs should change their way of communication with media as soon as possible. *“By CSOs and the media continuing to communicate along the lines of ‘this and that event was held,’ it will continue to subdue CSOs the lowest level possible, until one morning we will wake up and find out that information from the chess club in the Palilula municipality is of the same importance as a regional initiative for finding exact numbers of victims to some crime”* (Serbia).

During the conclusion of the media focus groups, one of the main questions was the visibility of TACSO, as well as the assessment of how the participants are informed regarding the role and activities of TACSO on a regional and national level. Most of the participants state that TACSO, as a term, is familiar but not its programme or work. TACSO’s best-known activities include their sharing of links with useful information via email and their trainings. Members of certain media from B&H have expressed their satisfaction with their cooperation with TACSO and hope to continue this cooperation.

Finally, media representatives were enthusiastic about the research and believe that “more of these discussions are needed.” They believe that they should actively involve CSO representatives, as it is only through dialogue that changes can occur.



IV Conclusions

Therefore the main conclusions of this report are to be grouped four main clusters: **media and CSO mutual visibility, awareness, communication, trust and cooperation**, resulting with three main group of conclusions.

First and outmost conclusion is that the media are not aware of full potential, capacity, usefulness for society, and relevancy of most of the CSOs.

The media presenting information and opinions submitted by CSOs, but in certain cases they are openly portraying them as money making organisations...and the only public acknowledgement media will give to CSOs is related to the CSOs work in the area of reconciliation.

Media is aware of numerous CSOs, they quote the CSOs representatives as relevant speakers, but the general conclusion about CSOs is full of prejudices and stereotypes, because of which steps towards better cooperation are not made.

Secondly, CSOs openly question the independence of media from politics and business, and sensibility of journalists towards the civil society topics.

Situation is identical with CSOs. According to the research, listed in the following text, the CSOs openly question the independence of media from politics and business, sensibility of journalists towards the civil society topics and in addition claim that CSO action are observed through financial value. Although they know journalists and media outlets which want and manage to report on CSOs in professional manner, they are very inclined to observe the media in general terms and through the stereotypes which are blocking them to form positive cooperation.

Thirdly, main obstacles for communication and increase of mutual visibility is the lack of systematic approach to the "other" groups.

The CSOs or the media are lacking the procedures, standards, strategies how to approach the media/CSO, which and what kind of information they need/should publish, how to measure their impact on public/users and how to increase their influence in cooperation.

Based on this and many other findings the title of the research imposed itself. Media and CSOs are working next to each other, they talk to each other, fight for peace and justice in the society, but everything is done with their eyes wide shut.

Also, conclusions of this report can be presented as list of problems that are to be solved:

Conclusions related to CSOs:

1. There is evident lack of cooperation with the media in the field of events portrayal in the media outlets.
2. There is lack of joint initiatives between CSOs and the media
3. There is no systematic plan for involvement of media in CSOs activities
4. There is lack of continuous purposeful use of social media




5. There is lack of capacities of in the field of public relations among CSO members
6. There is no evident application of modern advocacy tools and techniques
7. There is evident lack of understanding between CSOs and the media – CSOs are using “project” vocabulary that is often non readable by journalists
8. There is lack of proper format usage by CSO when presenting information to the media. There is evidence that information to media is presented in project proposal/donor report form rather than in form of news
9. There is no monitoring plan for measuring CSO visibility in the media, or visibility efficiency

Conclusions related to media outlets:

1. There is proactive engagement of media related to CSO activities, or programmes
2. Media are not recognizing CSOs as corrective to governments
3. There is lack of presentation of CSOs as factors of change in democratic processes
4. There is no efficient monitoring tools following CSOs work in key terms of credibility
5. There is no sufficient coverage of CSOs work that are engine outside of “power centres”

V Recommendations



*“Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.”
Anthony Robbins, American Advisor*

Recommendations for CSOs

Based on the comments made by the participants from the media and CSO groups and on the results of the research, the research team makes the following recommendations for improvement of the status and visibility of CSOs in media and the public:

- To improve current cooperation with media, especially with regards to the invitations to events and activities;
- To open dialogue and to be persistent with media representatives on how to create fruitful cooperation;
- To define goals and interests in order to start joint cooperation between CSOs and media for easier partnerships;
- To continuously inform and educate media representatives about programmes, goals, and results of CSO existence, in order to aid the decrease of stereotypes and prejudices;
- To systematically consider the need to involve media in CSO activities, to define standards of media relations, to create media communication strategy and internal procedures;
- To frequently use social networks like Facebook and Twitter, and internet news portals as communication channels in order to be involved in modern ways of information dissemination;
- To train staff that will be serving as PR officers and to work systematically on visual identity and visibility of CSOs in the media and the public;
- Communication with the public and the media should be based on activities which will be shown through modern advocacy;
- Regardless of whether it is oral or written, journalists and editors need to adjust the language of media communication to the target group so it is simple, informative and readable, without using project vocabulary;
- CSOs should communicate aims/ideas/findings/actions in the form of news, and not in report form for donors;
- Information about activities/projects should be sent to the media, selected based on the criteria, range and programme plan in accordance with the CSO programme and its desired reach;
- To set up a monitoring and evaluation system of the effects that CSO messages/activities/campaigns have on users in order to give value to their work, increase their visibility and appearance in the media. This can begin with a press clipping archive to be used for evaluation.
- Through increased visibility in the media, to take a leading role in the processes of European integration, and among other things, to interpret these activities to citizens;
- In transitional countries to continue working on the reconciliation processes.

Recommendations for the media

Based on the comments made by the participants from the media and CSO groups and on the results of the research, the research team makes the following recommendations for improvement of the status and visibility of CSOs in media and the public:

- To increase cooperation with CSOs and to proactively get involved in civil society to gain insight into the range and effect of their work;
- To recognise and support CSOs as corrective of governments, to factor in social changes, and work on reconciliation;
- To systematically show society the importance of accepting CSOs as factors of change in the democratic processes through regular and planned reporting, not simply by following daily announcements;
- To set up monitoring media and the evaluation of messages/information received by CSOs, in order to check their credibility, and also to get familiar with the work and activities of CSOs;
- To work on minimising prejudices against CSOs as less worthy members of civil society via media coverage of CSO work;
- To inform the public of CSOs that work outside of “power centres” – capitals and rich cities – and thereby fight against territorial discrimination of CSOs and citizens from smaller communities.

VI Annexes

- Annex 1** - Terms of References For regional CSOs and media focus group research
- Annex 2** - Information Letter for Focus Group Participants
- Annex 3** - Focus Group Participant Agreement Form
- Annex 4** - Regional CSO and media focus group research 2012 Timeline
- Annex 5** - Semi-structured Questionnaire for Civil Society Organisations Focus Group
- Annex 6** - Semi-structured Questionnaire for Media Focus Group
- Annex 7** - About the Association INFOHOUSE
- Annex 6** - SEMISTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MEDIA FOCUS GROUP
- Annex 7** - ABOUT INFOHOUSE



ANNEX 1

Technical Assistance Service Contract for the implementation of the project
“Capacity Building of Civil Society in the IPA countries and Territories (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia², Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/99³, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey).

EuropeAid/127427/C/SER/Multi – additional services

TERMS OF REFERENCE For regional CSO and media focus group research

Background of the assignment

The general objectives of this project are to strengthen the overall capacities and accountability of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) within the IPA beneficiaries and to guarantee the quality of services of CSOs and a sustainable role of the CSOs in the democratic process. The main purposes of the project are to:

- increase and improve the capacity and actions of CSOs and to
- improve the democratic role of CSOs.

An important activity under this heading is raising visibility, increasing knowledge and gaining insight **on relations and opinions that media has towards CSOs, CSO visibility in the media and the opinion of CSOs on the role of the media.**

As indicated in the TOR of the project, the main purpose of this assignment is to develop and conduct focus group research for TACSO in the countries in which TACSO is active.

The work will be coordinated by the PR and Communication Officer (PR&CO), advised by the Team Leader.

Scope of the assignment.

The organisation(s) will develop and conduct focus group research for TACSO in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

Bidding organisations will have to provide: project proposal, timeline, budget and CVs of staff members working on the project.

Activities to be carried out.

- Plan the focus group research in the country/countries;
- Develop the methodology and questions;
- Conduct the focus groups;
- Prepare the final report.

² hereinafter referred to as Macedonia

³ hereinafter referred to as Kosovo



Deliverables/results.

By the end of the assignment, the STE should have finalized or delivered:

- Focus Group Research survey on TACSO in one or more countries

Location of assignment.

- Countries in which TACSO is active as listed above.

Duration and timing of the assignment

The assignment needs to be conducted during February and March 2012. The final report is to be submitted by April 16, 2012.

Monitoring and evaluation of the Organisation

The activity will be monitored by the PR and Communication Officer/Team Leader.

The Organisation will deliver a final report to the PR&CO/Team Leader before remuneration.

Selection criteria

- Experience of similar assignments (15%)
- Proposed methodology (30%)
- Proposed Staff (25%)
- Time plan (5%)
- Budget (25%)

Ability of applicant to offer focus group research in more or all TACSO countries will be considered an advantage.

Application.

Applications must be in **English** and entail the following:

- Project proposal
- Budget
- Proposed timeline
- CVs of staff members working on the project with references from the company of previous assignment, mentioned in the CV to be attached;
- Reference list of the organisations

The application should be sent by e-mail to the TACSO Regional Office, PR and Communication Officer Sanela Tunovic, sanela.tunovic@tacso.org by **January 31 2012**.

ANNEX 2

Regional CSO and media focus group research 2012

INFORMATION LETTER FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Dear _____,

The general objectives of TACSO are to strengthen the overall capacities and accountability of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) within the IPA beneficiaries and to guarantee the quality of services of CSOs and a sustainable role of the CSOs in the democratic process.

An important activity under this heading is raising visibility, increasing knowledge and gaining insight **on relations and opinions that media has towards CSOs, CSO visibility in the media and the opinion of CSOs on the role of the media.**

Therefore, Regional TACSO Office is currently conducting the focus group research in your country. The Regional TACSO Office has engaged Association INFOHOUSE to conduct this study in 8 countries and 11 cities where TACSO is being implemented. INFOHOUSE is an independent, non-profit research organization with a national reputation for quality research.

You are invited to participate in a focus group discussion related to above mentioned project informations. The focus group, to be held on **<DATE>**, will include CSO representatives, media representatives and Local Advisory Group representatives (LAG). During this meeting, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences with and thoughts about CSO visibility and relations between media and CSO representatives, in a casual environment and with complete confidentiality. As a stakeholder, partner or beneficiary in the TACSO project, your views and experiences are extremely valuable in helping the TACSO to improve visibility of CSO and participatory partnership between CSOs and media. Your input will greatly help the TACSO to identify all potential problems, generate solutions and make recommendations for the empowerment of the partnership between media and CSO.

The focus group will be held on **<DATE>** from **<TIME1>** until **<TIME2>** at **<PLACE>**.

You were randomly selected from a list of eligible participants. Although we hope you will join us, participation is voluntary. Please be assured that anything you say during the focus group will be kept strictly confidential, and that TACSO and/or researchers will not release any information that can be linked to you. You are also welcome to call INFOHOUSE at +387/33/812-408 or at +387/33/532-757 (Regional TACSO Office in Sarajevo) for detailed information.

We hope that you will be able to join us for this important discussion.

Please confirm your attendance before March 23, 2012, electronically to bojan@infohouse.ba.

Palle Westergaard, TACSO Team leader



ANNEX 3

Regional CSO and media focus group research 2012

Focus Group Participant Agreement Form

I agree to participate in a focus group(s) described in Information letter for focus groups. I understand that my comments will be used for a Focus group research to be conducted by Association INFOHOUSE. The focus group(s) will take place **[DATE, TIME, PLACE]**. I understand that there is no risk associated with my participation. I also know that this study may contribute to empowerment of partnership between media and Civil Society Organizations.

I agree that all conversations which take place in the focus group should not be discussed with anyone outside of the focus group and its participants.

I give TACSO and Association INFOHOUSE ownership of the tapes and transcripts from the focus group and understand that tapes and transcripts will be kept in Regional TACSO Offices. I understand that information or quotations from focus groups will be published unless the researcher contacts me for my written permission.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can end it at any time without consequence. I also understand that if I have questions about this research project, I can call *the researcher* at [+387/33/812-408](tel:+38733812408) or contact by e-mail bojan@infohouse.ba.

I request that my name **not be used** in connection with tapes, transcripts, or publications resulting from this focus group.

Name of Participant (printed)

Name of Facilitator (printed)

Signature of Participant & date

Signature of Facilitator & date

Instructions:

1. Complete and send electronically to bojan@infohouse.ba.

ANNEX 4

Regional CSO and media focus group research 2012 Timeline

No	State	Place	Group and Time	Planned date	Date of the organization
1.	Bosna i Hercegovina	Sarajevo	CSO:10:00-11:30	28.03.2012.	28.03.2012.
			MEDIA:12:00-13:30	28.03.2012.	28.03.2012.
2.	Hrvatska	Zagreb	CSO:11:00-12:30	02.04.2012.	02.04.2012.
			MEDIA:11:00-12:30	03.04.2012.	03.04.2012.
3.	Srbija	Beograd	CSO:10:30-12:00	05.04.2012.	05.04.2012.
			MEDIA:13:30-15:00	05.04.2012.	14.05.2012.
4.	Crna Gora	Podgorica	CSO:10.30-12.00	16.04.2012.	16.04.2012.
			MEDIA:13:30-15.00	16.04.2012.	16.04.2012.
5.	Makedonija	Skopje	CSO:11:00-12:30	19.04.2012.	25.04.2012.
			MEDIA:13:30-15:00	19.04.2012.	08.06.2012.
6.	Kosovo	Pristina	CSO:10:30-12.00	20.04.2012.	20.04.2012.
			MEDIA:13:30-15.00	20.04.2012.	20.04.2012.
7.	Albanija	Tirana	CSO:12:00-13-30	17.04.2012.	17.04.2012.
			MEDIA:11:00-12:30	18.4.2012	19.4.2012
8.	Turska	Istanbul	CSO:12:00-13:30	25.4.2012	26.4.2012
			MEDIA:14:00-15:30	25.4.2012	06.06.2012.



ANNEX 5



Regional CSO and media focus group research 2012

SEMISTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CSO FOCUS GROUP

To be used by Researcher only. Not intended for public dissemination.

Note to researcher: Ensure that participants are seated in a horseshoe seating plan. It is essential to have an eye contact with all participants.

SECTION I : Introductory remarks

Good morning/afternoon!

- Thank you for taking the time to participate in the focus group research. We have envisioned that duration of this conversation should not be longer than 90 minutes. We will honor your time by making sure that we will end on time.
- We are researchers contracted by the Regional TACSO office to conduct an research on how media and CSOs see each other and work together.
- Our research will result in a written report which is scheduled to be released by May 2012. This report will be delivered to the TACSO Regional office.
- Does anyone mind if we tape-record this conversation for our report? We won't share the tapes with anyone else. More details you can find in informed consent.
- All information we collect is confidential as to who provided it. For example, we will not disclose who actually participated in this focus group nor will our final report make any attributions for quotes. We hope this encourages you (if you need encouragement) to speak freely.
- Any questions before we start?
- Be sure that everyone signs and completes the info on the formed consent.

SECTION II: General overview

First, we would like to ask you some general questions about your country and the situation related to media.

1. What are the sources of information you rely on mostly for acquiring information on situation in your country and society at large?
2. How well you trust to the sources you mentioned? What is the trust level? What are the main reasons for trust/distrust?
3. How would you assess the role of the media in the democratic process? How do you see the relationship between the media and the government?
4. Could you give us examples for your opinion?

5. How would you assess the media landscape in terms of
 - diversification,
 - pluralism,
 - content,
 - ethics,
 - objectivity,
 - trust,
 - quality?
6. *(for ex Yugoslavia countries) How do you describe the role of the media in transitional country?*
7. Your opinion on what should be the roles of the media and what are these roles in the reality? Are they the same or not?

SECTION III: MEDIA AND CSO RELATIONSHIP

NOW WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIA AND CSO

8. How do you see the relationship between the media and CSOs?
(depend on answers, researchers will focus on more detailed questions about relationship such as Active/reactive? Biased/nonbiased? ..)
9. Could you give us examples for your opinion?
10. What is your opinion about CSOs visibility in the media?
11. What do media think about CSOs? Some examples?
12. How would you describe media outlets in your country as a channel to spread your message to the public?
13. What are the existing opportunities for media and CSO`s relations improvement?
14. What are the existing challenges for media and CSO`s relations improvement?

SECTION IV: COMMUNICATING THE MESSAGE TO THE PUBLIC

THANK YOU FOR YOUR IMPORTANT FEEDBACK. WE KNOW THESE ARE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS ABOUT TOPICS PEOPLE DON'T USUALLY TALK ABOUT. WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT CSOs COMMUNICATION TO THE PUBLIC

15. What are some of the challenges you face in the use of communication to enhance your work?
16. Do you have any supporting evidence that your message (what you communicate) is understood by the citizens/target group?

17. What kind of evaluation/monitoring system you use, do you have some evidence on behavioral changes for example...?
18. What is the decision-making process for deciding what information will be published or communicated, what will be visible to the public?
19. Who decides what finally gets communicated to the citizens?
20. How do you decide which media outlet will be asked for spreading you message to the public? On which criteria?
21. Do media outlets or journalists have an influence on your decision what to publish or not?
22. Does the media generated opinion towards CSOs influence on capacities and action of CSOs? Some examples?
23. Are the good relations with media crucial for improving the democratic role of CSOs or not? Some examples?

SECTION V: CLOSING QUESTIONS

CLOSING QUESTIONS:

22. Before we finish, we would like to hear what do you think it should be done to improve CSOs visibility and image in general in media?
23. What is the role of Regional and National TACSO Offices in providing technical assistance related to improvement of CSOs visibility and what is their role in empowering partnership between CSOs and media?
24. What did you think about the subjects we have discussed? Do you think that this group covered issues that are important to civil society?

SECTION VII: CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

CLOSE THE INTERVIEW:

Thank you all for your time and ideas. This has been extremely helpful. As we said in the beginning, the purpose of this discussion was to help us to gain better picture about media and CSOs relationship and opinion that they have on each other. We want to be sure that our report will help in overcoming any obstacles that CSOs or media can have in their mutual cooperation.

Please remember that you agreed to keep this discussion confidential. Please do not share with others the details of what was said here.

Thank you for your help.

INFOHOUSE





ANNEX 6

Regional CSO and media focus group research 2012

SEMISTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MEDIA FOCUS GROUP

To be used by Researcher only. Not intended for public dissemination.

Note to researcher: Ensure that participants are seated in a horseshoe seating plan. It is essential to have an eye contact with all participants.

SECTION I : Introductory remarks

Good morning/afternoon!

- Thank you for taking the time to participate in the focus group research. We have envisioned that duration of this conversation should not be longer than 90 minutes. We will honor your time by making sure that we will end on time.
- We are researchers contracted by the Regional TACSO office to conduct an research on how media and CSOs see each other and work together.
- Our research will result in a written report which is scheduled to be released by May 2012. This report will be delivered to the TACSO Regional office.
- Does anyone mind if we tape-record this conversation for our report? We won't share the tapes with anyone else. More details you can find in informed consent.
- All information we collect is confidential as to who provided it. For example, we will not disclose who actually participated in this focus group nor will our final report make any attributions for quotes. We hope this encourages you (if you need encouragement) to speak freely.
- Any questions before we start?
- Be sure that everyone signs and completes the info on the formed consent.

SECTION II: General overview

First, we would like to ask you some general questions about your country and the situation related to CSOs.

1. What are the sources of information you rely on mostly for acquiring information on situation in your country and society at large?
2. How well you trust to the sources you mentioned? What is the trust level? What are the main reasons for trust/distrust?
3. How would you assess the role of the CSOs in the democratic process?
4. How do you see the relationship between the CSOs and the government in terms of control, censorship and bias; and self censorship of the CSOs (if any)?
5. Could you give us examples for your opinion?

6. How would you assess the CSOs landscape in terms of
 - diversification,
 - pluralism,
 - content,
 - ethics,
 - objectivity,
 - trust,
 - quality?
7. *(for ex Yugoslavi countries) How do you describe the role of the CSOs in transitional societies?*
8. According to your opinion what is the desirable role of the CSOs in your society and what is the current state of affairs when the CSOs are in question?

SECTION III: MEDIA AND CSO RELATIONSHIP

NOW WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIA AND CSO

9. How do you see the relationship between the media and CSOs?
 - 9.1. only event based (only during the press conference or similar)
 - 9.2. are media reluctant to participate in CSOs events? If yes why?
 - 9.3. are media having preformed negative opinion about CSOs? If yes why?
 - 9.4. are the media self initiatively covering the CSOs events/actions?
 - 9.5. do you consider CSOs as a source of useful information?

Could you give us examples for your opinion?
10. What is your opinion about CSOs visibility in the media?
 - 10.1. CSOs are inadequately visible?
 - 10.2. visible enough?
 - 10.3. some CSOs have privileged positions some non of it?

Could you give us examples for your opinion?
11. What is your general impression about how media perceive CSOs? Some examples?
12. How would you describe media outlets in your country as a channel to spread CSOs message to the public?
13. What are the existing opportunities for media and CSO`s relationship improvement?
14. What are the existing challenges for media and CSO`s relationship improvement?

SECTION IV: COMMUNICATING THE MESSAGE

THANK YOU FOR YOUR IMPORTANT FEEDBACK. WE ARE AWARE THAT SOME OF THE QUESTIONS LISTED ARE DIFFICULT IN TERMS THAT ARE NOT SUBJECT TO FREQUENT DISCUSSIONS. WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT CSOs COMMUNICATION TOWARD THE PUBLIC.

15. What are some of the challenges you are facing when the CSOs wants to use media as a communication tool/channel to enhance their work?

16. How do you know whether their message directed to the public is trustworthy?
17. What kind of evaluation/monitoring system you use to check the liability of the CSOs message/intentions?
 - 17.1. For example...?
18. What is the decision-making process for deciding what CSOs information will be published or communicated, what will be visible to the public?
19. Who decides what finally gets communicated to the citizens?
 - 19.1. On which criteria?
20. Do media outlets or journalists have an decision making power to influence on CSOs decisions what to be publish or not?
22. According to your opinion does the media attitudes and opinions have influence on actions of CSOs?
 - 22.1. For example does the negative attitude of media toward some CSOs have an impact on the work of that particular CSO? Some examples?
 - 22.2. According to your opinion does the CSOs attitudes and opinion have influence on media and / or media reporting?
23. Are the good relationship with CSOs crucial for improving the democratization process or not? Could you more elaborate on that?

SECTION V: CLOSING QUESTIONS

24. Before we finish, we would like to hear what do you think it should be done to improve CSOs visibility and image in general in the media?
25. What is the role of Regional and National TACSO Offices in providing technical assistance related to improvement of CSOs visibility
26. What is TACSO role in empowering partnership between CSOs and media?
27. What do you think about the subjects that we have discussed? Do you think that this group covered issues that are important to civil society?

SECTION VI: CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW:

Thank you all for your time and ideas. This has been extremely helpful. As we said in the beginning, the purpose of this discussion was to help us to gain better insight about media and CSOs relationship and opinion that they have on each other. We want to be sure that our report will help in overcoming any obstacles that CSOs or media can have in their mutual cooperation.

Please remember that you agreed to keep this discussion confidential. Please do not share with others the details of what was said here.

Thank you for your help.

INFOHOUSE



ANNEX 7

ABOUT ASSOCIATION INFOHOUSE

Our Moto: *"Information is oxygen of Democracy!"*

The organization INFOHOUSE is a non-profit organization established to promote and strengthen the information literate society and human rights. INFOHOUSE, in its activities of advisory work collects, processes, analyses and distributes information that are of value to civil society. The strong influence has been achieved so far and it has been done by information which were gathered, processed and disseminated in form of report.

Our work is based on:

- Involving citizens and organizations in process of building information society,
- Developing awareness about the importance of information as the way to fulfill democratic rights, and responsibilities,
- Building capacity of people and organizations.

With organizations and individuals we cooperate by:

- Designing and conducting research and evaluations,
- Training and consulting in public relations and media, information-communication and management capacity building,
- Implementing projects, activism and education of young people,
- Organizing PR campaigns.

INFOHOUSE is a member of NGO Council and Network for Building Peace. INFOHOUSE is currently acting as a Secretariat for NGO Council.

Here are some of the conducted evaluations and reports:

Invisible people on no man's land - Situation report on B&H Organizations dealing with the disabled persons, which was composed by Dženana Alađuz (INFOHOUSE) upon order from Human Rights Centre of the University of Sarajevo 2006

Can NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina make a difference? Case study of Nongovernmental organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 2006 pre-election and election period; for Mr. Pavol Demeš The German Marshall Fund, in cooperation with Foundation Mozaik.

How the media cover pre-election campaign? Report for Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in B&H 2006.

"SUSTAINABLE INTERVENTIONS TO COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA (SUSTAIN)" project evaluation report, for Catholic Relief Service, December 2011. More than 23 people were interviewed and more than 800 pages of the project documentation (narrative and other reports, procedures materials and training materials, publications ect.) were analyzed in detail.

Building Good Governance through Civic Engagement project evaluation report, for Civil Society Promotion Center, 2010. During the evaluation, 9 cities were visited, 29 interviews with 29 people from 13 organizations and 16 projects were conducted. More than 30 hours of conversations were made and several hundred pages of narrative and financial reports, produced materials and brochures were read and analyzed.

Strengthening of civic activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina in election and post-election processes 2006-2008 project evaluation report, for Civil Society Promotion Center, 2008. During the evaluation, 13 cities were visited, we traveled 2200 kilometers, 39 interviews were done with 39 people and 19 organizations, 12 hours of conversations, 297 pages of transcriptions of conversations. We have read several hundred pages of narrative and finance reports, produced materials and brochures.

Evaluation of NGO Q and evaluation of project Queer Sarajevo Festival for NGO Q, 2009. More than 25 interview persons, survey on 198 persons. We have read several hundred pages of narrative and finance reports, produced materials and brochures.

References on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment issues:

2012, Empowering women voters – 101 reason why women on local election; supported by Foundation Heinrich Boell, cooperation with Foundation CURE

2011-2012, Empowering women voters – 101 reason why women on local election; Office of Public Affairs and Foundation Heinrich Boell, cooperation with Foundation CURE

2012 Promotion and media campaign of the project “Together against Torture”; for Viva žene/European Commission

2010 Empowering the women voters – 101 reason why vote for women, for Swiss Embassy - Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

2010 Research and analysis of CARE's on line campaign “I am a Roma Women” in Region for Care International NWB

2011 Emergency fund for female entrepreneurs, Centers for Civic Initiatives/USAID

2009 Public Relation strategy and implementation of PR strategy for project Young Man initiative – gender based violence prevention program, for CARE NWB

2008 Communication Strategy for empowering feminist organization CESI Croatia

2008 Media Strategy for empowering feminist organization NGO MEDICA B&H



Contact



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71 000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina
E-mail: info@tacso.org

T/A Help Desk for

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* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.