

# TRIALOG Country Paper SERBIA

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## TRIALOG

TRIALOG is a project to strengthen civil society organisations (CSOs) in the enlarged EU for active engagement in global development.



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### Acronyms:

**CSO** – Civil Society Organisation

**DACU** – Department for Planning, Programming, Monitoring and Reporting on EU Funds and Development Assistance, former Development and Aid Co-ordination Unit

**EC** – European Commission

**EU** – European Union

**GDP** – Gross domestic product

**IPA** – Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

**MDGs** – Millennium Development Goals

**MFA** – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**NAD** – National Priorities for International Assistance

**ODA** – Official Development Assistance

**OECD DAC** – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee

**SAA** – Stabilisation and Association Agreement

**SBRA** – Serbian Business Registry Agency

**SECO** – Sector Civil Society Organisations

**SEIO** – Serbian European Integration Office

**SWG** – Sector Working Group

## Foreword

This study was undertaken by TRIALOG in the context of looking at the future enlargement of the European Union (EU). Serbia applied to become an EU member in 2009 and since January 2014 the EU accession negotiations with Serbia have been ongoing. As part of the accession process, the development cooperation and humanitarian aid provided by Serbia will be negotiated between Serbia and the European Union. Serbia will have to adopt the EU *acquis* concerning development cooperation and humanitarian aid, set up national structures and legislation and become a donor.

TRIALOG has worked with civil society organisations active and interested in development cooperation in the accession countries of the EU and new member states since 2000. Accession negotiations have not always taken seriously enough the issue of preparing a new EU member state to make the transition from being a recipient of aid to becoming a donor as Serbia is expected to make in the coming years. Development cooperation and humanitarian aid cannot be treated simply as a box ticking exercises at the end of the accession negotiations. Different stakeholders from state officials and politicians to civil society and the general public have to be engaged in this process in order to achieve legitimacy and support for the country's new role as a donor and to prepare the country to undertake this new role effectively.

In this context it is encouraging that the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Mr. Johannes Hahn stressed during his hearing before the European Parliament that he realises “the necessity to prepare new members of the EU thoroughly for their future responsibilities” and the importance of “ensuring that all criteria is met”. As recent declarations indicate that the EU will not admit any new members in the coming five years, TRIALOG considers this commitment to the quality of the reforms process more important than ever. Civil society organisations in Serbia, as well as in other EU candidate countries, must become fully engaged in the formation of the countries' donor systems and strategies and capacity building opportunities have to accompany this process.

This TRIALOG Study on Serbia is part of a series of studies made on the EU candidate countries in order to assess the state of play in the negotiation process and map the civil society situation in the country.

I hope you find our study interesting and enriching!

**Rebecca Steel-Jasińska,**  
**TRIALOG Project Manager**

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## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to provide an overview of Serbian civil society involvement in development cooperation, as well as development education and awareness raising. As Serbia started the European Union (EU) accession negotiations in January 2014, it is expected to align its legislation with the EU body of laws, also called the *acquis communautaire*. Chapter 30 of the EU *acquis* deals with external relations and includes legislation with regards to the provision of development and humanitarian aid to developing countries. During the EU accession process, Serbia will also go from being a recipient of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to becoming a donor country.

The paper also assesses the extent to which steps have been taken by the government of Serbia to set up an institutional and policy framework for the provision of development assistance to developing countries. At the same time, the involvement of civil society in international cooperation is presented. Finally, the most active and relevant civil society actors working in this domain are mapped in the paper.

The desktop research included the review of the main national strategy and policy documents, European Commission progress reports, as well as reports prepared by international and local civil society organisations. Interviews with key resource people working in civil society organisations in Serbia, as well as representatives of the Serbian government were also conducted. The paper was prepared from August to October 2014.

The paper is structured in six parts: first, an introduction is provided; second, the country profile of Serbia is presented; third, the relations between Serbia and the EU are explained; fourth, the development cooperation sector in Serbia is analysed; fifth, the Serbian civil society and its role in development cooperation is presented; sixth, a list of some of the main civil society actors and networks in Serbia is included.

## 2. Country profile

### 2.1. Recent history

Serbia – officially, Republika Srbija – is located in South-eastern Europe in the region known as the Western Balkans. It used to be one of the six republics that make up the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, along with Croatia, Bosnia and

Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Slovenia. Serbia became a stand-alone sovereign state in 2006 after Montenegro declared its independence thus marking the final step in the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation. The other republics had seceded throughout the 1990s, with Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia going through devastating armed conflicts – the so-called Yugoslav wars. During 1998 and 1999, Serbia was engaged in civil war with its autonomous province, Kosovo<sup>1</sup>, situated in the southern part of the country and with a predominant ethnic Albanian population. In 2008 Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence which Serbia has not recognised<sup>2</sup>.

As it emerged from the 1990s, Serbia entered a phase of post-conflict reconstruction and started its transition to democracy and a market economy. In doing so it struggled with the heritage of war – its displaced population, a devastated economy and infrastructure, the need to balance reconciliation and justice for war crimes – while, at the same time, trying to shrug off its communist past and looking ahead towards European Union (EU) membership.

### 2.2. Current situation

Serbia has a population of 7.2 million with less than 13% of its citizens identifying as belonging to national minorities<sup>3</sup>. Hungarians in the autonomous province of Vojvodina, situated in the northern part of the country, are the largest national minority, representing 3.5% of the population, followed by Roma (2%) and Bosniaks (2%)<sup>4</sup>. The constitution guarantees the rights of minorities however more measures need to be taken to ensure the rights of Roma are respected<sup>5</sup>. Of particular concern is Serbia's declining population, of

<sup>1</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

<sup>2</sup> According to a 2014 Freedom House report, at the end of 2013, 105 countries had recognised Kosovo's statehood. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World – Kosovo*, 2014, available at: [http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/kosovo-0#.VDZRHRY\\_ntQ](http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/kosovo-0#.VDZRHRY_ntQ)

<sup>3</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI – Serbia Country Report*, 2014, available at: [http://www.bti-project.de/uploads/tx\\_itao\\_download/BTI\\_2014\\_Serbia.pdf](http://www.bti-project.de/uploads/tx_itao_download/BTI_2014_Serbia.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* Other minorities include Croats, Slovaks, Romanians, Albanians, Montenegrins, Bulgarians, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Council of Europe: Committee of Ministers, *Comments by the Government of Serbia on the third opinion of the Advisory Committee on the implementation of the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities by Serbia*, 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53fd96a44.html>

which half lives in rural areas. Serbia is still struggling to reintegrate its population displaced during the 1990s' wars, with housing remaining an outstanding issue for which initiatives have been created at the regional level<sup>6</sup>.



Serbia is an upper middle income economy, with an estimated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of EUR 32.96 billion in 2013<sup>7</sup>. Serbia ranked 77<sup>th</sup> out of 187 in the 2013 Human Development Index<sup>8</sup> and was on the official 2012-2013 OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list of Official Development Assistance recipients<sup>9</sup>. Serbia's economy, composed of services (71% of GDP), industry (19%) and agriculture (10%), has experienced two recessions since 2008 with a fragile recovery in 2013<sup>10</sup>. Serbia ranks 94<sup>th</sup> out of

144 countries in the latest Global Competitiveness Report, which reflects the existence of state-controlled structures and a slow process of privatisation<sup>11</sup>. The informal economy is a further obstacle to competition. The unemployment rate reached nearly 21% in 2014, while youth unemployment was at 49% in 2013, according to the Serbian Statistical Office<sup>12</sup>. Overall, the education system does not correspond to labour market needs. An estimated 9% of Serbian people were living below the poverty line in 2013<sup>13</sup>. Nearly 30% of Roma are estimated to be living in absolute poverty, making them one of the poorest and most disadvantaged groups in Serbia<sup>14</sup>.

Serbia is a parliamentary democracy with deputies elected for four years in the unicameral, 250-seat National Assembly. The prime minister is elected by the assembly, while the president is elected by direct vote for up to two five-year terms. Recent elections were largely considered free and fair by international observers. Serbia's constitutional and legislative framework corresponds generally to European standards, however, capacity for parliamentary oversight and governmental policy planning and implementation needs to be reinforced<sup>15</sup>. Serbia is organised in central, provincial and local self-governments, and, while public administration is well developed at central level, local governments have limited capacity. Corruption is considered to be widespread in Serbia and the rule of law sector is lacking in independence and efficiency<sup>16</sup>. Dealing with organised crime, including trafficking in human beings, is also a challenge despite regional initiatives<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council/Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Submission from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) for consideration by the EU Directorate General for Enlargement : Serbia*, 2014, available at:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/53c38e2f4.htm>

<sup>7</sup> The World Bank, available at:

<http://data.worldbank.org/country/serbia>, Calculated in EUR at current exchange rate.

<sup>8</sup> UNDP, Human Development Reports, available at:

<http://hdr.undp.org/en>

<sup>9</sup> The official list of ODA recipient countries of the OECD DAC is available at:

<http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/DAC%20List%20used%20for%202012%20and%202013%20flows.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, *Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II) – Indicative Strategy Paper for Serbia (2014-2020)*, 2014, available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2014/20140919-csp-serbia.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20140919-csp-serbia.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> World Economic Forum, *Competitiveness Rankings*, available at: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2014-2015/rankings/>

<sup>12</sup> UNDP Serbia, available at:

<http://www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/en/home/countryinfo/>

<sup>13</sup> CIA, *The World Factbook – Serbia*, available at:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ri.html>

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, *Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II) – Indicative Strategy Paper for Serbia (2014-2020)*, 2014

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> United States Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report - Serbia*, 2014, available at:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/53aab9ad14.html>



## 3. Serbia and the European Union

### 3.1. Serbia-EU relations background

Serbia – together with five other Western Balkans countries – was identified as a potential candidate for European Union (EU) membership during the Thessaloniki European Summit in 2003. In 2005, the negotiations were launched for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SSA), but they were called off one year later due to a lack of improvement in Serbia's co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The SAA was signed in 2008, the same year in which a European partnership for Serbia was adopted, setting out priorities for the country's EU membership application. In 2009 Serbia formally applied to become an EU member state.

Serbia was granted candidate country status in 2012. Following Serbia's landmark agreement signed with Kosovo on 19 April 2013, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations in June 2013. In September, the European Commission (EC) started the screening process – the analytical examination of Serbian laws for harmonisation with the EU legislation or the *acquis communautaire*. At the same time the Stabilisation and Association Agreement entered into force. The Council of the European Union adopted the framework for negotiations in December the same year, and the first intergovernmental conference with Serbia took place in January 2014, representing the formal start of the accession negotiations.

### 3.2. Serbia's current accession process

In the process of EU accession, Serbia's key priorities are the reforms related to the rule of law and fundamental rights. This is in line with the new EC approach to EU accession negotiations, according to which judicial reform and the fight against organised crime and corruption will need to be tackled as priority. This will have to be coupled with economic reforms, including in the areas of economic governance and competitiveness. However, the main stakes in Serbia's advancement on the road to EU membership will be represented by a continued progress in the normalisation of relations with Kosovo, including the implementation of agreements reached so far.

Efforts have been undertaken by the Serbian government to further the reform process. The

*National Plan for the Adoption of the Acquis*, adopted in 2013, was revised in August 2014 with implementation foreseen by 2018. It defines measures for the harmonisation of Serbian and EU legislation and human resources required for implementation. Financial resources have yet to be allocated to the measures identified in the plan. Serbia's previous *National Programme of Integration* for 2008-2012 was implemented at a level of 88% – out of 1172 planned measures, 1030 were adopted – raising expectations in the current phase of the accession process<sup>18</sup>.

Serbia's national programmes and strategies have been adopted in the area of economic policy, agriculture and rural development, while programmes for employment and social reform, as well as competitiveness and growth are in preparation. The programming document *National Priorities for International Assistance in the Republic of Serbia 2014-2017 with projections until 2020*, adopted in 2013, aims to support reforms needed to meet the EU accession criteria by aligning international assistance with national priorities.

A Coordination Body, headed by the Prime Minister, has been established to coordinate the work of ministries and government bodies related to EU accession. The Coordination Body is supported by an expert group and 35 expert sub-groups corresponding to the chapters of the EU *acquis*. The Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO) was established in 2004 as a government service to accompany the process of the country's accession to the European Union, including participation in and monitoring of accession negotiations, harmonisation of legislation, and public information<sup>19</sup>. Since 2010 SEIO has also been responsible for coordinating, programming and monitoring the use of international assistance received by Serbia.

Serbia is currently half way through the screening process – the review of Serbian legislation and the assessment of the extent to which it has been aligned with the body of EU laws i.e. the *acquis communautaire* which is structured around 35 chapters. Screening is a pre-requisite for EU accession negotiations and so far it has been launched for 18

<sup>18</sup> Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), *National Priorities for International Assistance (NAD) 2014-2017 with projections until 2020*, 2014, available at:

<http://www.evropa.gov.rs/Documents/Home/DACU/12/74/NAD%202014->

[2017%20with%20projections%20until%202020%20\(english\).pdf](http://www.evropa.gov.rs/Documents/Home/DACU/12/74/NAD%202014-2017%20with%20projections%20until%202020%20(english).pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), available at:

<http://www.seio.gov.rs/office/about-us.58.html>

chapters or policy areas in Serbia<sup>20</sup>. Based on the screening reports issued by the EC, the Serbian government is expected to prepare action plans for implementing the recommendations in each of the chapters, which will then be opened for negotiations. According to Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, Serbia's current priorities include Chapter 32 regarding financial control, Chapters 23 and 24 on justice, fundamental rights and security, as well as Chapter 11 on agriculture and rural development<sup>21</sup>.

During a visit to Belgrade on 29 June, EC outgoing President Jose Manuel Barroso assessed that Serbia's accession talks so far "are going very smoothly", while pointing out that Serbia had many more reforms to carry out<sup>22</sup>. While no chapters have yet been opened for negotiations, according to the Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, Michael Davenport, it would be realistic to expect the opening of the first chapters i.e. Chapters 23 and 24 in the first half of 2015, while the Serbian government would like to already open Chapter 32 by the end of this year<sup>23</sup>. The EC has foreseen that the screening process for Serbia will last until June 2015 however this will not prevent the opening of chapters that are ready for negotiations.

### 3.3. Progress of negotiations on development policy and humanitarian aid

Screening for Chapter 30 on external relations which includes notably trade, as well as development policy and humanitarian aid is ongoing. The explanatory screening meeting during which the EC presented the EU legislation in the area of external relations to a Serbian delegation led by the State Secretary in the Ministry of Trade took place in July 2014<sup>24</sup>. In particular, it was emphasised that Serbia needed to conclude the process of accession to the World Trade

Organisation as a precondition for EU membership<sup>25</sup>. The bilateral screening meeting took place on 9 October 2014, during which the level of alignment of Serbia's legislation in the areas of trade, as well as development policy and humanitarian aid was assessed<sup>26</sup>.

Following the bilateral screening, the European Commission will prepare a screening report for Chapter 30, including recommendations for the Serbian government regarding the steps to be taken before negotiations are opened. The government will most likely be required to prepare an action plan for the implementation of EC recommendations including in the area of development policy and humanitarian aid. Serbia's objective is to finalise the alignment with EU legislation by the end of 2018<sup>27</sup>, and it is expected that accession negotiations will be finalised with the closing of Chapters 23 and 24, as well as Chapter 35. While no detailed timeline is available, it seems likely that legislation regarding development policy and humanitarian aid will be prepared and adopted later in the negotiations process, given the EU emphasis on Chapters 23, 24, and 35, as well as other national priorities and experience from previous EU enlargements.

<sup>20</sup> EurActiv, *Serbia Halfway Through Screening, Hopes for Opening of First Chapter*, 2014, available at:

<http://www.euractiv.rs/english/7462-serbia-halfway-through-screening-hopes-for-opening-of-first-chapter>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union, Brussels, available at: <http://www.eu-brussels.mfa.gov.rs/newstext.php?subaction=showfull&id=1404480501&ucat=109&template=Headlines&>. The Serbian delegation also included representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Serbian Export Credit and Insurance Agency, and Serbian European Integration Office.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union, Brussels, available at: [http://www.eu-brussels.mfa.gov.rs/newstext.php?subaction=showfull&id=1413211087&ucat=109&template=Headlines&#disqus\\_thread](http://www.eu-brussels.mfa.gov.rs/newstext.php?subaction=showfull&id=1413211087&ucat=109&template=Headlines&#disqus_thread)

<sup>27</sup> Republic of Serbia Government, *Intergovernmental Conference on the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union – The Opening Statement of the Republic of Serbia*, 2014, available at: [http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/pristupni\\_pregovori/the\\_opening\\_statement\\_of\\_the\\_republic\\_of\\_serbia.pdf](http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/pristupni_pregovori/the_opening_statement_of_the_republic_of_serbia.pdf)



## 4. Development cooperation of Serbia

### 4.1. Serbia as a recipient of Official Development Assistance

#### 4.1.1. Overview of international assistance to Serbia

*Persona non grata* due to its role in the Yugoslav wars, Serbia was virtually isolated by the international community during most of the 1990s<sup>28</sup>. With the removal of Slobodan Milošević and the change in political leadership which marked the beginning of its transition to democracy, Serbia started receiving extensive international assistance at the end of 2000. By 2002, donor support consisted mainly of humanitarian assistance, as well as emergency reconstruction of infrastructure. From 2003 onwards, it moved gradually towards the provision of development assistance to support structural reforms and to build institutional capacities in support of Serbia's incipient European integration process, as prompted by the Thessaloniki European Summit.

Over the period 2001-2012 Serbia received an estimated EUR 8.9 billion in international assistance, with an average disbursement rate of EUR 800 million per year<sup>29</sup>. Assistance, however, varied greatly from year to year (Chart 1) due to different factors, notably national political instability, insufficient administrative and absorption capacities, negative global economic trends and unpredictable humanitarian crises. There was a sharp increase in development assistance after 2008, translated into major infrastructure loans from international financing institutions, as well as budget support and assistance for public finance management through EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) grants. A large increase in assistance in 2010 was the consequence of Serbia's increased administrative capacities and improved procedures, particularly in

relation to inter-ministerial coordination<sup>30</sup>.

Donors have gradually started phasing out their assistance to Serbia. It is expected that over the 2014-2017 period the levels of bilateral assistance will decrease and that the predominant source of international grant assistance will be the EU under IPA-2 (national IPA, Multi-Beneficiary IPA, Cross Border Cooperation and Transnational IPA programmes). Based on partially available data from donors, the estimated allocation of international assistance for this period is approximately 1.1 billion EUR i.e. EUR 275 million per year (as compared to EUR 800 million over the period 2001-2012)<sup>31</sup>. A recent evaluation of the performance of international assistance to Serbia over the period 2007-2011, found that the assistance had limited impact and sustainability, despite being responsive and relevant to Serbia's needs and consistent with national priorities<sup>32</sup>.

#### 4.1.2. Institutional arrangements for aid coordination

More than 30 bilateral and multilateral donors have supported Serbia over the past years, among which the EU, USAID, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Norway have been the most active. Additionally, the international financing institutions – the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), and the World Bank – have provided loans for the development of the Serbian economy.

As in many recipient countries, in the early stages of development assistance, coordination in Serbia has been mostly donor driven. Still, as early as 2000, the Development and Aid Co-ordination Unit (DACU) was established. In 2005, Serbia signed the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and subsequently adopted an Aid Effectiveness Agenda. From 2010 onwards, when DACU was transferred to the Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), efforts for the improvement of aid and donor coordination were led by SEIO. These improvements included the creation of Sector Working Groups (SWGs), which ensure the consultation and coordination of the various national institutions and donor representatives for the

<sup>28</sup> Serbia underwent economic and trade sanctions, diplomatic isolation and military intervention. For more details see: ISN-ETH Zurich, *Successful Sanctions – Serbia and Montenegro, 1992-1995*, 2012, available at: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Special-Feature/Detail/?lng=en&id=154572&tabid=1453376834&contextid774=154572&contextid775=154574>

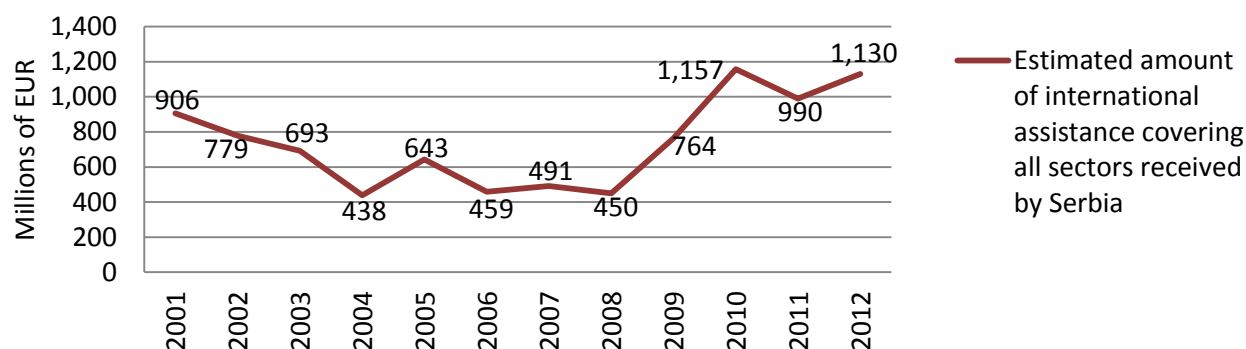
<sup>29</sup> Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), *National Priorities for International Assistance (NAD) 2014-2017 with projections until 2020*, 2014

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), *National Priorities for International Assistance (NAD) 2014-2017 with projections until 2020*, 2014

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Chart 1 Estimated amount of total international assistance (EUR) received by Serbia (2001-2012).



**Source:** Information System for Coordination of the Development Assistance to the Republic of Serbia (ISDACON IS), available at: [www.evropa.gov.rs](http://www.evropa.gov.rs), quoted in Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), *National Priorities for International Assistance (NAD) 2014-2017 with projections until 2020*, 2014.

programming and monitoring of international assistance. SWGs correspond to policy areas which are important for Serbia's preparation for EU accession and its socio-economic development.

A permanent consultation process with representatives of civil society was established in 2011 in the framework of the SWGs. Sector Civil Society Organisations (SECOs) are composed of consortia of three CSOs which are particularly active in the work of a given sector. CSOs are selected based on public invitation and one in each group acts as *rappporteur* for the whole group. SECOs act as representatives of the wider community of both national and international CSOs by having created informal networks of CSOs around each policy sector. SECOs regularly participate in SWG meetings during the programming and monitoring phases of the international assistance programme cycle.

The SWGs are coordinating the preparation of multi-annual National Priorities for International Assistance (NAD) planning documents. The mechanisms for aid coordination put in place i.e. the SWGs and the use of NAD have made possible a gradual move to a sector approach in the management of international assistance to Serbia since 2011. This approach also supports Serbia's EU accession process, however, it is somewhat weakened by the existence of too many overlapping strategies in each sector and their lack of clear link with the national budgetary process<sup>33</sup>.

Efforts have been undertaken to analyse Serbia's

experience as a recipient of international assistance, notably through the use of the ISDACON database managed by SEIO<sup>34</sup>. Different publications such as *Ten years of development assistance to the Republic of Serbia*<sup>35</sup> and *Setting up a more effective aid coordination mechanism in Serbia*<sup>36</sup> provide an overview of trends, best practices and recommendations regarding Serbia's aid coordination mechanisms.

## 4.2. Serbia as a donor of development and humanitarian assistance

According to Chapter 30 of the EU *acquis communautaire*, Serbia needs to set up a legal and institutional framework in line with EU development policy. During the EU accession process Serbia will also go from being a recipient of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to becoming a donor country. The Serbian government will therefore need to prepare and establish necessary frameworks for the provision of development and humanitarian aid to developing countries. EC progress reports published to date show that legislation on development policy and humanitarian aid has not yet been adopted in Serbia

<sup>34</sup> Information System for Coordination of the Development Assistance to the Republic of Serbia (ISDACON IS), available at: [www.evropa.gov.rs](http://www.evropa.gov.rs)

<sup>35</sup> Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), available at: <http://www.evropa.gov.rs/Evropa/ShowDocument.aspx?Type=Home&Id=843>

<sup>36</sup> Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), available at: [www.evropa.gov.rs](http://www.evropa.gov.rs)

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

and no relevant institutional structures are in place<sup>37</sup>.

Serbia's *National Plan for the adoption of the Acquis*, adopted in February 2013, lists several priorities for 2013 in the area of development policy and humanitarian aid, under chapter 3.30.2<sup>38</sup>. These include the establishment of an organisational unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) equipped technically and with personnel to monitor, plan and coordinate development cooperation and humanitarian aid, in accordance with a proposed draft for a new Law on Foreign Affairs. The document also foresees in the longer term, the possibility of adopting a Law on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, and within its framework the appointment of a National Coordinator to coordinate the work of all public authorities and institutions in this area.

According to the revised *National Plan for the adoption of the Acquis*, from August 2014, the adoption of the new Law on Foreign Affairs is foreseen for 2014<sup>39</sup>. A current draft of the new Law on Foreign Affairs contains a single reference to development and humanitarian aid in its preamble<sup>40</sup>. It is possible that further practical arrangements related to the provision of development and humanitarian aid to developing countries will be specified in by-laws and regulations. The revised *National Plan for the adoption of the Acquis* postpones the creation of a unit in the MFA dealing with development and humanitarian aid, the adoption of a law on Development Cooperation, as well as the appointment of a National Coordinator to 2015-2018.

According to the *National Plan for the adoption of the Acquis*, Serbia has not provided to date development, technical or financial aid to developing

countries, and no national budget has been allocated for such purposes<sup>41</sup>. In terms of humanitarian assistance, Serbia has provided limited ad hoc material aid on a case-by-case basis in response to natural disasters, notably to South-East Asian countries<sup>42</sup>. There are no institutional mechanisms for coordinating the provision of humanitarian assistance to other countries however relevant ministries have been involved in accordance with the nature of disasters and the needs of the affected populations<sup>43</sup>. No data is publicly available regarding the amounts of emergency aid provided by the Serbian government to developing/other countries<sup>44</sup>.

In response to the floods that started to affect Serbia in spring 2014, the Serbian government established in May the Office for the Assistance to and Recovery of Flooded Areas, which coordinates the reception and distribution of the humanitarian assistance received by Serbia for flood relief<sup>45</sup>. Serbian civil society was mobilised in its contribution to the national response to the floods crisis. Many CSO resources were directed at providing emergency assistance to the Serbian population affected by the floods<sup>46</sup>. This experience at the national level could serve as a basis for the future set-up of institutional structures and cooperation with civil society for the provision of humanitarian aid to other countries.

Public discourse on development cooperation issues in Serbia is scarce and has a limited reach. There are no discussions at government level involving civil society about capitalising on Serbia's experience as an aid recipient in view of setting up structures for the provision of development and humanitarian aid to developing countries<sup>47</sup>. This is explained by a focus on the situation in the country, notably given specific

<sup>37</sup> European Commission, *Staff Working Paper, Analytical Report, COM(2011) 668*, 2011; European Commission, *Serbia Progress Reports 2012, 2013, 2014*, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/strategy-and-progress-report/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/strategy-and-progress-report/index_en.htm)

<sup>38</sup> Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), *National Plan for the adoption of the Acquis 2013-2016*, 2013, available at: [http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna\\_dokumenta/npaa13\\_16.pdf](http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/npaa13_16.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), *National Plan for the adoption of the Acquis 2014-2018, 2014 (Serbian only)*, available at: [http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna\\_dokumenta/npaa/NPAA\\_2014\\_2018.pdf](http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/npaa/NPAA_2014_2018.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> "In the conduct of the affairs of its scope, MFA particularly: [...] works on coordination of international humanitarian and development aid". Article 3, paragraph 35, draft Law on Foreign Affairs [unofficial translation from Serbian], available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.rs/sr/index.php/o-ministarstvu/zakoni/11606-2013-08-01-08-21-23?lang=cyr>

<sup>41</sup> Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), *National Plan for the adoption of the Acquis 2013-2016*, 2013

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> TRIALOG interviews with Serbian civil society and government representatives

<sup>45</sup> Reliefweb, *Government sets up Office for assistance, rehabilitation of flooded areas*, 2014, available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/government-sets-office-assistance-rehabilitation-flooded-areas>

<sup>46</sup> Institute for Sustainable Communities, *CSOs' Relief Efforts Help Citizens in Flood Affected Areas*, 2014, available at: <http://www.iscserbia.org/Vesti/ISC%20Newsletter%20-%20Floods.pdf>;

Institute for Sustainable Communities, *e-newsletter "Civil Society Floods Response Update"*, 2014, available at: <http://www.iscserbia.org/Vesti/ISC%20Newsletter%207%20Special%20%20English.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> TRIALOG interviews with Serbian civil society and government representatives

circumstances, such as the floods that have affected Serbia since May 2014. The focus of the government has been to organise an appropriate response to the floods, while ensuring the transparency and proper distribution of humanitarian assistance and other donations received by Serbia in this context<sup>48</sup>. The predominant view seems to be that Serbia needs to reach a certain level of development and carry out the necessary reforms as required by the EU accession process, in order to be able to provide assistance to other countries and participate in development cooperation.

In a rare example of public statements about international development, former Serbian Prime Minister, Ivica Dačić, declared at the end of 2013 that Serbia was ready to provide development, technical and medical aid to African countries, notably for post-conflict economic reconstruction<sup>49</sup>. This declaration was made in the context of the visit to Belgrade of the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Erastus Mwencha. During his visit, discussions also took place about preparing a Memorandum of Understanding and setting up a Joint Committee for economic cooperation between Serbia and African countries, without providing a timeline for implementation<sup>50</sup>.

When joining the EU, Serbia will need to become a donor however building the government's capacity to act as an efficient donor takes time. The government will need to rely on qualified human resources and therefore invest in building the capacities of relevant state institutions, such as the ministries of foreign affairs, finance, agriculture, among others, with regards to development cooperation principles and working methods. Capacity building on development cooperation is equally necessary for civil society actors, notably with regards to their role of holding the government accountable in this area, as well as implementing projects in developing countries, while being accountable and effective actors themselves.

More importantly, the citizens of Serbia need to understand the principles on which development cooperation is based, especially since it is supported by the state with public finances. Development

education and awareness raising are approaches that can address the issue of citizens' understanding and engagement with development cooperation. Development education<sup>51</sup>, an active learning process, founded on values of solidarity, equality, inclusion and co-operation, enables people to understand the causes and effects of global issues, such as extreme poverty, climate change, among others. It fosters citizens' personal involvement, informed actions and participation in the fight against world-wide poverty eradication and exclusion.

If Serbia is to successfully take on its responsibilities as an EU member state it needs to start tackling issues concerning development policy and humanitarian aid early on in the accession process, even among competing priorities, and not treat them as a box-ticking exercise.

## 5. Civil society in Serbia

### 5.1. Overview of civil society

More than 23,700 associations, 50 foreign associations, as well as almost 600 foundations and endowments were registered in Serbia by September 2014, according to the Serbian Business Registry Agency (SBRA)<sup>52</sup>. The number of associations increased by 10% and the number of foundations by 20%, as compared to the organisations registered in November 2013. For comparison, as of November 2013, more than 50,000 associations were registered in Croatia, a country with a similar history and almost half of Serbia's population<sup>53</sup>. For the purpose of this study, associations, foundations and endowments will be regrouped under the term civil society organisations (CSOs) which will not include other actors such as churches and religious organisations, political parties or foundations, trade unions, sports clubs etc. The majority of Serbian CSOs are based in Vojvodina and Belgrade, with the others spread evenly by regions. According to a 2011 study, most Serbian CSOs work in culture, media and recreation; education and research,

<sup>48</sup> TRIALOG interviews with Serbian civil society representatives

<sup>49</sup> International Radio Serbia, *Dacic and Mwencha for cooperation of Serbia and African countries*, 2013, available at: <http://voiceofserbia.org/content/dacic-and-mwencha-cooperation-serbia-and-african-countries>

<sup>50</sup> International Radio Serbia, *Cooperation of Serbia and the African Union*, 2013, available at: <http://voiceofserbia.org/content/cooperation-serbia-and-african-union>

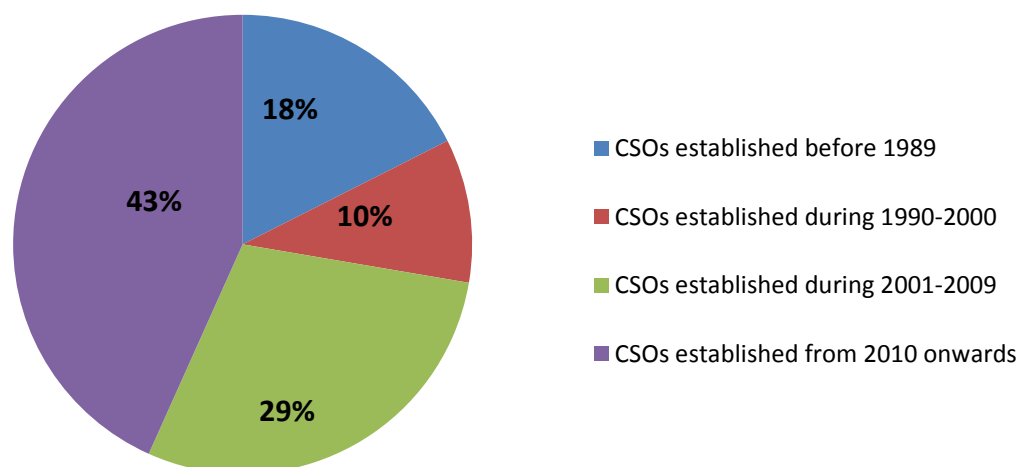
<sup>51</sup> CONCORD, DEEEP, *Development needs Citizens, A position paper of the CONCORD DARE Forum*, 2011, available at: <http://deEEP.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/development-needs-citizens-position-paper.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Serbian Business Registry Agency, available at: <http://www.apr.gov.rs/eng/Home.aspx>

<sup>53</sup> USAID, *2013 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, 17<sup>th</sup> edition, 2014, available at: [http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1863/EE\\_2\\_013\\_CSOSI\\_FullReport.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1863/EE_2_013_CSOSI_FullReport.pdf)



Chart 2. Typology of Serbian CSOs by year of registration



**Source:** Estimations based on data provided in The Republic of Serbia Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, Civic Initiatives, *Assessment of the Situation in the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) Sector in Serbia*, 2011 and on the Serbian Business Registry Agency website.

and social services, whereas fewer CSOs deal with human rights, law and advocacy, and EU integration<sup>54</sup>. Almost one quarter (24%) of Serbian CSOs are involved in international cooperation<sup>55</sup>.

The Serbian CSO sector is relatively young, with the majority of organisations founded after 2000 (Chart 2). Representing almost one fifth of Serbian CSOs (18%), the organisations established before 1990 are less involved in advocacy, despite relying on strong membership and networks of volunteers. Many are organisations for people with disabilities, organised at the national level in the National Organisation of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia. Among these traditional associations, a smaller group of CSOs has developed which pursue a rights-based and capacity-building approach<sup>56</sup>. Being active in areas such as advocacy, policy dialogue and service provision, they are included in national and international sector-based alliances and networks in various fields.

Around 10% of Serbian organisations were created in the 1990s to deal with human rights violations, humanitarian aid provision for refugees and displaced

people, the promotion of peace and reconciliation, and the promotion of democratic values. Many developed into professional CSOs that are engaged in advocacy and capacity building, while also dealing with international and political issues, both within the region and in the context of European integration. They rely on international support more than other CSOs and have a weaker constituency<sup>57</sup>.

Around 29% of Serbian CSOs were created between 2001 and 2009, and mainly emerged after the political and social changes in October 2000. They are undertaking smaller-scale community-based projects on socio-economic and environmental issues, have more limited capacities, and focus on mobilising local resources from communities and municipalities<sup>58</sup>. Around 43% of Serbian CSOs have registered since the Law on Associations was adopted in 2009, however little information is available about their capacities, structure, and areas of interest.

According to the SBRA, 7,304 persons were full-time employed in associations in 2012, compared to 6,572 11%<sup>59</sup>. For comparison, in 2012, there were 9,757 employees in Croatian associations and 10,386 in other Croatian CSOs<sup>60</sup>. The Law on Volunteering imposes financial and administrative burdens on Serbian CSOs, thus limiting their work with

<sup>54</sup> The Republic of Serbia Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, Civic Initiatives, *Assessment of the Situation in the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) Sector in Serbia*, 2011, available at: <http://civilnodrustvo.gov.rs/media/2012/10/ASSESSMENT-OF-THE-SITUATION-IN-THE-CIVIL-SOCIETY-ORGANIZATIONS-CSOs-SECTOR-IN-SERBIA.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations (TACSO), *2013 CSO Needs Assessment Report Serbia*, 2014, available at: [http://www.tacso.org/doc/nar\\_rs2014april.pdf](http://www.tacso.org/doc/nar_rs2014april.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> USAID, *2013 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, 17<sup>th</sup> edition, 2014

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

volunteers<sup>61</sup>. The consequence of avoiding these burdens is a dominant culture of *ad-hoc* volunteerism in Serbia i.e. the majority of volunteers are engaged for specific short-term actions and current project activities<sup>62</sup>. However, many CSOs run ongoing volunteering schemes which promote good conditions for volunteers. Currently, the National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) of Serbia is developing a mechanism to recognise the skills and competences acquired through volunteer activities, while engaging in advocacy for the necessary changes to the Law on Volunteering<sup>63</sup>. There is also a generational shift in the CSO sector, with some prominent CSO leaders retiring from key positions, creating a demand for advanced training for emerging leaders<sup>64</sup>. The EU accession process also requires CSOs to engage with new topics and thus further develop their capacities.

Partnerships are a growing practice in the sector. Working in networks is a common practice, with more than 100 functional networks at the national and local level<sup>65</sup>. CSOs are also increasingly forming cross-sector partnerships with local self-governments and public institutions, notably in view of applying for and implementing EU-funded projects.

## 5.2. Enabling environment of civil society

### 5.2.1. Legal environment

The legal environment for Serbian CSOs is generally favourable. The registration process is simple and decentralised, with the possibility to register in a few days and online. Foreign associations can also register in Serbia. The law allows for non-formal associations to be established, without officially registering, which enables human rights defenders and community-based organisations to be active. However, foundations are still meeting some difficulties in the registration process. Recent positive developments include the

introduction of simplified accounting requirements for CSOs as of 2014, and the audit exemption for CSOs. Also, application procedures for public funding for public benefit programmes were simplified in 2013, resulting in less expensive and faster processes for CSOs<sup>66</sup>.

While civil liberties are generally guaranteed by the Constitution, the latest European Commission progress report on Serbia raises concerns about deteriorating conditions for the full exercise of the freedom of expression in the country. Notably, it mentions an increasing trend of self-censorship, undue influence on editorial policies, as well as a series of cases of intervention against websites<sup>67</sup>. Moreover, the report calls on public officials to publicly and more systematically condemn threats, physical assaults and cases of incitement to violence and hate speech from extremist groups against non-governmental organisations, human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers or individual citizens, which are still occurring in the country<sup>68</sup>.

The main shortcomings in the legal environment are related to the CSOs' access to financial resources. CSOs participating in public tenders for the implementation of social services are required to submit bank guarantees, thus preventing many of them from participating as service providers<sup>69</sup>. In addition, unfavourable by-laws i.e. regulating the minimal standards of services provision, the licensing of service providers, and the earmarked transfers for services to poor municipalities from the national level, as well as delays in their implementation have the unintended consequence of putting CSOs that provide community services outside the legal framework<sup>70</sup>. This in turn creates difficulties for CSOs to sustain service provision and move from donor support to more sustainable funding from local budgets. While CSOs may engage directly in income earning activities in order to achieve their organisational goals, they are discouraged due to the inconsistent interpretations of this provision by public authorities, which can lead to CSOs being

<sup>61</sup> Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations (TACSO), *2013 CSO Needs Assessment Report Serbia*, 2014

<sup>62</sup> TRIALOG interviews with Serbian civil society representatives

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> USAID, *2013 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, 17<sup>th</sup> edition, 2014

<sup>65</sup> Balkan Civil Society Development Network, Civic Initiatives, *Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development – Serbia Report*, 2013, available at: <http://monitoringmatrix.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/CMR-Serbia-2013-eng.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations (TACSO), *2013 CSO Needs Assessment Report Serbia*, 2014

<sup>67</sup> European Commission, *Serbia Progress Report*, 2014, available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2014/20140108-serbia-progress-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20140108-serbia-progress-report_en.pdf)

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Balkan Civil Society Development Network, Civic Initiatives, *Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development – Serbia Report*, 2013

<sup>70</sup> TRIALOG interviews with Serbian civil society representatives



fined<sup>71</sup>.

Tax legislation remains rather unfavourable for CSOs<sup>72</sup>. Unlike in most European countries, Serbian CSOs are not exempt from property tax on real estate. A 2.5 percent tax on gifts or inheritance received by CSOs has been abolished since 2010 however it has been unequally implemented by the authorities<sup>73</sup>. Individual charitable giving is not recognised as the ground for tax deduction, which discourages philanthropy. At the same time, an increase in corporate tax deductions for donations to CSOs from 3.5 percent to 5 percent is expected to stimulate corporate philanthropy<sup>74</sup>.

### 5.2.2. Financial sustainability

According to the USAID CSO Sustainability Index, the financial viability of Serbian CSOs has been improving since 2011, while it remains the weakest sustainability performance indicator<sup>75</sup>. Government funding for CSOs has shown positive trends over the last few years, including the provision since 2013 of co-financing for CSO projects funded by the EU and other donors. Some ministries are also providing co-financing for EU-funded projects and this trend is expected to increase<sup>76</sup>.

In 2012, around EUR 72 million (RSD 8.6 billion) were disbursed in support of programmes and projects of associations and other civil society organisations at all levels of government, compared to around EUR 25 million (RSD 3 billion) allocated in 2011 only by the central government<sup>77</sup>. However, these numbers include funding allocated to civil society organisations in their widest definition i.e. churches, religious organisations, trade unions, sports associations, etc.,

<sup>71</sup> Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations (TACSO), *2013 CSO Needs Assessment Report Serbia*, 2014

<sup>72</sup> For a comprehensive overview of tax laws for CSOs in Serbia see: Balkan Civil Society Development Network, Civic Initiatives, *Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development – Serbia Report*, 2013 and Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations (TACSO), *2013 CSO Needs Assessment Report Serbia*, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> USAID, *2013 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, 17<sup>th</sup> edition, 2014

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> TRIALOG interview with representatives of the Serbian Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society

<sup>77</sup> Current exchange rate. The Republic of Serbia Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, *Annual Summary Report on budget expenditures for the associations and other civil society organisations*, 2011 and 2012, available at: <http://civilnodrustvo.gov.rs/en/documents/publications/>

as well as to political parties<sup>78</sup>.

Public funds are only available for projects and not for the institutional development of CSOs, and in addition associations need to compete for funding with other types of organisations, such as churches, religious organisations, political parties, sports clubs, as mentioned above. Financial support at local government level remains limited and is perceived by CSOs as lacking transparency, despite the introduction in 2012 of the public call procedure for the allocation of state funds<sup>79</sup>. Public calls for CSOs remain rarely used at local government level and decisions are made by authorities according to other criteria<sup>80</sup>.

The diversity of CSOs' revenue sources remains limited, with most CSOs obtaining funds through calls for proposals from international donors. The level of international donor support remained stable in 2013, despite a gradual withdrawal of donors from Serbia as the country progresses towards European integration<sup>81</sup>. In order to avoid a potential gap in funding which might be created by the phasing out of international support, some donors, notably USAID, invested in building the capacity of local and community foundations to access and manage direct grants starting with 2013, including for re-granting purposes<sup>82</sup>. Calls for proposals for EU grant programmes have also included re-granting mechanisms since 2012. Currently, Serbian CSOs are eligible for EU funding under the following grant programmes: the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR); the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) (including cross-border cooperation, Civil Society Facility, Technical Assistance for CSOs - TACSO, People-2-People); Europe for Citizens. Serbian CSOs can also partner with EU-based CSOs in EC-funded Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) projects, under the EC thematic programme Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities (CSO-LA).

According to a 2011 study, in the structure of the CSO budgets, funds provided by corporations represent only 6%, while 3% are provided by individual

<sup>78</sup> It was not possible to identify the amount allocated exclusively to CSOs as defined in this paper i.e. associations and foundations, excluding churches and religious organisations, political parties, sports clubs, etc.

<sup>79</sup> Balkan Civil Society Development Network, Civic Initiatives, *Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development – Serbia Report*, 2013

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> USAID, *2013 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, 17<sup>th</sup> edition, 2014

<sup>82</sup> TRIALOG interviews with Serbian civil society representatives

citizens<sup>83</sup>. However, a recent improvement in tax legislation regarding corporate donations might contribute to improving corporate philanthropy. Income earned through service provision remains limited and constituency building for long-term financial sustainability is still needed.

### 5.2.3. Relations with the government

Despite the challenges Serbia is facing regarding the guarantee of full freedom of expression as seen above, interactions between the government and CSOs have improved in the last few years with the former appearing more ready to engage with civil society, especially in the context of EU integration<sup>84</sup>. This is also due to the Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society (the Office), established in 2011 to support the dialogue between the Serbian government and CSOs. The Office contributed to improving the transparency of public funding, through the adoption of the Regulations on Transparent funding for CSOs, and through the preparation of annual reports on public funding for civil society. In its Strategic Framework for 2011-2014 and its 2013-2014 Operational Plan, the Office mentions as targets the establishment of a National Council for the Development of Civil Society, as well as the development of a Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development<sup>85</sup>.

A number of CSOs participate in the planning and programming of international assistance received by Serbia through the SECO mechanism and with the support of the Office. Public calls for participation in this mechanism are launched by the Office which is currently in the process of finalising the selection of the second generation of SECOs. The SECO mechanism has been well received by Serbian civil society and perceived as a positive tool for CSO participation. Some weaknesses have been however highlighted, notably the limited activity of some sector groups, and most importantly, the lack of regional or local activities, as well as the limited visibility of the process in the wider civil society<sup>86</sup>. Indeed, according to some

CSO representatives, SECO activities are based in Belgrade and there are few opportunities for local and regional organisations to participate.

During 2013 and 2014, the Office also facilitated the participation of civil society representatives in the negotiations on Serbia's accession to the EU<sup>87</sup>. CSOs participated through web streaming in the monitoring of explanatory screenings for 16 chapters, the preparation of the bilateral screening and the drafting of the Action Plan for Chapter 23, as well as briefing meetings following bilateral screenings. Participation in web streaming was organised through public calls published on the Office website and more than 300 representatives of CSOs attended<sup>88</sup>. The Office also organised trainings to strengthen CSOs' capacity to participate in and monitor the accession negotiations process. Web streaming for the explanatory screening on Chapter 30 – External Relations – was attended by nine CSO representatives, from seven different organisations<sup>89</sup>.

Recent initiatives are expected to further structure the cooperation between government and CSOs. In 2013, the government changed its Rules of Procedures related to public hearings. The agendas of public hearings are now published and deadlines are established that give CSOs more time to react to and participate in the policy process<sup>90</sup>. Furthermore, Guidelines for participation of CSOs in the decision making processes have been adopted by the government at the end of August 2014. These have been received as a positive initiative by Serbian civil society, notably due to the variety of possible forms of participation of interested CSOs organised on four levels: information, counselling, involvement and partnership<sup>91</sup>.

Despite these positive developments and initiatives, government authorities, especially at the local level, still do not see the benefit of involving civil society and

<sup>83</sup> The Republic of Serbia Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, *Civic Initiatives, Assessment of the Situation in the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) Sector in Serbia*, 2011

<sup>84</sup> Balkan Civil Society Development Network, *Civic Initiatives, Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development – Serbia Report*, 2013

<sup>85</sup> The Republic of Serbia Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, available at: <http://civilnodrustvo.gov.rs/en/documents/office-acts/>

<sup>86</sup> TRIALOG interviews with Serbian civil society representatives

<sup>87</sup> The Republic of Serbia Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, *Report on the participation of CSOs in the negotiation process for the accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union*, 2014, available at: <http://civilnodrustvo.gov.rs/media/2014/06/Report-on-CSOs-participation-in-negotiating-process-in-Serbia.pdf>

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> These organisations include: European Policy Centre, United Trade Unions Independence, Native Land/Rodna gruda, Confederation of autonomous trade union of Serbia, Modern youth, Balkan Security Agenda, Club of students of the Faculty of Security. Information provided by the Serbian Office for Cooperation with Civil Society.

<sup>90</sup> USAID, *2013 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, 17<sup>th</sup> edition, 2014

<sup>91</sup> TRIALOG interviews with Serbian civil society representatives

CSO participation in policy processes is rather more formal than substantial. The level of state control locally is increasing, primarily through the selection of CSO projects that receive funds from local public budgets<sup>92</sup>. There is also an issue of capacity of CSOs to engage, with only a limited number of CSOs taking an active part in discussing legislation or policies. The Office is also perceived by some parts of civil society as at risk of becoming a bottleneck, since some public institutions are using it as the only channel of communication with civil society, thus failing to address CSOs directly<sup>93</sup>.

### 5.3. Involvement in development cooperation and development education

According to a 2011 study, 24% of Serbian CSOs are involved in international cooperation in addition to other activities, and 0.7% of CSOs listed international cooperation as their main area of work<sup>94</sup>. Serbian CSOs most often cooperated on international projects with CSOs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, while cooperation was more limited with Albanian and Turkish organisations. Serbian CSOs also cooperated with CSOs in the other Western Balkans countries. The main areas of cooperation were culture, education, and social services.

The most frequent motivation for establishing cooperation was the existence of common interests and aims. Almost one third of Serbian CSOs were involved in international cooperation to provide assistance to another organisation (29%)<sup>95</sup>. Better use of capacities, using the reputation of the partner organisation for increasing their influence, responding to donor requirements, as well as facilitation of fundraising were additional reasons for involvement in international cooperation. Serbian CSOs involved in joint activities or projects with CSOs in neighbouring countries were supported through EU funds (IPA-Civil Society Facility), as well as by international foundations, while a limited number of CSOs received support for study visits from relevant ministries<sup>96</sup>.

<sup>92</sup> USAID, *2013 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, 17<sup>th</sup> edition, 2014

<sup>93</sup> Balkan Civil Society Development Network, Civic Initiatives, *Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development – Serbia Report*, 2013

<sup>94</sup> The Republic of Serbia Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, Civic Initiatives, *Assessment of the Situation in the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) Sector in Serbia*, 2011

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> TRIALOG interviews with Serbian civil society representatives

There are however no regular and predictable funds from the government for CSO involvement in this type of activities.

It is difficult to assess whether the percentage of Serbian CSOs involved in international cooperation has increased since 2011. On one hand, it could be expected that the number has increased due to growing capacities and expertise of Serbian CSOs who are also engaging more in European partnerships and networks, as well as on international issues. Additionally, regional cooperation and the implementation of joint projects with CSOs in neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans have increasingly been supported by the EU through IPA funds. On the other hand, Serbia's EU accession has introduced new topics for CSOs which are now focusing on and building their capacities to better engage in this more domestic process.

Despite their involvement in regional initiatives, Serbian CSOs' presence beyond the Western Balkans has been very limited. Very few if any Serbian CSOs have been active in the implementation of development cooperation projects in developing countries outside the region<sup>97</sup>. The reasons quoted by CSO representatives are the current focus on the situation in the country itself, as well as the lack of government funding for such projects<sup>98</sup>. CSOs see a potential of participating in the implementation of development cooperation projects, and consider they have the necessary expertise and experience due to their involvement in the post-conflict reconstruction phase in Serbia. However, CSOs see this as a rather long-term possibility, once Serbia reaches a certain level of development and becomes an EU member state.

This view is also reflected in the establishment of the AidWatch Serbia – Coalition for the monitoring of development assistance. At European level, AidWatch CONCORD monitors the levels of development aid disbursed by EU member states, while advocating for improved effectiveness and transparency of aid programmes. AidWatch Serbia, a coalition of 14 CSOs, acts as a watchdog for the spending of international assistance received by the country, with a view of using this experience once Serbia becomes a donor of development and humanitarian aid. AidWatch Serbia is also liaising with European development cooperation CSO platforms to learn about their ways of working and exchange experiences.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

Many Serbian CSOs engage on international policy issues specific to their area of work and have integrated the millennium development goals (MDGs) in their working frameworks. Some CSOs are also implementing non-formal teaching activities related to global education issues, such as the environment and climate change, social justice, and gender. Interviewed CSOs were also increasingly partnering with CSOs from EU member states, as well as being members of European and regional level networks, seeing these as potential ways of engaging beyond their immediate neighbourhood.

It is important that Serbian civil society becomes involved in and engages with development policy and humanitarian aid early in the accession process, thus accompanying the Serbian government in its transition from being a recipient of international assistance to becoming a donor country. Civil society plays a crucial role in development cooperation. Civil society acts as a watchdog and holds governments accountable, it implements development cooperation projects and often has close relationships with civil society in developing countries. An EC communication from 2012 stresses the essential role of civil society in EU's actions to further democracy and sustainable development in the world<sup>99</sup>. Civil society input to policy formulation is crucial because of its unique experience at the grassroots level and also because these policies will influence it as implementer of the projects.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

Serbia was identified as a potential EU candidate country in 2003 but it was not until ten years later, in June 2013, that it received the green light to start accession negotiations. In this process, Serbia will also be expected to implement the EU *acquis communautaire* in the area of development policy and humanitarian aid. While little progress has been made in this area, in its *National Plan for the Adoption of the*

*Acquis*, the Serbian government envisages the creation of a unit in the MFA dealing with development and humanitarian aid, the adoption of a law on Development Cooperation, as well as the appointment of a National Coordinator for 2015-2018. Since Serbia's objective is to finalise the alignment with EU legislation by 2018, it seems somewhat worrisome that the *acquis* concerning development policy and humanitarian aid could be adopted only towards the very end of the accession process.

Serbia's involvement in development cooperation and humanitarian aid provision to developing countries to date has been limited. Serbia is a recipient country of ODA and focused on its own development, especially in the context of its EU accession process. Due to its experience as a recipient of development assistance though, Serbia has developed numerous institutions, frameworks and practices which could successfully be adapted to the provision of development and humanitarian assistance, as Serbia progressively becomes a donor country. Serbia has the potential to build on its institutional set-up for aid coordination as a recipient of international assistance in order to become an effective donor in the near future.

The past 15 years have seen the development of a vibrant, active civil society sector. Some shortcomings regarding their legal environment and financial sustainability still prevent Serbian CSOs from reaching their full potential. The Serbian CSOs' engagement with the government has improved over the past years, even if the central and local governments do not always acknowledge the benefit of involving civil society in policy processes and CSOs do not always have the capacity to do so. The Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society has facilitated the participation of civil society representatives in Serbia's EU accession process. This practice is welcomed and should be systematically implemented in a manner that includes local, regional and Belgrade-based CSOs.

The experience of civil society in Serbia's post-conflict reconstruction phase and transition to democracy is valuable and represents an important potential to be used in the context of development cooperation. In 2011, almost one quarter of Serbian CSOs were active in international cooperation, mainly with CSO partners from other Western Balkans countries. The recent unfortunate example of the floods which have affected the country since May 2014, has seen an important mobilisation of Serbian civil society which could serve as a baseline for future civil society involvement in the provision of

<sup>99</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations"*, 2012, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0492:FIN:EN:PDF>



humanitarian aid to developing countries. Numerous CSOs in Serbia have included development-related topics, such as the MDGs, climate change and gender equality in their activities, however, the number of CSOs that engage in such activities is not clear.

### Recommendations

- Government of Serbia to systematically create opportunities for and facilitate the inclusion of Serbian civil society at all levels – national, regional and local – in the EU accession process.
- Government of Serbia to further improve the enabling environment of the Serbian civil society, including the regulatory, financial and participatory dimensions and to include CSOs in the monitoring of accession negotiations on Chapter 24 of the EU *acquis communautaire*, notably regarding the civil society-related provisions.
- Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society to include Serbian CSOs in the follow-up to the bilateral screening meeting for Chapter 30 of the EU *acquis* on development policy and humanitarian aid, including subsequent briefing meetings, and the drafting of a potential action plan.
- Civil society to engage with the government on the topic of development policy and humanitarian aid, as well as the progress on Chapter 30 of the *acquis*.
- Government of Serbia and European Commission Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations to address the issues of development policy and humanitarian aid at an early stage in the EU accession process in order for Serbia to be fully prepared to take up its responsibilities as a new donor.
- Civil society, state and EU actors to provide capacity building opportunities on development policy and humanitarian aid to Serbian civil society actors and state representatives.
- Serbian government together with donor community in Serbia and civil society to systematise and analyse the lessons learned from its experience as a recipient of international assistance and to use this experience in setting up structures for the provision of development and humanitarian aid.
- Civil society together with government and donor community in Serbia to systematise lessons learned from the participation of Serbian civil society in the national response to the floods crisis, notably for the provision of humanitarian aid in the future.
- Serbian government and civil society actors to promote and implement activities that support development education and awareness raising in Serbia.
- Serbian and EU CSOs to actively seek opportunities to partner with each other in the area of development policy and humanitarian aid, e.g. to jointly implement development education and awareness raising (DEAR) projects under the Non-State Actors and Local Authorities (NSA-LA) grant programme of the European Commission.

## Annex 1 – List of Serbian civil society actors active in sectors closely related to international cooperation

Name of the CSO	Area of work	Countries of implementation	Contact
Aid Watch Serbia (Leskovac)	Democratisation / Good governance	Serbia	<a href="http://www.aidwatchserbia.org">www.aidwatchserbia.org</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@aidwatchserbia.org">office@aidwatchserbia.org</a> Tel: +381 16 236 890
Anti-Poverty Network (Belgrade)	Poverty reduction	Serbia	<a href="http://www.protivsiromastva.net/">http://www.protivsiromastva.net/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@protivsiromastva.net">office@protivsiromastva.net</a> Tel: +381 11 7621 785 (Coordinated by SeCons)
AS – Center for Empowerment Youth people who are living with HIV and AIDS (Belgrade)	Human rights	Serbia	<a href="http://aids-support.org/">http://aids-support.org/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@aids-support.org">office@aids-support.org</a> Tel: +381 60 5030 402 +381 11 3343 260
Association for Development of Children and Youth – Open Club (OKNIS) (Niš)	Citizenship / Development education	Serbia Bosnia and Herzegovina	<a href="http://www.oknis.org.rs">www.oknis.org.rs</a> Email: <a href="mailto:oknis@medianis.net">oknis@medianis.net</a> Tel: +381 18 523 422 +381 18 244 995
National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) (Novi Sad)	Citizenship / Development education	Serbia	<a href="http://napor.net/">http://napor.net/</a> (Serbian only) Email: <a href="mailto:office@napor.net">office@napor.net</a> Tel: +381 21 2618 597
Autonomous Women's Centre Belgrade	Human rights	Serbia Western Balkans Slovenia	<a href="http://www.womenngo.org.rs/english/index.php">www.womenngo.org.rs/english/index.php</a> Email: <a href="mailto:azc@azc.org.rs">azc@azc.org.rs</a> Tel: + 381 11 2687 190
Belgrade Open School	Citizenship / Development education	Serbia	<a href="http://www.bos.rs/eng/">http://www.bos.rs/eng/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:bos@bos.rs">bos@bos.rs</a> Tel: +381 11 30 65 800
Center for Democracy Foundation	Democratisation / Good governance	Serbia	<a href="http://www.centaronline.org/en/index.php">http://www.centaronline.org/en/index.php</a> Email: <a href="mailto:info@centaronline.org">info@centaronline.org</a> Tel: +381 11 3627 780
Center for Ecology and Sustainable Development (CEKOR) (Subotica)	Environment / Sustainable development	Serbia	<a href="http://www.cekor.org">www.cekor.org</a> Email: <a href="mailto:djnatasa@yahoo.com">djnatasa@yahoo.com</a> Tel: +381 24 523 191
Civic Initiatives (Belgrade)	Citizenship / Development education	Serbia Western Balkans	<a href="http://www.gradjanske.org/page/home/en.html">www.gradjanske.org/page/home/en.html</a> Email: <a href="mailto:civin@gradjanske.org">civin@gradjanske.org</a> Tel: +381 11 3398 637
Divac Foundation (Belgrade)	Democratisation / Good governance	Serbia	<a href="http://www.fondacijadivac.org">www.fondacijadivac.org</a> Email: <a href="mailto:hod@divac.com">hod@divac.com</a> Tel: +381 11 3341 755
Educational Centre (Leskovac)	Citizenship / Development education	Serbia	<a href="http://www.nvo.org.rs/">http://www.nvo.org.rs/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:edcentar@gmail.com">edcentar@gmail.com</a> Tel: +381 16 215 413
Environmental Ambassadors for Sustainable Development (Belgrade)	Environment / Sustainable development	Serbia Western Balkans Turkey Kosovo	<a href="http://ambassadors-env.com/">http://ambassadors-env.com/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@ambassadors-env.com">office@ambassadors-env.com</a> <a href="mailto:ambasadorior@gmail.com">ambasadorior@gmail.com</a> Tel: +381 11 3225 139
European Movement Serbia (Belgrade)	Citizenship / Development education	Serbia	<a href="http://www.emins.org/english">www.emins.org/english</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@emins.org">office@emins.org</a> Tel: + 381 11 3640 174
Group 484 (Belgrade)	Human rights	Serbia	<a href="http://www.grupa484.org.rs/en">http://www.grupa484.org.rs/en</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@grupa484.org.rs">office@grupa484.org.rs</a> Tel: +381 11 2660 972
Media Education Centre (Belgrade)	Citizenship / Development education	Serbia	<a href="http://www.mediaeducationcentre.eu/eng/">http://www.mediaeducationcentre.eu/eng/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@mediaeducationcentre.eu">office@mediaeducationcentre.eu</a> Tel: +381 62 1071 082 (SMS)



National Coalition for Decentralization (Niš)	Democratisation / Good governance	Serbia	<a href="http://decentralizacija.org.rs/">http://decentralizacija.org.rs/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:info@decentralizacija.org.rs">info@decentralizacija.org.rs</a> Tel: +381 18 527 708
National Convention on the European Union (Belgrade)	Democratisation / Good governance	Serbia	<a href="http://eukonvent.org/eng/">http://eukonvent.org/eng/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:eukonvent@emins.org">eukonvent@emins.org</a> Tel: + 381 11 3640 174
Network of the Committees for Human Rights in Serbia – CHRIS Network (Niš)	Human rights	Serbia	<a href="http://chris-network.org/">http://chris-network.org/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@chris-network.org">office@chris-network.org</a> Tel: +381 18 526 232 +381 18 526 234
Network of organisations for children in Serbia (MODS) (Niš)	Human rights	Serbia	<a href="http://www.zadecu.org">www.zadecu.org</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@zadecu.org">office@zadecu.org</a> Tel: +381 18 523 422
Network of NGOs working with persons with disabilities (Belgrade)	Human rights	Serbia	<a href="http://www.cilsrbija.org/ser/index.php">http://www.cilsrbija.org/ser/index.php</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@cilsrbija.org">office@cilsrbija.org</a> Tel: +381 11 367 53 17 +381 11 367 53 18
People's Parliament (Leskovac)	Citizenship / Development education	Serbia	<a href="http://www.parlament.org.rs/">http://www.parlament.org.rs/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:ana@parlament.org.rs">ana@parlament.org.rs</a> Tel: +381 16 236 890 (Lead organisation of Aid Watch Serbia)
Regional Centre for Minorities (Belgrade)	Human rights	Serbia	<a href="http://www.minoritycentre.org/">http://www.minoritycentre.org/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:info@minoritycentre.org">info@minoritycentre.org</a> Tel: +381 11 2623 364
SeCons (Belgrade)	Poverty reduction	Serbia	<a href="http://www.secons.net/">http://www.secons.net/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@secons.net">office@secons.net</a> Tel: +381 11 412 12 57
SHARE Foundation (Novi Sad)	Human rights	Serbia	<a href="http://www.shareconference.net/en">www.shareconference.net/en</a> Email: <a href="mailto:info@shareconference.net">info@shareconference.net</a>
Smart Kolektiv (Belgrade)	Poverty reduction	Serbia Montenegro	<a href="http://www.smartkolektiv.org">www.smartkolektiv.org</a> Email: <a href="mailto:svetlana@smartkolektiv.org">svetlana@smartkolektiv.org</a> Tel: +381 11 2659 700
SOS Children's Villages (Belgrade, Kraljevo)	Human rights	Serbia	<a href="http://www.sos-decijasela.rs/?lang=en">www.sos-decijasela.rs/?lang=en</a> Belgrade Email: <a href="mailto:ivan.stojanovic@sos-decijasela.rs">ivan.stojanovic@sos-decijasela.rs</a> Tel : +381 11 34 47 222 Kraljevo <a href="mailto:zaklina.popovic@sos-decijasela.rs">zaklina.popovic@sos-decijasela.rs</a> Tel: +381 36 375 451
The Youth Dialogue Programme (Novi Sad)	Citizenship / Development education	Serbia Kosovo	<a href="http://www.ydprogramme.org/index_e.htm">http://www.ydprogramme.org/index_e.htm</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@ydprogramme.org">office@ydprogramme.org</a> Tel: +381 65 8119 805
TRAG Foundation (Belgrade)	Democratisation / Good governance	Serbia	<a href="http://www.tragfondacija.org">www.tragfondacija.org</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@tragfondacija.org">office@tragfondacija.org</a> Tel: +381 11 78 39 467
Women Against Violence Network (Belgrade)	Human rights	Serbia	<a href="http://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net/en/">http://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net/en/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:zene.protiv.nasilja@gmail.com">zene.protiv.nasilja@gmail.com</a> (Coordinated by Autonomous Women's Center)
World Vision Serbia (Belgrade)	Human rights	Serbia	<a href="http://www.wvi.org/serbia">http://www.wvi.org/serbia</a> Email: <a href="mailto:tijana_moraca@wvi.org">tijana_moraca@wvi.org</a> Tel : +381 11 3972 828
Young Researchers of Serbia (Belgrade)	Environment / Sustainable development	Serbia	<a href="http://www.mis.org.rs">http://www.mis.org.rs</a> Email: <a href="mailto:office@mis.org.rs">office@mis.org.rs</a> Tel: +381 11 3111 314
Zajecar Initiative (Zajecar)	Citizenship / Development education	Serbia Kosovo Macedonia	<a href="http://www.zainicijativa.org/index.php">http://www.zainicijativa.org/index.php</a> Email: <a href="mailto:dankon@zainicijativa.org">dankon@zainicijativa.org</a> Tel: +381 19 440 224