



Technical Assistance for
Civil Society Organisations

**Regional Conference on Reflections and
Elaborations of IPA CSF Future
Perspectives and of TACSO 2 Planning
Conference Report**

24 to 26 October, 2011

Priština



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Preface

Initiating its second phase, the project Technical Assistance to capacity building of the Civil Society Organisations in the Western Balkan and Turkey, TACSO organised a joint regional conference with EU DG Enlargement on Reflections and Elaborations of **IPA CSF Future Perspectives and of TACSO 2 Planning** for the Local Advisory Group (LAGs) members, European Union Programming Committee (EUPC), European Union (EU) and European Union Delegation (EUD) representatives as well as TACSO representatives from 24 – 26 October 2011 in Pristina.

The CONFERENCE REPORT is prepared by Hajrulla Çeku under the responsibility of the TACSO Regional Office, Sarajevo November 2011. From this link, you can access the conference agenda, the list of participants and the PowerPoint Presentations, [IPA CSF Future Perspectives and of TACSO 2 Planning -- Documents](#).

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PowerPoint Presentations contained in the link, [IPA CSF Future Perspectives and of TACSO 2 Planning -- Documents](#) are:

- Mr. Khaldoun Sinno: SAP Dialogue cycle
- Mr. Dragan Crnjanski: Thematic Evaluation EU’s Support to Civil Society in the Western Balkans (WBT) and Turkey
- Mr. Henk Visser (two presentations): EU Enlargement CSF – TACSO (CSOs) and EU Enlargement CSF – TACSO (TACSO 2)
- Ms. Luisa De Amicis: “Future perspectives for TACSO 2: Financial Regulations and PRAG”
- Mr. Erik Illes: CSF 2011-13 implications for TACSO
- Ms. Tanja Hafner Ademi: IPA CSF and TACSO 2 LAG Conference
- Ms. Jasenka Perovic: Needs Assessment TACSO 2
- Ms Sandra Bencic: Assessment of Potential Exit Strategies for TACSO Project

Conference Day One – 25 October 2011, Pristina

Opening of the Conference:

Ms. Karin Schulz, Director of Development Consulting, on behalf of SIPU International, officially opened the conference. After the welcoming remarks, she briefly explained TACSO's achievements so far, focusing on capacity development facilities in support of the work of CSOs. While speaking about TACSO Kosovo¹, she mentioned two publications: the first on the institutional set-up in dealing with CSOs, and the second on capacity building of CSOs. Ms. Schulz concluded that challenges remain for civil society, especially in strengthening their roles in policy-making, participation, dialogue and advocating political parties.

Mr. Ilir Deda, an advisor to the President of Kosovo, began his speech by describing the multi-fold demanding transition of the Balkans region. He considered this the most beautiful part of European Union integration, as it changes societies. For us this means a progress towards where we want to be, with a functioning democracy, intersociety dialogue and developed countries. He further added, "For this purpose, we need substantial involvement of civil society, but a genuine involvement, especially the role of civil society in dialogue with state institutions." According to him, civil society has to do monitoring and be a watchdog in order to inform the general public on state affairs and, by this, he argued that our societies will slide towards Euro-scepticism, which he considers a good thing. "We have to develop critical minds, to address the question why we want to join EU, not just articulating our desire to be part of it. NGO expertise in various fields is essential in policy planning and implementation. To come to this, we need an organised civil society. In Kosovo there is already an instrument of dialogue, thanks to the role of the Kosovar Civil Society Foundation. Participation of citizens in policy processes democratises the society, and civil society is key to this process. It raises transparency and legitimacy of decision-making, raising the public's trust for state institutions." Mr. Deda concluded by mentioning that EU integration forges two-fold transparency, as a criterion for accession and as a result of having a partner, the CSOs. According to him, the Balkan people have wasted too much time in conflicts and they need to focus on building true piece.

Mr. Khaldoun Sinno, Acting Head of the Commission, on behalf of the European Commission Liaison Office in Kosovo, stressed the importance of regional co-operation as a fundamental principle of EU's policies and politics for the region, adding that the same level of co-operation goes for CSOs as well. Mr. Sinno continued, "We encourage this exchange of CSOs of the region, as there is a need to talk and exchange between the countries of the region (at both civil society and state levels). This year was a very good one for the region, but somehow underestimated. The European Commission (EC) proposed negotiation for Montenegro, accession for Croatia and conditional negotiations for Serbia, thus keeping the enlargement process alive." Referring to Ilir Deda's argument about Euro-scepticism, Mr. Sinno concluded that it is not necessarily a bad thing, as the closer the country gets to the EU the more critical the society becomes. He further mentioned that the EC engages very deeply with civil society in

¹ under UNSCR 1244/99. Hereinafter referred to as Kosovo.

policy formulation as well as in the dialogue for the Progress Report. In concrete terms, speaking of Kosovo, he mentioned the dialogue with the government of Kosovo, which is called SAPD. “Each time we meet with the government in SAPD, before we meet with the CSOs, as we want to hear their remarks before we meet the government. This proved to be very beneficial, especially this year in writing the Progress Report. I would like to thank the local TACSO office for helping us in this endeavour. Two things about this year’s Progress Report on civil society: the government has to find ways to involve CSOs in decision-making, and there is pressure on CSOs by the government.” He concluded by reiterating, once again, the democratic principles, stating that good policy design and implementation is possible only if you have wide public participation, as opposed to the exclusiveness of the government in policy making. “CSOs have to act constructively towards the government. Essentially, citizens have to know that their voice is heard and respected.”

The last speaker of the opening panel was **Mr. Robert Nelson**, Head of Section for DG Enlargement. He began by thanking TACSO for its role and expressing his belief that it should continue working in the coming years. According to him, the experiences of civil society of the region have proven valuable for DG Enlargement, and thus it is important to maintain the momentum for the upcoming phase for TACSO. “The European Commission has always stressed the importance of a single facility for the CSOs in the region. To enforce the single facility, all civil society funding has been brought under a particular programme, which sets up the strategy for support for CSOs. This strategy will bring sustainable results in the EC’s support to CSOs in the Western Balkans and Turkey. The new Civil Society Facility programme will focus on three outcomes: better benefits for CSOs as a result of dialogue, capacity of CSO networks to raise the voice of the people, and increased capacities of grass-root initiatives.” He especially stressed the importance of the last component, as there are many important organisations outside the areas of focus and usually left aside. Mentioning CSDP between the EU and Turkey, EIDHR, and many other programmes of CSO support, he argued that there is a need for better co-operation between TACSO and EU offices. In this regard, he suggested that the time between programming and implementation has to be shortened. In addition, there is a need for revision of financial instruments. He further mentioned implementation arrangements, such as longer term partnership arrangement, provisions for re-granting, smaller grant schemes, working through member states by the means of decentralised management, etc. Mr. Nelson stressed the importance of networking of CSOs. He continued, “The calls tend to put CSOs in competition between each other, and this needs to be revised towards a more co-operative approach.” He further gave figures of financial help for the Western Balkans and Turkey under civil society support programmes, explaining the high degree of interest that member states showed for a single joint civil society support programme when this instrument was first presented to them on October 14th. “They asked for M&E, strengthening co-ordination, and gender mainstreaming. There is a great interest in TACSO and LAG activities. I recommend that you lobby your embassies and persuade them join the LAG. This approach has proved to be very effective and paves the way for a successful implementation in upcoming years.”

IPA CSF Day

Panel 1

Ms. Karin Schulz facilitated this panel and hosted the following speakers (topics):

- Mr. Dragan Crnjanski – The Interim Evaluation EU IPA CSF Assistance to Civil Society in the WB and Turkey
- Mr. Henk Visser – Project Impact Assessment and Guidance of EU Funded Projects Presentation DG ELARG Task Manager

Mr. Dragan Crnjanski, Team Leader of Thematic Evaluation of EU Support to CS in the WBT, presented a twofold primary objective: provide findings and recommendations to assist the DG Enlargement, and to assess the performance of financial assistance as well as the threefold specific objective: assessment of the intervention logic, judgment, and recommendations. “The Evaluation is structured in two phases: specific objective 1 and specific objective 2, while specific objective 3 is cross-cutting. Phase 1 was completed and its report approved by June 2011.” He presented the phase one evaluation questions and interim findings, the presentation of lessons learned on intervention logic and the main recommendations on intervention logic. It was said that Phase 2 starts today and it is organised in three successive stages: fieldwork preparation (underway), fieldwork implementation (until 18/11/11) and synthesis. The focus on global impact of Phase 2: direct impact, indirect impact, donor co-ordination, participation issues and cross-cutting issues.

The second speaker, **Mr. Henk Visser**, Programme Manager – EU policies - Task Manager For DG Enlargement, began his speech by concluding that what TACSO is doing is already making an impact, in one way or another, positive or negative. He further explained concerns the European Commission is having about accession, respectively about Croatia and other countries. “A good example is Chapter 23 – Justice and Home Affairs. In Croatia, there is still much to be done in this respect, but as the country gets closer to the EU, civil society has a role in telling the EC to pay attention to shortcomings or asking for chapter to be closed and accession ratified. They have chosen the second option.” The impact level of doing things was one of the most articulated issues of the conference. Mr. Visser stated that there is a lack of success stories on the impact level and brought up the question, “how can technical assistance become more effective in promoting positive change?” He emphasised that freedom of expression, regional co-operation, socio-economic issues, exclusion of young, women and vulnerable groups from the market, poverty reduction, and climate change are issues that were raised in the Strategic Paper of the European Commission. “These are issues that we will focus on when designing civil society support schemes. In addition, we think it is essential that politicians and administration listen to the people and there is a substantial role for the civil society to play. Impact is not just a collection of results. How can TACSO insist on making an impact when it tries to guide and assist CSOs were the final remarks of Mr. Visser.

After the panel presentations, the floor was opened for Q&A and comments. The following are the discussions related to the issues presented during the second conference panel.

The first questions were on the way the European Commission is assessing impact and the methodology it utilises? Mr. Visser answered this question, “The border line between result and impact is usually vague. I personally have not been very involved in measuring impact, but rather assessing the results, unfortunately. But it does not make any difference (assessing the results) as we train or over train people of government, but we are not sure whether they apply the acquired skills.” **Ms. Aida Bagic**, Resident Advisor TACSO Croatia, asked about the security reasons of not being able to get data from the CRIS database? Henk Visser explained that the European Commission has been under attack and more protection has been applied, thus limiting access. But he ensured that he has access to the CRIS database, and can get data from it and provide it to other interested parties. Mr. Visser further elaborated, “We access data on multi-beneficiary contracts, but it is a fact that there is a sort of gap and we cannot obtain ready-made and structured projects and data. We have to proceed in a pragmatic way and work through delegations. We were receiving different information, different formats from different delegations. I am not complaining. The table we have prepared is more comprehensive and will be submitted to the EC.”

Ms. Tanja Hafner Ademi, Executive Director of Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) (EUPC), raised the issue of the definition of civil society when it comes to thematic evaluation. Her concrete question concerned the level at which the European Commission assesses the impact of civil society work, with regards to its internal work and vis-à-vis the EU integration process. She added, “There is a dilemma on what civil society development means. How civil society dialogue has come about is important in assessing its role on the impact level. There is research and other documents that make suggestions on these issues; it just needs to be agreed upon.” Henk Visser provided the following explanation, “Another example in definition is when countries had difficulties in defining what a minority means. There is no official definition of civil society, and it varies from country to country. One example is religious institutions. It is possible to speak about the organisation of civil society and organised CSOs that represent the main bulk of the organised civil society. We have unclear definitions.” Ms Hafner Ademi replied, “In the programming you can use a working definition. From the beginning, there were different expectations from civil society, but we have a different understanding of civil society. In this respect, what does civil society developments entail?” Henk Visser replied, “CS facility is not equal to civil society development programmes. Civil Society Facility is about participatory democracy as an objective.” **Mr. Peter Theunisz**, Senior Evaluator, IBF and Thematic Evaluation of EU’s support to civil society in the Western Balkans and Turkey, joined the discussion on the issues of definitions. According to him, the issue is one of discrimination. “The perspective of the EU is that you are civil society and you are not at the same time. The rules are established and we can implement that rule, when the other part of the EU says you are all CS, this creates confusion. For example, faith-based organisations applying for funding will be eligible, but when it applies to a national delegation, it risks being rejected as a result of not being considered CSOs. The recommendation is to clarify this issue and present it more prominently in guidelines for protocols for proposals (as well as Web sites, TACSO brochures, etc.). The other perspective has a similar outcome, discrimination: CSO itself may consider itself being civil society or not. If you go to Turkey and ask faith-based organisations or trade unions, whether they consider themselves CSOs, they might say no. Here we have a clear issue that needs to be clarified. So, instead of having a definition of civil society in footnote, it

should be placed on page one.” **Mr. Erik Illes**, from DG Enlargement (seconded from SIDA) stated that the key is the right of citizens to organise, and that the accession process is key to participatory democracy, so the main objective is not accession, but democracy. “What about CSOs which are against the EU, members states could say how do you support those that are against EU? Regarding outcomes and impact – after a huge investment, what has been achieved? The European Commission has a lot to do in raising transparency and access to data. Compliance monitoring of contracts has been the focus of the European Commission, and not very much the results. In terms of impact, the targets that were set were unrealistic.”

The last comments of this session:

Mr. Pekka Tuominen, member of the European Disability Forum Executive Committee Treasurer (EUPC), “I belong to the International Disability Alliance, representing 60 million people with disabilities in the EU. My message is that you always have minorities inside, and you have to ensure that all people with physical disabilities are on board.”

Ms. Luisa De Amicis, Programme and Policy Manager at EUCLID Network (EUPC), “I agree on the relevance of the definition, but we should not only focus on the definition, as we get in the loop and never get out of it. The real question is what we want to achieve, such as social problems and other practical issues. Let’s start addressing the social issues more rather than focusing on definition.”

Mr. Henk Visser, DG Enlargement, “There is no definition of impact. Regarding definition, in some countries they want a limit on the organisations they want to work with. The definition shall be kept based on the purpose of the specific call. This might be discriminatory, but every definition is discriminatory somehow. How do we measure the impact if there are no ways to communicate? If it is a success, it is because of the member states, if there are difficulties, it is always due to the EC’s procedures.”

Ms. Karin Schulz, SIPU International, “How can we as TACSO monitor our activities and assess the outcome and impact level? How can we measure the indicators?”

Ms. Milica Ružicic, co-chair of the Federation of NGO Counsel and President of the Centre for Living Upright, TACSO Serbia LAG Representative, “I suggest that TACSO can host an event to provide information to all beneficiaries about the results and effects of the projects that were implemented by EU support. To see what kind of technical assistance TACSO provided for two years and what are the future plans. It is a chance to get acquainted about the work of EC in this field as well.”

Ms. Slavica Draskovic, Resident Advisor TACSO Bosnia and Herzegovina, “In order to monitor impact and changes, we think that logical frameworks should be development for each country of intervention. Based on our experience with IPA grantees, monitoring plans should be developed as well, in order for LAG members to be involved in the monitoring of our activities.”

Ms. Amra Seleskovic, Directress of Association Vesta, TACSO Bosnia and Herzegovina LAG Representatives, “In the last two years we have paid attention to the capacity building of CSOs, and now we have to monitor the activities and the changes at the policy level, which should be treated as impact. And this impact should be measurable. There are some projects and activities of CSOs in Bosnia, supported by TACSO, that have managed to influence the policy level, at least by providing recommendations. And it is important for TACSO to have this level of measurement as well.”

Mr. Goran Djurovic, Resident Advisor TACSO Montenegro, “It is almost impossible to talk about the impact. When we speak about capacity development, as TACSO we are dealing with less developed CSOs in our countries. Priorities in one country are not the same as in other countries. When we speak about impact, we have to see what the starting point is. During programming we have to consider the contextual element. The European Commission should prepare a list of priorities specific for each country, and not apply the same capacity building tools for all the countries. We have to put more attention on programming and utilise TACSO to better operate in that level.”

Ms. Tanja Hafner Ademi, BCSDN, “The European Commission is very good at investing and building very good experts in civil society for the development of the sector. What remains a challenge is how to translate the individual capacity built through TACSO trainers into sector capacity.”

Mr. Genci Pasko, Resident Advisor TACSO Albania, “How can we monitor results and impact? First, we identify baseline needs, and they can contribute to better monitoring and assessment of results.”

Panel 2:

Ms. Zelah Senior, CSO CB Expert TACSO Regional Office, facilitated this panel and hosted the following speakers (topics):

- Ms. Venera Hajrullahu (Kosovar Civil Society Foundation) and Ms. Visare Gorani (Swedish Embassy in Pristina) – National Donor Co-ordination
- Ms. Luisa De Amicis (EUCLID Network) – Financial Regulations

Ms. Venera Hajrullahu, Executive Director of Kosovo Civil Society Foundation, TACSO Kosovo LAG representative, stated that donor co-ordination is not a new phenomenon and that it diminishes the aid effectiveness. She reiterated the Paris Principles: ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing results, and mutual accountability. “Everything is already identified, and it is difficult to add to it, but implementation remains a challenge. We do not need to invent new approaches or principles, but need to get these principles implemented.” Ms. Hajrullahu also argued that a lot of money has been spent, while it is time to look at what results have been achieved and that more accountability should be provided. According to her, aid cannot be seen as charity, but rather as an investment. “The change we want is impact we need to achieve through this investment. It is time for lessons learned, in order to foster long-term sustainability

of the sector. Donor co-ordination efforts are constraint by politics, personal leadership and limitation of mechanisms.” Two examples from Kosovo were presented in this topic. The first is the aid management platform for Kosovo (not updated). **Ms. Visare Gorani**, Swedish Embassy in Pristina, presented the second example. According to Ms. Gorani, there is an overlap of donors and CSOs in the same field. “The government donor co-ordination mechanism was not very effective, so the Swedish Embassy proposed a mechanism of donor mechanism with the aim of supporting civil society more effectively. The CSO E-Database brings structured data about the funding according to the CSO, field of work, and other dimensions.” She also explained that SIDA is the chair of this platform and maintains the database by collecting the information from donors. Under this initiative, donor co-ordination meetings and discussions are organised, and different speakers are invited to deliver speeches.

Financial regulation is the rules through which the European Commission administers its grants for civil society. **Ms. Luisa De Amicis** explained EUCLID Network’s involvement with DG Communication and DG Budget, and publication of a policy briefing. “Better return on investment”, after which the network started discussions with the EU Parliament. “Recommendations are taken by the Parliament and will be voted by the council. The entire process was aiming at simplification, transparency, and effectiveness. The idea was to give CSOs the possibility to keep the surplus and reinvest it (non-profit rule). In addition, in-kind contribution to be recognised as eligible costs, lump sum and flat rates instead of detailed budget depending on the project, indirect costs for project grants to increase the 7% cap to 15% – 20%, VAT to be considered as eligible cost and other provisions were proposed.” She presented the following achievement of the Network’s work: increased threshold of small and very small grants (up to 60,000 EUR and 10,000 EUR), VAT recognised as eligible cost, setup a database of beneficiaries, allow surplus as reserves, increased contribution to core-costs (up to 10%). In the conference day, the EU Parliament voted in plenary regarding the proposal, and afterwards there were negotiations with the council. Ms. De Amicis considered this a window of opportunity and urged CSOs to influence the governments to promote each sector’s interests by changing the Financial Regulation. “Financial Regulation is not the only tool for the IPA recipient countries, there is also the Practical Guide (PRAG). Euclid Network recommends creating a working group, gathering experts and the most influential NGO networks, hosted by TACSO to change PRAG. The aim will be to simplify bureaucracy, increase effectiveness, ensure transparency and have better relationships with EU institutions.”

Ms. Ayça Haykır, Director of Civil Society Development Center, TACSO Turkey LAG Representative, stated that it is the perfect time to have such a study. In addition she explained that grants are made with service contracts and we have to announce to everyone that a grant is a grant. Ms. Haykır recommended that the EU delegations have more dialogue with the central financing contract units, as in each country the interpretation is different. In reflection, **Ms. Aida Bagic** said that sometimes it is reported that CSOs have more difficulties with national institutions than with the European Commission. **Mr. Genci Pasko** pointed out the paradox of hearing about efforts to simplify the financial procedures, while the new calls coming for IPA are even more complex and complicated. **Ms. Luisa De Amicis** added that for the necessary changes, we as a network need the people and the organisations to act jointly. **Ms. Tanja Hafner Ademi** considers it good news that the European Commission started revision of the Financial

Regulation, and brought into question the attitude of the EU institutions regarding the change of PRAG. On the issue of PRAG, Ms. De Amicis added that “the more we tell them we want to change PRAG, the more they will listen to us.” Changing Financial Regulation, according to her, was not at the top of the EU agenda. As CSOs really put in effort and pushed hard, the EU placed it on the agenda and, consequently, they got in touch with many officials, including Henk Visser, MEP’s and other European Commission officials.

Ms. Dubravka Velat, Program Director of Civic Initiatives, TACSO Serbia LAG Representative, asked whether this financial regulation reform is just about the foreign funders or if it also encompasses domestic donors. She complained about the Financial Regulation, and especially the cross-border co-operation, which according to her makes it a nightmare to coordinate and run a project, especially with regard to its financial part. **Ms. Venera Hajrullahu** and **Ms. Visare Gorani** explained that the reform concerns mainly the multi-lateral donors, but it is a good suggestion to involve the domestic/national donors in this process as well.

The final topic of discussion was focused on TACSO’s role in helping to resolve this issue. Ms. Luisa De Amicis explained that their idea is to have TACSO act as a facilitator vis-à-vis the European Commission, and act as a forum of discussion and exchange. “We have to have a clear idea among civil society of what we want to change, in order for policy-makers to have a clear picture of what policy changes need to be applied.” **Mr. Goran Djurovic** further contributed to the discussion, explaining that TACSO’s role is not to manage but rather support this process, because in their ToR for TACSO 2 it is stated that they have to tackle the development of CSOs at the national level, thus the capacities are not appropriate for this kind of campaign. “Yes, we can offer our expertise in liaising with local CSOs, but there are many important issues that we have to deal with, thus we have limited capacities and means.” In conclusion, **Ms. Aida Bagic** asked about the timeframe. **Ms. Luisa De Amicis** replied by saying that it will be implemented by the summer of 2012. She suggested creating a working group, by finding partners in the region, to try to change the financial provisions that will benefit these organisations. **Mr. Henk Visser** concluded by restating that the financial Unit’s task is to protect the financial interest of the European Union. “The EU institutions are inter-dependent and all of them responsible for the responsible spending of tax-payers’ money in a decentralised implementation system. One of the main successes of the CSF is that there will be one CSF for the neighbouring policy. Cross-Border Co-operation stems from the structural fund way of thinking, and countries have to be prepared to work on structural funds.”

Panel 3:

The following speakers/topics were presented:

- Mr. Ake Sahlin (SIPU International) – Presentation with TACSO Perspectives Combined with Group Reflections
- Mr. Erik Illes (DG Enlargement) – IPA CSF 2011-13 Main Implications for TACSO 2
- Ms. Tanja Hafner Ademi (Balkan Civil Society Development Network) – TACSO 2 Objectives in the Perspective of the EUPC and the BCSDN

In the beginning of his speech, **Mr. Ake Sahlin**, Project Director SIPU International, explained that the needs assessment produced four major concerns regarding civil society development needs: funding, internal capacity within the CSOs, image of civil society, and decision-making (participation). “TACSO 1 was done based on these concerns and was given roughly 6.5 million Euros. TACSO did kick-offs, thousands of training events with thousands of participants, a web page with thousands of visitors, newsletters, help services, etc. The strategy for TACSO 1 was simple: let’s make activities, trainings and events that could provide immediate outcomes for CSOs. The mid-term strategy was to establish TACSO in that process and to get recognised and accepted as a credible partner in the development process and this was accomplished.” The performance of TACSO was assessed through branding surveys, evaluation training programmes, follow-up help desk services, and feedback received from CSOs and beneficiaries. Mr. Sahlin further explained the priorities for the upcoming two years, considering “impact” as one of the major challenges, to prove that TACSO is contributing to the creation of impact, to a developed and well-functioning civil society. He appeared critical regarding the objective of TACSO to build capacity and assist CSOs in assuming their democratic role, which according to Mr. Sahlin, are yet to be accomplished, in the sense that, TACSO has offered capacity building, but he was not sure whether CSOs are already participating in the democratic processes. He argued that in TACSO 2 priority must be given to CSOs, which are keener to democratic processes. The regional dimension was again raised as a crucial issue, stating that TACSO is a regional project, but the challenge remains as there are no regional challenges/issues, but rather national ones. Mr. Sahlin’s view of TACSO is of a regional level tool of intervention. “The challenge of the regional office is to address regional level activities in a balanced way when it comes to articulating issues in regional level activities.” Risk taking is another important aspect of TACSO 2 work, as it is assessed that this instrument is moving from low risk to high risk. Mr Sahlin concluded, “There is a clear expectation to move from training to more complicated matters such as to try to influence legislation, strengthen national institution, change the policies, and influence funding opportunities. We have to accommodate these aspects when formulating the strategy for the upcoming years.”

Mr. Erik Illes began by recognising the important work done by TACSO, but emphasised that it is important to recognise also that this is a work in progress. He further added, “We aimed at having a three-year funding decision, although there are financial constraints which limit us to two years. If you decide for a three-year funding decision, there might be a gap between the planning of the programme and its implementation.” Considering this as a good start, Mr. Illes explained the actual structure and the three outcomes:

- Greater benefit to CS from national legal and financial frameworks and improved dialogue with state institutions.
- Greater commitment and capacity of CSO networks to give citizens a voice and to influence public sector reform through analysis, monitoring, advocacy, etc.,
- Increased access of grass-root civil initiatives to financial resources and/or contributions as well as expertise from established CSOs and CSO networks.

“One of the advantages of the multi-year financing is that we do not have to focus on funding but rather concentrate on implementation.”

Speaking about CSF 2011-2013 implications for TACSO, Mr. Illes classified as critical the role of TACSO in facilitating a programmatic approach to CSF implementation. According to him, it was difficult to identify what have been achieved through previous civil society facilities.

Regarding the outcomes, he mentioned in the beginning, “We need to establish a baseline and indicators against CSF objectives, assist in developing an M&E mechanism, and further the development of LAGs to become sustainable for regular stakeholder communication. It is important for TACSO to have a clear idea on what remains to be accomplished, as it will be closing by the summer of 2013. It has to work on the element of sustainability by strengthening the LAGs.” In addition, it was said that TACSO should focus on the following areas: assist in screening of networks; good practices; gaps and technical assistance to strengthen coalition building; assess existing examples of bridging the gap between CSOs and community initiatives; communication; and assist in increasing public knowledge of the role of the CS in a functioning democratic society.

The last speaker of the panel **Ms. Tanja Hafner Ademi** presented the Civicus Civil Society Index Global Report. The report screens 30 countries in the period 2008-2011, assessing 5 dimensions: civic engagement, level of organisation, values, impact and environment. The report was published in September 2011, and looks at the challenges of civil society on the global level. The following global findings of the report were put forward by Ms. Hafner Ademi:

- Changing the definition of CS (non-formal movements, new forms of participation and online activism),
- State-CS relations are limited and unsatisfactory,
- The sector is in a historical moment, facing either decline or renewal,
- Financial and human resource challenges continue,
- A gap between CSOs articulation and the internal practicing of values,
- Networking is a strength, but still insufficient,
- Greater impact in the social sphere rather than influencing policy,
- Public trust in civil society as an idea with low levels of involvement in formal civil society activities.

The Balkan specific findings of the report:

- Average development compared to the rest of the world,
- Civil society is in a developed/matured phase (transition from focus led by donors to that led by citizens),
- Balance between “imported” and “indigenous”,
- Only difference noticed between Slovenia and Croatia vs. the rest of the Balkans (esp. In terms of legal framework development or lack thereof)
- Unevenly developed sector (urban-rural, big-small, etc.),
- Internally, transparency and accountability mechanisms should be built,
- Underestimated potential by both the state and donors,
- EU integration incentive for enlarging civil society space, this has a down side in some cases (abuse of EU funds),
- Government and civil society relations are at the top of the agenda,
- Two avenues of engagement: policy and financing.

Ms. Hafner Ademi explained that the key challenges for civil society and the EU are the establishment of a structured dialogue between civil society in the Balkans and EU institutions; improved funding policies/procedures for civil society at EU and national levels; the promotion of alternative sources and models for supporting civil society; increasing opportunities for influencing EU and national policies and programmes for civil society; and common/regional framework on monitoring the EU and national policies on civil society. “The Enlargement package and IPA PF 2011-2013 to a great extent reflect the need of civil society development and civil dialogue. In the next period, close co-operation in all segments with local civil society stakeholders on the regional and national levels. The EC needs to use the knowledge, experience and capacity in equal partnership relationships (not just advisor or implementer) of local CSOs.”

Ms Ademi proposed three concrete steps for IPA CSF & TACSO:

1. TACSO
 - a. Needs to be localised in 2013, and for the pre-accession period,
 - b. The EC needs to support the functions with the perspective that the state is expected to provide the minimum environment and funding for accession,
 - c. TACSO’s natural role is to connect, relate and support both government and CSO activities,
 - d. Further implementation should be achieved through a call for proposal,
 - e. Modalities of functions should be approved by local stakeholders,
 - f. It should be implemented by clearly defined criteria.
2. Structures Dialogue European Commission – Civil Society
 - a. Consultation process framework and structure between civil society in the Balkans and EU institutions,
 - b. Feed into EC monitoring and programming,
 - c. National civil dialogue structures, capacity-building component for CSOs should be an essential part.
3. IPA CS Facility
 - a. Realistic and focused approach,
 - b. Current EU regulation does not allow for reaching out to grass-root organisations and to grant institutional support,
 - c. Key determinants of positive donor impact are: proportion of funding, the mechanisms, effective co-ordination, and conceptualisation and understanding of civil society by the donors.

Ms. Aida Bagic said that after hearing Ms. Hafner Ademi’s presentation, she sees that there are many other stakeholders that have a role in this process, as it is not only TACSO, but many efforts must be combined. Mr. Erik Illes suggested that M&E will require some more work, and that even though coalition building is something that TACSO is already doing, it needs to be strengthened. Ms. Babic also noted that the work plans and need assessments are already prepared and asked the EC to state any requirements so that they can plan and finish them in a timely manner.

Ms. Edis Agani, Task Manager – Social Development Team for the European Commission Liaison Office to Kosovo, TACSO Kosovo LAG Representative, sees M&E as a part of TACSO 1 and continuing to be part of TACSO 2, and suggests that discussion should be about the impact level assessment, as the day to day monitoring is being done by the national delegations. **Mr. Goran Djurovic** raised the dilemma of capacities to perform this task. According to him, the current ToR foresees guidance for monitoring EU funded projects, and his dilemma was concerning the process of monitoring the impact of EU funded projects through a short-term expert/consultant. **Mr. Erik Illes** replied by adding that the idea is not for TACSO to evaluate and monitor, but rather to sit down and work for the CSF main outcomes, by setting up a system and implementing specific activities. “It should not be the task of TACSO to monitor the specific projects.”

Mr. Kenan Hadzimusic, Liaison officer at the IMPACT European Centre for Cross-Sectoral Partnership in Brussels - European Citizen Action Service (EUPC), discussed the issue of reaching out to grass-root civil initiatives and their needs to have access to financial resources. “This is a hard task for big NGOs. And how can grass-roots civil initiatives manage and access these funds? And how will they be chosen?” **Ms. Luisa De Amicis** suggested focuses on the exchange of people who will go to other countries and share experiences. According to her, social innovation is one of the key elements and more focus should be put on citizens. Speaking of financial sustainability, she suggested including the private sector in the stakeholders’ cooperation. **Mr. Erik Illes** mentioned that there are a number of good examples to foster CSO networks and coalitions, and that those examples should be utilised. As a reaction to many issues that were discussed, **Ms. Tanja Hafner Ademi** reminded the participants that it is very important to bear in mind that TACSO means technical assistance for civil society and that this should be the primary task of TACSO. “When we talk about the next phase of TACSO, we have to bear in mind what the needs are when it comes to considering the role of LAG with multi-sector membership. If the idea is to have a structural dialogue between civil society and government then LAG would not be the most appropriate tool, but if the idea is to foster a multi-sector dialogue then LAG might function well.” **Mr. Ake Sahlin** added another element that he had not touched upon during his presentation, namely the importance of views and experiences outside of the region, which could bring value to the respective countries. He suggested increasing that contribution in order to have more chances for exchange.

Mr. Henk Visser, in the conclusion of the discussion, added the following remarks, “Monitoring is an inside job and an organisation can constantly monitor its project. You can say that you achieved the impact only if you have been constantly monitoring your project implementation. Monitoring of the use of EU money is the obligation of the contracting authority, and we cannot ask outsiders to perform this task. And we need TACSO to include this into their system so that we could ask assistance from them in obtaining the information for monitoring. Having a monitoring mechanism internally enables the organisation to have a qualitative annual report. We are not going to ask TACSO to do the job we have to do.”

Mr. Robert Nelson shared his view that CSF is a means to an end, not an instrument whereby CSOs are going to have a comfortable life. “The ultimate goal of all these is the accession of the countries into the EU, sooner or later. We spent lots of time trying to define what civil society

means in our programme, while the definition must vary from person to person, from nation to nation, and this will always be a difficult concept to define satisfactorily so that everybody will be happy.” He agreed with Ms. Hafner Ademi to get on with the job and stop trying to define or redefine the civil society, as in its core the civil society is there to help citizens live a better life. “I must emphasise that PRAG is a guide and it is supposed to help our work. When CSF started some years ago, apart from TACSO, we have focused on disciplines such as corruption and other issues. The idea was to encourage networking across the region.”

Conference Day Two – 26 October 2011, Pristina

TACSO day

Needs Assessments.

The second conference day was dedicated to needs assessments, exit strategies, financial support and work plans. Initially, TACSO CSO CB expert, **Ms. Jasenka Perovic**, CSO CB Expert TACSO Regional Office, presented needs assessments, general tendencies and main findings per October 2011 as compared to reporting in October 2009. According to Ms. Perovic, the general purpose of the report is to provide the basis for tailoring TACSO’s programme support to both civil society and government authorities in IPA countries.

The general findings of the Need Analysis Report:

- Legal framework
 - a. Legal framework in place, at least on paper, but needs further improvements,
 - b. Public benefit status still not fully regulated or not recognised at all,
 - c. Same issue as above where there are no legal provisions on volunteering,
 - d. Regarding tax issues CSOs are considered same as commercial enterprises,
 - e. Philanthropy limited to certain areas of activities.
- Government – CSO relations
 - a. Lack of legal institutions and legal framework,
 - b. In some countries government is the main donor but, in others, government funding is limited.
- Human and technical capacities
 - a. Challenges in engaging permanent professional staff and dependency mainly on volunteers,
 - b. Founder’s syndrome (overdependence on the founder, leader),
 - c. Gap between CSOs and their constituencies,
 - d. Strategic thinking and analytical capacities remain poorly developed.
- External relations
 - a. Definition of CSO is not clear,
 - b. Low public image,
 - c. Poor quality of networking,
 - d. CSOs are dependent on funding,
 - e. Low absorption capacities,

- f. Long-term financial planning is rare.

Major impacts over the past two years: effective election monitoring, promoting civic values, leaders of public debate, etc. Recommendations at the regional level: exchange visits for the CSOs, partnership events for CBC projects, regional dialogue between CSOs benefiting from TACSO, regional networking and partnership, exchange of information between CSOs and government, regional conferences, database of CSOs, improvement of legal regulatory framework for the CS sector, harmonisation of tax regulation with the NGO law, increase capacities in the EU funding process, capacity building to manage projects, capacity building for grass-root organisations, encouragement CSOs to undertake strategic planning, encouragement CSOs participation in decision-making, etc.

Exit Strategies.

The next speaker, **Ms. Sandra Bencic**, TACSO STE, spoke about the general models for country exit strategies and general recommendations for national and regional exit strategies. Her presentation included general considerations on the national and regional level and on country and regional based options.

Main options identified per country:

- For Albania, TACSO should continue as an independent national project by transforming the country office into a national NGO for provision of services to civil society,
- For Bosnia and Herzegovina, absorption of Component 1, 2 and 4 by national institutions and the transfer of Component 3 to national NGOs with adequate capacity for provision of capacity building services,
- For Croatia, absorption of Component 1 and 4 by existing national institutions; transfer of Component 3 to national NGOs with adequate capacity for provision of capacity building services; the potential establishment of an office for CSF, absorbing the help desk and assistance for P2P, partnership actions, transfer of good practices and liaison between the region and the EU,
- For Kosovo, establishment of independent agency for co-operation with the CSO sector,
- For Macedonia², absorption of Component 1, 2 and 4 by national institutions and transfer of Component 3 to national NGOs with adequate capacity for provision of capacity building services,
- For Montenegro, all existing and future functions and activities of TACSO should be transferred to one or several national CSOs,
- For Serbia, continuation as a EU project that works in close co-operation with the Office for Co-operation with Civil Society,
- For Turkey, continuation of TACSO as an independent national project with external funding.

Regional component exit options: a) transfer of TACSO regional functions to regional level organisations, b) continuation of TACSO as a regional technical assistance project dedicated to

² Former Yugoslav Republic of

the support regional networks, and c) integration of the TACSO regional component with CSF. The specific added value of TACSO is: a) development of the civil society sector in the context of EU integration, b) regional dimension, and c) national offices and LAGs.

Conclusion: three sustainability strategy goals:

- Improving dialogue between CSOs, improving financial sustainability, sustainability of the capacity development of CSOs. TACSO output, which should be sustained: communication mechanisms, LAGs, regional and national offices, and HR.
- Institutional sustainability of LAGs. Two options for LAGs coming from Serbia: continuing as a local advisory body, transformation to an advisory body, transformation to a donor co-ordination unit, transformation to an advisory body to the office of government. Recommendations for LAG sustainability: representation of different CS sectors, selection of LAG members through transparent and open procedure, definition of the mandate of LAG members in terms of duration.
- Financial sustainability options: Continuation of the financing of TACSO through CSF, national funds for continuation of TACSO activities, integration of TACSO functions and activities into calls for proposals in national and MB IPA programmes, Securing funds through donor co-ordination.

TACSO beyond 2013.

The presentation on TACSO beyond 2013 was delivered by **Mr. Henk Visser**. Mr. Visser considers TACSO a pilot, a test, a way the European Commission wants to be sure that CSOs are able to deliver capacity building in this form. He further explained that the commission's goal is to reach out to local, small and grass-root organisations in order to build their capacities through consolidated CSOs. "I don't think that we have reached that. TACSO should do local donor co-ordination, help CSOs conduct daily M&E, promote the impact of civil society work, help networking of CSOs, maintain dialogue with EU delegations, set-up a complex organisation structure, a LAG group of maximum 10 (sectoral representatives), etc. The next two years is the end of piloting and we have to see what is next." He thinks that it is important to ensure that there is still a technical assistance facility in place helping civil society, and this could be done through focusing on needs assessment during the upcoming two years, in a regular manner. "TACSO will continue to act as an information desk for CSOs and this is very important. We need to communicate the results and get civil society to present themselves, who they are and what they are doing, mapping of who can do what, building coalitions among CSOs, helping CSO – government dialogue, links to the private sector and promote corporate social responsibility." It was said that in terms of funding after 2013, all options are open to consideration, while in concrete terms Mr. Visser proposed a model of a joint budget with contributions from government, CSOs and EU delegations. This joint budget is suggested to help sustain TACSO financially. The regional office will be there to oversee regional networking, whereas national offices will remain to sustain their activities.

LAG/ EUPC Recommendations

The last conference activity was group discussions to prepare recommendations for TACSO 2 based on the needs analysis and draft work plans. After the group discussions, Ms. Aleksandra Gregorovic, Ms. Slavica Draskovic, Ms. Hilal Yildirim, Ms. Hamijete Dedolli, and Mr. Kenan Hadzmusic, presented concrete recommendations from these discussions.

Ms. Aleksandra Gligorovic, National Voluntary Service Coordinator/Member of Association for Democratic prosperity – Zid, TACSO Montenegro LAG Representative, on behalf of the group:

- Related to needs assessment, we think that TACSO should get in direct contact with CSOs, to see what their needs are.
- From the position of LAG, TACSO should not continue providing trainings only, but should also support other CSOs which are working on advocacy and watchdog through more advanced trainings, and not only basic ones.
- TACSO should focus only on a few issues and not many activities, namely provide a few support measures to CSOs.
- The visibility of TACSO should be increased on the national and regional level using different media tools, as well as non-profit media.
- It will be interesting to have TACSO 3, but we think that what Mr. Henk Visser proposed should be either fully or partially funded by the European Commission, because there are no national donors interested in supporting this kind of structure that will continue providing technical assistance to civil society.
- A regional approach is not very understandable when it puts an emphasis on a regional office and not on national offices, as we do not see how this regional office could act properly in addressing the civil society challenges of particular countries.

Ms. Slavica Draskovic on behalf of the group:

- In terms of needs analysis, a distinction must be made between what has been done so far and what remains for the future,
- Communication between the EU delegation and TACSO team is crucial and should be strengthened in the future,
- TACSO could work much more with public authorities in each country,
- No official evidence exists in the region on how many people work in civil society, so we need structured data and information. This could be done through mapping,
- The needs analysis lacks a clear structure of financing, operational funds and grants for small and medium CSOs,
- In terms of legacy, LAG is an option to facilitate the exit strategy and strengthen the offices for civil society at the governmental level,
- Regarding regional perspective, TACSO should strengthen regional dimension through regional projects, such as cross-border co-operation,
- It is also important to strengthen the work of CSOs at the local level and work with municipal authorities,
- Visibility, results and impact at the regional level are important elements of TACSO's work.

Ms. Ilksen Hilal Yıldır, EU Affairs Expert – Coordinator Directorate for Project Implementation for the Republic of Turkey Ministry of EU Affairs, TACSO Turkey LAG Representative, on behalf of the group:

- Further analysis should be performed for needs analysis and work plans, as well as exit strategies,
- We had concerns on the national level, such as Albania, to see whether TACSO could act as a means of re-granting to CSOs, as Albania lacks this capacity. At the same time this experience could be shared regionally,
- We need to enhance the capacities of national structures working with technical assistance and reach out to local and grass-root organisations,
- There is no clear perspective on the way financing should continue after 2013, as the region needs further technical assistance to civil society.

Ms. Hamijete Dedolli, Executive Director for PVPT, TACSO Kosovo LAG Representative, on behalf of the group:

- Participants from Kosovo, Croatia and Montenegro think that in order to get sustainable services for CSOs we need governmental support, considering the fact that international donors are leaving every day,
- On the other hand Turkey thinks that CSOs, in order to remain independent, should not receive governmental support.
- It is good to have in place mechanisms such as councils composed of the representatives of civil society and government, in order to discuss the important issues for the sector, but the weak point of this mechanism is that communication between civil society members is loosened,
- There is a need for more advocacy of CSOs towards government regarding governmental funding,
- Related to exit strategy, we agree with the continuation of the TACSO option, but at the same time we believe in the need to build national capacities of civil societies, who can take over the role of providing technical assistance.

Mr. Kenan Hadzimusic on behalf of the group and the Programme Committee:

- We need to create foundation type structures, co-financed by the European Commission and the national governments as a means to work for sustainability and the possibility of re-granting and reinvesting (the revolving fund),
- Compatibility with EU financial rules could be a problem, but maybe there is some room to propose a mechanism for this,
- We could co-operate with foundations who could fund the innovative part of the mechanism in order to avoid problem with EU rules,
- The governments might have a lack of political will to finance such structures, as they have a role to play and obligations to provide enabling environments for the work of CSOs,
- The best way to learn is by doing a project. It is important to have trainings and manuals, but the best way to learn things is by running projects, which can bring about societal changes,

- It is important that TACSO takes on more policy issues, as a means for CSOs to promote policy changes. LAG in Kosovo was very much involved in policy issues, such as the Consultations Manual, and this is an example to be followed,
- The regional level is important for information exchange, sharing of success stories, as well as for tapping into successful existing initiatives rather than starting new structures,
- It is important to develop the capacity of the civil society sector, and also the sub-sector level. We need to work more to translate individual trainings into development of sectors or sub-sectors,
- It is important to follow-up trainings with practical work (coaching, visits, ToT, etc.),
- Social innovation – we need to focus on projects, which bring about the change and are innovative, thus avoiding in-box thinking and doing. This will give us flexibility in dealing with contextual specificities and allow us to become more effective in achieving change and impact.
- Coaching of small organisation could be performed sectoraly. Big NGOs do not have time to perform coaching for smaller ones, but they will find time if there is funding for this coaching and there are working models in the EU and elsewhere.

General Conference Comments

Ms. Ardita Metaj-Dika, Resident Advisor TACSO Kosovo, clarified that the Manual for Consultations was prepared by the Kosovar Civil Society Foundation, a Kosovo LAG member, and mentioned that, in Kosovo, there are conditions and needs that make TACSO deal with policy issues. **Ms. Venera Hajrullahu** asked for the roadmap for the exit strategy. **Ms. Sandra Bencic** replied, “First draft of the Exit Strategy Report was presented at the Ohrid meeting, and the feedback from that meeting was incorporated. The LAG minutes’ feedback will be further incorporated in the report. The Exit Strategy Roadmap foresees conducting national consultation and preparation of the national exit strategy reports with LAG members, interviews with government officials supporting civil society, meetings with EU delegations and the EU Information Centres and screening and assessment of capacities of CSOs and their networks. This could be done either through screening and mapping or through open calls.” Regarding the consultation process for an exit strategy at the regional level, the following steps are foreseen: joint LAG meetings, consultation with the European Commission and representatives of CSF, meetings with programming authorities for national and MB IPA, meetings and consultations with other donors. It was said that by July 2012 this strategy could be implemented.

Ms. Venera Hajrullahu also raised the issue of the financial perspective of the European Commission for TACSO. **Mr. Robert Nelson** provided the answer: “From 2014 to 2020 there is going to be a new financial instrument, but I can’t tell you much about it as it is still in the initial phase of discussion. In the next three years we don’t know who is going to become an EU member, or be promoted into candidacy. And this will influence the contents of the new programme. CS constitutes an important element of IPA, and there is no reason to believe that it will stop providing financial support to the sector. You have today endorsed the fact that TACSO is doing a great job, and that it needs to continue operating for the upcoming two years. There is funding for technical assistance until 2015.” On this issue, **Mr. Erik Illes** also added that, under the financing decision, 6 million EUR are set-aside for 2012 IPA co-operation for technical

assistance. “We will try to be as flexible as we can, but we will need to see financing after the TACSO 2 period.”

Ms. Aida Bagic asked if there is a plan for which partnership action calls will be issued in upcoming two years? **Mr. Robert Nelson** explained that there will be a large sum for partnership actions, but it will be done in a different way, and that the European Commission is currently discussing the modalities. **Mr. Erik Illes** added on that issue: “We plan to announce the call for these types of grants for networks to receive seed funds to develop their programmes, and they will be four year programmes. We need to contract these framework partnership agreements in the forthcoming period.”

The closing speech of the conference was made by **Mr. Ake Sahlin**, TACSO project director, “Yesterday we focused on CSF and today we focused on TACSO 2, and both days provided lots of information and insight which need to be accommodated in the work plans for the TACSO 2. We need to do our best to meet these expectations and proposals that have been put forward during these two days. I thank all the LAG members, as without them it would be impossible to do what we are doing. ECLLO and our friends from Brussels, big thank you for your contribution, flexibility and commitment. Resource persons and guests, thank you for your contributions and presentations. TACSO team, thank you very much for meeting all of our requirements and for your hard work. The organisers of the meeting, the regional office and the Kosovo team, made this happen and we need a big applause for them.”