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6TH CIVIL
SOCIETY
FORUM
REPORT

CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM REPORT

31 May 2017, 16:00 – 20:00 - EU Programme Support Office (EUPSO), Nicosia

1. PARTICIPANTS, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE FORUM

The 6th Civil Society Forum hosted by Civic Space was held at EUPSO on 31st May 2017, Wednesday from 16.00 to 20.00 under the “Role, Functionality, and Sustainability of the Forum” theme. The agenda of the forum is attached in Annex 1.

23 participants from 15 CSOs participated in the Forum. You can find the list of participants attached in Annex 2.

OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM

- To initiate the selection process of the new CSO members of the Steering Committee;
- To develop recommendations for the Open Door Festival;
- To share and endorse the latest version of the Civil Society Forum code of conduct;
- To brainstorm and build consensus on the role and vision of the Civil Society Forum
- To brainstorm and develop recommendations on the needs and functionality of the Civil Society Forum
- To develop recommendations for keeping the Forum sustainable, innovative and viable.

METHODOLOGY OF THE FORUM

The Civic Space team and the facilitator, in the meetings they held for the preparation of the 6th Civil Society Forum, worked to design the agenda and the methodology in line with participative dialogue principles. Based on objectives of participatory exchange of ideas, constructive dialogue and ownership, the Forum was held in the form of plenary sessions and small group workshops. Workshops organized in small groups were inspired by the structured dialogue method. This method is a method designed to stimulate participatory and democratic dialogue by triggering questions to enable a participation space for the diversity of expressions, personalities, and characters, and to enhance the effectiveness for exchanging opinions. Normally the Structured Dialogue Method requires at least two full-day workshops supported by a software program. However, this was not possible within the given timeframe and available resources of the Forum and thereby, its second half was adapted to the needs inspired from this methodology.

2. FLOW OF THE FORUM: DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WELCOME, STEERING COMMITTEE CSO MEMBERS' NOMINATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM CODE OF CONDUCT

Following the opening of the Forum with the short speeches of the European Commission Program Manager-Civil Society and the Civic Space Team Leader, the agenda was presented to the participants and approved. At this stage, participants did not propose any additions or amendments to the agenda.

Since the CSO Members of the Steering Committee completed their six-month periods in the committee, it was time to do the new elections and a closed candidate nomination process was also included in the agenda of the 6th Civil Society Forum. CSO members of the Steering Committee

Hazal Yolga and Niyazi Güvenir shared their views and experiences with the new candidates and participants.

Hazal Yolga: *"As members of the Steering Committee, we provided recommendations for Civic Space activities, shared our opinions on reaching out to more CSOs and people and strategic aims. Civic Space is here to provide financial and contextual support to civil society, and hence, being the Steering Committee member actually means supporting civil society and the community in general, not the project itself."*

Niyazi Güvenir: *"We have added our experiences and expertise to Civic Space activities and tried to be the bridge between the project and civil society. Be it meetings on associations law, or Estonia study visit, or other Civic Space activities have been very beneficial. Gaining new information was stimulating. I am sure that new candidate friends will also be a part of important activities."*

The participants were provided nomination forms in their folders and were able to nominate their candidates during the Forum. In addition, to provide opportunity for CSOs, which could not participate the Forum, it was decided that the nomination will continue either in hard-copy or internet till 9th June. Following this part of the Forum, the information that the deadline to adapt associations' statutes was extended until the end of December was shared and the importance of finalizing this process was highlighted.

As foreseen in the agenda, Enver Ethemer, from Envision Diversity and ex-Civic Space Steering Committee member presented the final version of the Civil Society Forum Code of Conduct that was finalized following a long process of feedback and recommendations, and the final version of the document was endorsed by the participants.

PRESENTATION OF CIVIC SPACE ACTIVITIES

The Team Leader of Civic Space Project, Marija Jancic-Amberg presented the activities conducted by Civic Space since the 5th Forum and the upcoming activities already in the work-plan. A part of this presentation was information shared by 3 CSO representatives who took part in some Civic Space activities.

Melis Erođlu, representing Social Transformation Centre, a beneficiary of the Civic Space Incubation Facility, shared the following views: *"Social Transformation Centre is a new association and in this context we wanted to make use of the Incubation Facility support. At first, we wanted to do address all what is needed and to cover many activities, and the tailor-made individual support we received in the Social Incubation provided us with a strategic focus. Social Incubation is also a new initiative here and we think that there are things that can be improved, such as neither the Civic Space team nor us (the incubates) dedicated enough time and could not held periodic meetings. My recommendation for the new Incubation Facility beneficiaries will be to plan time better, dedicate more time to the facility, hold periodic meetings and plan their work more strategically."*

Ruba Salamandar from Leap2Peak, a civil society group supported by the Grow Civic In-Kind Support Programme, provided the following information about what her group has been working on: *"We are actually an international peer-to-peer students' learning initiative. Our specific target group is international students enrolled in universities and recent graduates. We provide activities, trainings for them and try to create spaces and means to address their problems by also including relevant duty-bearers such as the private sector, universities, etc. We received Grow Civic support to build our website and conduct a social media campaign to be able to outreach to a wider group of students"*.

Emete Imge, from the Universal Patient's Rights Association and ex-Civic Space Steering Committee member, shared the following information regarding Civic Space activities on enabling environment for civil society: *"A working group meeting was held in December, facilitated by the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL). This meeting was held to discuss priorities for improving the environment around civil society and to identify a road-map for drafting a strategy for improving the enabling environment. The decision made in the meeting was to draft a text for inviting CSOs who are willing to take part in drafting such a strategy, then identifying and drafting the priorities together with them, and finally to consult the strategy with all CSOs. Accordingly, a call for CSOs text was drafted and will be announced very soon publicly. Another activity under enabling environment was the study visit to Estonia. There, we have met with both CSOs and public sector representatives and received information about both the legal framework and dialogue mechanisms between civil society and the government. For example, there is a civil society support group in the Parliament consisting of MPs; the public sector funding to CSOs is quite transparent and well-structured; internet is being used highly efficiently and the bureaucratic framework allows for nearly zero paper consumption. We saw that another world is possible."*

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE OPEN DOOR FESTIVAL

Following the presentation of Civic Space activities, the session on Open Door started. The participants took part in an open session and developed ideas and recommendations for the Open Door Festival. The recommendations provided are presented below under 4 categories:

Recommendations related to the design of Open Door Festival

- In order not to have confusion on the context, the meaning, aims and expectations of Open Door Festival must be defined and understood well; it should not be in the way it was held last year, as one representative stated *"We did not understand what to do exactly, we opened our door, just sat in our office and waited for people to come. It should be structured and implemented more pro-actively"*.
- The objectives of the events and activities to be organized for increased participation should be synchronized and shared with clear messages.
- Establishing a Coordination Committee of Recommendations and Planning.
- The design phase must be more participatory, and reach out of Nicosia. A participatory design process can be carried out with questionnaires and opinion exchanges via internet or telephone, not only through volunteer representatives.
- Summer holidays and university term start dates (orientation weeks) must be considered while scheduling.
- Providing guidance and support by sharing lessons learned from last year's festival and good-examples.

Recommendations aiming to increase the access and participation to the Open Door Festival:

- Increasing the access to target groups outside Nicosia and the access of groups to Nicosia (public transport).
- Expanding and increasing outreach to rural areas.
- Expanding the boundaries and scope of target groups, not being limited with educated active civil society individuals, it should be: *"From family, to neighbourhood, to "muhtars"; reach out and touch the public."*
- Increasing the participation and mobilization, by way of cooperation on thematic target groups and joint/merged activities, so that participation is not decreased when divided between different days or CSOs.
- Thematic grouping can be rights-based or target group/subject base. For example, under the heading of the right to education, joint events can be organized together with teacher unions, family unions, organizations working on peace education, and academics. Or under

the health heading, joint events can be organized together with unions, chambers and CSOs working in different health issues, from healthy-food to diabetes.

- Outreach to the SMEs and business community for participation, sponsorship and support purposes.
- Building bridges and enabling bilateral benefits aiming to increase the social responsibility projects and financial support between SMEs/ business community and CSOs: *"More Social responsibility projects will be more meaningful and knowledge/data based and CSOs will have the opportunity to receive more diverse support"*.
- Promoting a more pro-active approach: *"Not just open our doors and wait for people to come but to go out and knock-on doors ourselves"*.

Recommendations related with the visibility and communication of the Open Door Festival

- Prioritizing crazy, vibrant and artistic activities.
- Increasing the visibility on radio, TV, newspapers and social media.
- Holding press conferences in municipalities and chambers.
- Ensuring municipal contribution in terms of announcements and visibility (social media, announcement boards, newsletters).
- Ensuring communication and cooperation with universities, student unions and clubs.
- Preparing a communication strategy.

Innovative Action Recommendations for the Open Door Festival

- Open/warm tent: A mobile open/warm tent, set up in crowded/busy areas, where, in turns, the CSOs will share their announcements, knowledge and coffee.
- Star/space observation: Star/space observations, especially for disadvantaged groups, with mobile telescopes at different regions and different days/ nights.
- Inclusion of universities: Converting Open Door festival events into documentaries and/or photo exhibitions by cooperating with radio, TV and communication faculties.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONALITY OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

Following the coffee break, participants worked in small groups to discuss the following subjects for an hour:

- Role: Envisioning the ideal role and scope of the CSO Forum
- Situation Assessment: What worked well & what should be improved about the CSO Forum?
- Needs Assessment: What does the CSO Forum need to fulfil its role & achieve its vision?
- Recommendations: For CSOs, the Steering Committee members, Civic Space Team

After one hour, participants gathered in a plenary session and shared the following recommendations to present what they discussed in small groups:

Role and Objectives	Situational and Needs Assessment	Recommendations
To finalise the data base to enhance networking and communication channels	Current status is assessed as positive	Creation of output-oriented thematic groups to increase the effectiveness and volunteerism
To increase and improve cooperation and networking opportunities	Strategy document/ call text is a constructive output	Preparation of a communication strategy including aims, objectives, roles and vision/mission
To provide coordinated answers and solutions by anticipating and assessing	Sustainability is low/ non-existent	Ensuring a subject/agenda related participation, rather than calling everyone to

the problems and needs related to CSOs		every meeting, thus increasing the sustainability
To increase the capacities of CSOs	Cannot fulfil monitoring and evaluation roles In some respects the language of the Forum might be too technical and not be understood/comprehended	Sharing concepts in a simple, understandable way, adapted to the local language Disseminating information about the Forum which provides clear and simple answer to the question: "What will be the contribution/benefit of the Forum for us?"
To develop strategies on subjects of common interest	The aim and role of the Forum is not fully comprehended, it is not clear enough	Creating campaigns and initiatives to increase volunteerism Creation of thematic groups while the larger Forum in which all members participate topics of common interest (e.g. enabling environment) to be discussed
To assess the threats and opportunities to improve the working environment of CSOs and create a constructive conducive space	The favourable environment and its direct contribution to CSOs are not fully understood	Creating opportunities in addition to the data base to increase networking and communication channels
Crisis management for common space	Creation of common trust, belief, belonging and ownership	Increasing potential local and foreign cooperation/networking opportunities
To identify common objectives for CSOs	Failure to achieve sustainability in participation	Identification of a roadmap for financial sustainability
To create local and foreign cooperation/networking opportunities and to develop capacity	Volunteering-based work is low and not widespread	Renting billboards to be used by CSOs in turns
To compile resources (including experience) in a pool to enable more effective and efficient use	Ineffective use of media	Increasing cooperation with SMEs, business community and chambers to create sponsorship and social responsibility opportunities
	No long-term action/activity/business plan	Preparing 5-year strategic mission/vision, feasibility and sustainability plan
	Problems about early scheduling and coordination	Planning the short term /12 months activity and action plan
	Lack of international networks	Identification of a more creative visibility strategy apart from traditional marketing and announcement methods
	Cooperation between NGOs is weak or superficial (activity-based rather than institutional)	Identification of a methodology such as a handbook/guideline on strategy, transfer of corporate knowledge and experience to stimulate new participation and organizations as well as effective integration
	New organizations and participants can not immediately be integrated into the Forum	Preparing a communication strategy for both internal members and external relations of the Forum
		Creation of creative, non-partisan, broad thematic working groups to promote cooperation and exchange of ideas among organizations, institutions and areas of interest. For example, "Island" theme could bring lots of different groups together such as

		photographers, students, poets, environmentalists.
		Establishment of thematic "rapid response, rapid intervention" groups on the basis of current issues in order to be able to react more simultaneously and quickly to daily events.

ANNEX I – Agenda

14:00 – 14:15	Registration
14:15 – 14:30	Welcome & Presentation of the Agenda
14:30 – 14:45	Reflection and Sharing Experiences of the Steering Committee CSO Members & Closed Nomination of Candidates
14:45 – 15:00	Presentation of Code of Conduct & Endorsement by the Forum
15:00 – 15:20	Presentation of Civic Space Activities & Future Plans
15:20 – 15:45	Recommendations for the Open Door Festival
15:45 – 16:00	Coffee Break
16:00 – 17:00	Structured Dialogue Session in small groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Role: Envisioning the ideal role and scope of the CSO Forum ● Situation Assessment: What worked well & what should be improved about the CSO Forum? ● Needs Assessment: What does the CSO Forum need to fulfil its role & achieve its vision? ● Recommendations: For CSOs, the Steering Committee members, Civic Space Team
17:00 – 17:30	Plenary Session: Role, Functionality, Recommendations
17:30 – 18:30	Cocktail

ANNEX II – List of Participants

Name	Organization Name	E-mail
Ruba Samandar	Leap2peak	rubasamandar@gmail.com
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ANNEX III – Code of Conduct for the Forum

Civil Society Forum

Code of Conduct

Mission of the Forum

- o Forum is a democratic structure whose operation is guided by ethical and democratic principles.
- o Forum operates on the ideas of democratic governance, civic care, prudence in decision making, responsibility and accountability, openness and transparency, tolerance, sustainability and ownership and independence and neutrality.
- o Civil Society Forum is not owned by any group or institution. It is a collaborative and interactive platform which is based on mutual trust and solidarity amongst its members with agreed upon representation.
- o Forum seeks to advance the cooperation and networking amongst CSOs impartially.

Principles

Democratic Governance

- o Forum has a strong commitment to equal participation, unequivocal statutes or ethical standards on decision making and ensuring involvement of all parties equally. Forum also binds to good code of conduct and professionalism and values the work of everyone in a motivating manner. It works with an internal consensus building on cooperation, inclusion, integrity and clear policies.

Civic Care

- o Forum is a platform where CSOs work together to develop a culture of honesty, respect, due care for each other and mutual collegiality.
- o Forum works to solve problems and communicate in a non-violent fashion.

Prudence

- o Forum should exercise caution and discretion in decision making about use of resources, by abiding the principles of sustainability of the forum in the coming years.

Responsibility and Accountability

- o Forum must be responsible and accountable in its actions to stakeholders, wider public and other CSOs. It also needs to demonstrate accountability for financial resources received from donors, beneficiaries and other partner organisations.

Openness and Transparency

- o Forum must communicate in an open and direct manner. It should not act anonymously. It should also be open to new and diversified ideas.

Neutrality and Independence

- o Forum must aim to be independent of all influence and particular benefit hence it must act in the manner to maintain autonomy, avoid being under the control of a particular group, opinion or institution/organisation.

Tolerance and Diversity

- o Forum should recognise and honour the diversity of opinions. It should circumvent disparaging and defamatory or slanderous language. It should venture to sustain or support the provenance of freedom of speech, expression of interest and tolerating difference of opinions.

Methods**Time**

- o Forum should meet every 3 months as agreed by majority in the first Civil Society Forum.

Rotating Location & Presidency

- o In order to ensure diverse regional participation and equal participation of regional organisations, forum should meet at different locations on a rotating basis. It should consider a rotating presidency or regional collaboration for organising the forum.

Format

- o Forums should follow the format of workshops to encourage engagement.

Communication & Reporting

- o All reports and notes related to the forum as well as communication should be communicated online and to all members.

Monitoring of Implementation of Decisions

- o Implementation of all decisions should be monitored by the forum members through an informal internal audit to ensure mutual trust is being maintained for sustainability.

Steering Committee

- o Steering Committee membership should be done openly through an election process. Election of the members should be through democratically casted votes. Membership should not be limited to two people but thematic groups should work to promote diversity and secure thematic representation.

Need a space to meet up? Contact Us!



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