

## Civic Initiatives – Annual operational report for 2019



## The Three Freedoms (Freedom of Association, Assembly and Expression)

In April, the **Three Freedoms Platform** was formed during ICSW, consisting of 20 civil society organizations. The idea is that the signatories act as a joint front of civil society organizations for the protection of endangered freedoms and for creating conditions for unhindered participation of citizens in public affairs through the development of civil society. Another 20 organizations joined the platform. The signatories of the Platform held 5 meetings at which joint activities were agreed upon, in order to influence the protection of fundamental rights (freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression).

In August, the CI launched a **bi-weekly Newsletter Three Freedoms under a magnifying glass**, which showcases violations of fundamental rights. The newsletter is also sent in English to embassies and international organizations. So far, 8 reports have been prepared in Serbian and English, which have been forwarded to the relevant actors.

The CI sends **bi-weekly reports to the CIVICUS monitor** showing violations of fundamental rights. Since March 2019, Serbia has been placed on the watch list, as a country where there is a sharp increase in violations of these rights (the rating was *narrowed* in the previous period). In December, the rating was changed, Serbia was removed from the watch list, so that the current status was defined as *obstructed*. A conference was held in Belgrade, in cooperation with CIVICUS, at which the reasons for the downgrade were presented.

At the invitation of colleagues from CIVICUS, Jelena Stević and Ivana Teofilović attended consultations with the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association on May 30 and 31 in Johannesburg, which brought together more than 80 representatives of CSOs, activists and academics around the world. They presented the work of the Three Freedoms Platform and cases of violations of fundamental rights in Serbia.

Together with **Balkan Tube Fest** and YouTubers, the #KoKoZe campaign was launched with the aim of raising awareness among the younger population about fake news. As part of the campaign, YouTubers collected questions and then recorded videos with experts to answer the most frequently asked questions. At the end of September, CI participated in the Balkan Tube Fest, where they had their own panel to discuss the importance of the campaign together with YouTubers. Cooperation with Balkan Tube Fest continues, which will be reflected in the organization of 5 local events on the topic of cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia in the first quarter of 2020.

Meetings with local media and CSOs were held in Valjevo, Niš, Vranje and Kragujevac in September to discuss the media situation in local communities and find the best solution for the survival of independent local media. A media shelter has been opened in Vranje, and this week it will open in Kragujevac as well. The plan is for these shelters, in the establishment of which local free media, CSOs and citizens will participate, to be established in 6 more cities. Media shelters have the task of helping local media to survive and find ways for sustainability in the current social situation.

Civic Initiatives **launched their podcast called "Tačka ključanja" ("Boiling Point")**. "Tačka ključanja" is a podcast that deals with protests and all kinds of political engagement of citizens in public places. The

emphasis of the "Tačka ključanja" podcast is on the personal experiences and thoughts of the participants and organizers of the protest, as well as on local initiatives of dissatisfied citizens.

Until the completion of this report, 16 shows were recorded and published, with an average audience of 400 listeners. A process has been launched to increase listenership, in cooperation with the podcast.rs platform.

**A platform „U pravu si!“ ("You are right!")** is being developed, which will contain all the information that citizens need to know about the organization of public gatherings - legal framework related to freedom of assembly, security, the role of police, how to register, gathering rules, noise, banners, etc. So far, 38 articles have been written, and the platform is expected to be launched in the spring.

The "Tačka ključanja" podcast and the „U pravu si!“ Platform are part of a broader **“Politika na ulici” (“Politics on the streets”)** program that will address the freedom of assembly.

## **Civic education**

**The online platform Resource Center for Civic Education Teachers** has been prepared and launched. Various materials were collected - relevant manuals, guides, brochures, analyzes, research, etc. and the design and structure of the platform has been developed.

Cooperation has been established with CE teachers regarding the collection of teaching materials and the creation of lesson plans for secondary schools, which will be sent to interested teachers in the form of a newsletter. The newsletter on civic education will contain examples and suggestions for conducting classes for teaching units within the curriculum for primary and secondary school, as well as teaching materials, useful links, news, and the like. **So far, 230 teachers have applied.**

The program **Podrška jačanju učeničke participacije za građansko obrazovanje – „Demokratija se uči u školi“** (Support to Strengthening Student Participation for Civic Education - "Democracy is Learned in School") was launched in cooperation with the Union of High School Students of Serbia, and with the support of the Open Society Foundation. The project lasts until December 31st. 13 focus groups were held with students, teachers, principals, and professional associates of secondary schools.

**Research has been conducted on student involvement in decision-making processes** at school and at the level of local self-government. A conference was held at which the results of the research were presented, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Institute for the Advancement of Education.

In January, three more projects will be launched, which will include trainings for teachers. The projects are supported by the embassies of Australia and the Czech Republic, as well as the Ministry of Education.

## **Resource Center Activities**

The activities of the Resource Center are defined for the first year, presented at a public event in June and published on the RC website. A Need Assessment Report (NAR) was prepared. In September, a teambuilding was held for RC representatives to build a team and increase networking among consortium members. RC activities were presented to EUD representatives, in order to connect them to ongoing projects.

The RC Council has been formed, and elected members are from the fields of business, media, institutions, CSOs, networks and the donor community.

Trainings were held within the Civic Initiatives' Resource center: Basic training on organizational development, Use of data in the non-profit sector, Ulaz Slobodan (Free Entry) and Fundraising by individuals and companies.

Open Doors were held in local Resource Centers and nationally on the following topics: Economic activities of associations, Basics of drafting project proposals and budgeting, Financing of civil society organizations, Communication with the media, Budgeting and justification of costs.

A new way of entering data into the CRM database has been established, which will enable easier recording, communication, and faster recording. The newsletter has been redesigned and is sent weekly to around 4,000 addresses of interested CSOs with the latest news in the sector and CI's activities. 150 HD services have been provided since the beginning of the year. 4 TA sessions were held for strengthening the capacity of newly established organizations in the field of: project writing, strategic thinking, budget writing, and economic activities.

A call for mentoring support has been issued and organizations to be supported in public advocacy have been selected.

We answered more than 400 Help desk inquiries; 20 Open Doors: Every month we open our doors to you for questions related to the topic of the month; TA and Info sessions: more than 30 TA and Info sessions throughout Serbia; Mentoring support for 25 CSO / informal group initiatives; 17 Trainings for improving the work of associations that covered topics from writing project proposals, organizational development, public advocacy, community organization, various ways to raise funds to increase the visibility of the association, monitoring the spending of funds from the local budget.

Planning for 2020 was held and a work plan was made for all project partners.

## **The ACT program**

The inception phase of the Active Civil Society Together project, which will be implemented with Helvetas, with the support of the SDC, has been completed. Within this phase, a detailed program was developed and a comprehensive survey on the state of civil society was conducted in cooperation with IPSOS, modeled on the survey conducted by the CI during 2011. The project starts in October and

consists of three components: institutional strengthening of civil society, networking and cooperation with local governments. Within the CI, this program will be harmonized with the work of the Resource Center because the activities are compatible. The ACT team has been formed, and the implementation of the activities for which the Civic Initiatives are in charge will start in February.

## **Work on the legal framework and practice of state authorities**

CI, in cooperation with partners from the consortium - Transparentnost Srbija, Asocijacija on-line medija, Narodni parlament Leskovac, Edukacioni centar Leskovac i Medija reform centar Niš (Transparency Serbia, Online Media Association, People's Parliament Leskovac, Leskovac Education Center and Media Reform Center Niš), worked to coordinate activities involving actors from the civil and business sector, at national and local levels, in the process of creating the Third Partnership Action Plan for Open Government.

In April and July, 3 meetings of the special Inter-Ministerial WG were held on the occasion of the implementation of the Action Plan of the POU Initiative 2018-20. The WG brings together more than 70 members and their deputies - representatives of state bodies, local self-government bodies and CSOs (6). CI are a member of the WG but also had the role of co-organizer of these meetings. The meetings were an opportunity to review progress in implementing the ongoing AP commitments and present a draft report on its quality prepared by the Independent Monitoring Mechanism (IRM).

Since the beginning of 2019, with the mentoring support of the consortium members, 5 LGUs have been included in the process of drafting local POU action plans - Sombor, Lapovo, Vlasotince, Bela Palanka and Novi Pazar. The whole process was conducted in coordination with the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government. On September 30, the City Assembly of Novi Pazar adopted the LAP. In Sombor, the members of the work group are working on the final definition of the obligations before presenting them to the citizens in order to collect comments for the amendment. The work group in Bela Palanka is still working on determining the priority areas to which the obligations will apply. Action plans have been adopted in Lapovo and Vlasotince as well.

CI Program Director Bojana Selaković participated in the 6th Global Open Government Partnership Summit on May 29-31 in Canada. The summit brought together 79 member states and 20 local governments of the Open Government Partnership. Bojana Selaković spoke at the session "OGP in Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans Countries: Raising the Ambition" where she presented the challenges that Serbia is facing in the implementation of the Open Government Partnership initiative.

CI, together with the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, continued to contribute to the implementation of recommendations related to non-profit organizations. We were consulted in the process of declarations led by the Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering that led to the removal of Serbia from the FATF gray list, we were consulted during the development of the Donor Guide for recognizing the risk of misuse of NGOs for terrorist financing. A guide to the donor community was presented at a joint event with the Office and the Board. Three trainings were held for CSO representatives on this topic.

The process of drafting the Law on Social Entrepreneurship was stopped and continued with the strong participation of civil society after the meeting with the Prime Minister. The CI, together with members of the Coalition for Solidarity Economy, have been appointed to the new Work Group. All civil society representatives worked together on a new Draft that was presented to other members of the WG and the Ministry of Labor, which coordinates the process. One meeting of the working group was held, and so far there have been no changes in the position of the Ministry or any progress in the process.

At the same meeting with the Prime Minister, the CI initiated the activation of the process for amending the Law on Volunteering. Subsequently, the Ministry of Labor and the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society also began work on establishing a Working Group to analyze the effects of the existing law. CI provided inputs for the participation of other CSOs. A policy brief has been prepared presenting CI's position on the shortcomings of the existing law and recommendations for change.

CI became a member of the work group for drafting the new Public Administration Reform Strategy. CI was also a member of the previous work group that worked on the development of the current AP and participated in its monitoring. CI also provides input in the process of monitoring the PAR process supervised by the EC, as a member of the Weber platform and in direct communication with the DEU. Two work group meetings were held.

An advocacy campaign was successfully conducted to exclude disastrous provisions in the draft of the Accounting Law, which abolished the special chart of accounts for non-profit organizations.

## **CSSF program with PCI from London**

Civic Initiatives will launch a youth work program in southern Serbia in February in co-operation with the Peaceful Change Initiative from London. The inception phase, lasting 6 months, will start in February, where the role of the CI will probably be extended to cooperation with local self-governments and work with the media, but also to determine all the details of the work on the project.

## **International Civil Society Week - ICSW 2019**

International Civil Society Week (ICSW) 2019 brought together over 700 civil society leaders, activists, and citizens from 93 countries, who come from different sectors and parts of the world to Belgrade. The complete report is attached.

## **Miljenko Dereta Space**

In November 2019, an exhibition was held on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the death of Miljenko Dereta, the founder of Civic Initiatives. The exhibition symbolically presented Miljenko's life's work and efforts within civil society.

On the occasion of this anniversary, the Miljenko Dereta Space was opened, which in the future will serve to bring together civil society and citizens who are committed to positive social change. For now, the ground floor is in function, and in the next few months, the other two floors will be completed.

## **ANNEX 1**

### **International Civil Society Week - ICSW 2019**

#### **The power of togetherness in Belgrade**

International Civil Society Week (ICSW) 2019 brought together over 700 civil society leaders, activists, and citizens from 93 countries, coming from different sectors and parts of the world to Belgrade, to work together to find answers to current global challenges in the field of human rights, democracy, international development and to find a solution to defend the space for civil society action.

For the first time in almost a quarter of a century of holding this international gathering, CIVICUS, in cooperation with Civic Initiatives, held its flagship event in the Balkans, a region that provides a suitable place to explore the need for togetherness and strength of action.

This region, and especially Serbia, demonstrates that changes in laws, strategies or governments do not guarantee democracy, because democracy is constantly being worked on. By holding the ICSW in Belgrade, we have managed to draw the public's attention and send a message rooted in local circumstances, which at the same time fully reflects on global challenges.

#### **Events that preceded ICSW 2019**

##### **ICSW LOCAL EVENTS**

ICSW's local partners organized 25 accompanying events at various regional and international locations between January and April 2019, as an overture to the main ICSW event in Belgrade. Representatives of local ICSW events then gathered at the main event in Belgrade to share their diverse experiences and perspectives with the global delegation in Belgrade. Some of the countries where ICSW local events took place are: Argentina, USA, Slovakia, Mexico, Ukraine, Serbia, Albania, Zimbabwe, Macedonia, Zimbabwe, Lebanon and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

##### **YOUTH ASSEMBLY IN NOVI SAD**

The Youth Assembly was held on April 6 and 7, 2019 in Novi Sad, which was attended by 85 young CIVICUS members from 40 countries and 57 different civil society organizations. The focus of this year's Youth Assembly was on researching the mechanisms and conditions for strengthening the power of young people to effectively contribute to a peaceful, just and (self) sustainable world.

##### **GLOBAL SUMMIT ON CIVIL SOCIETY 2019**

The event gathered 120 leaders from civil society organizations and activists from around the world. The most important item on the agenda was the adoption of the Belgrade Call to Action, which is a call to civil society to jointly defend the votes of the people for the sake of a just and sustainable world. Currently, 135 civil society organizations have supported this call for action.



## **ICSW 2019**

### **OPENING CEREMONY**

CSW 2019 was opened in the presence of more than 1,200 participants, consisting of representatives of civil society from around the world, activists, human rights activists, and representatives of the diplomatic corps, celebrating civil society, human rights and community. Lisa John, Secretary General of CIVICUS, and Maja Stojanović, Executive Director of Civic Initiatives, welcomed the audience from the main stage, after which Yetnebersh Nigussie, lawyer and activist for the rights of persons with disabilities from Ethiopia, and Marija Lukić from Serbia shared their personal stories. This was followed by a political satirical play "24 minutes with Kesić" specially designed for ICSW 2019, and the ceremony closed with a performance of "Rock Camp for Girls" which lifted the audience in a fun and empowering exploration of the meaning of togetherness.

### **PLENARY SESSIONS: BRIDGES, STEPS, STREETS**

On the topic of the power of community, within the International Civil Society Week, a five-day experience full of provocative and vivid presentations, discussions and workshops was held by representatives of numerous civil society organizations and activists.

The realization is designed through three basic segments of events:

1. Bridges - The focus of this segment was on networking participants and creating alliances, solidarity, and collective action, clarifying goals, identifying, and connecting with relevant actors, defining roles, and maintaining relationships based on common values.
2. Steps - This segment covered the sharing of tools, resources, skills and approaches that enable efficient and innovative cooperation, with a focus on working together to protect and defend fundamental rights and democratic freedoms and ensure sustainable development.
3. Streets - This segment explored the strengths of emerging grassroots civic movements around the world, considered ways to communicate with citizens to better connect with their target groups, and considered what skills civil society organizations need to engage citizens in advocacy, community building, or philanthropy.

### **PARALLEL EVENTS AND INTERACTIVE SESSIONS**

Parallel events were organized every day and their goal was the exchange of experiences and knowledge, by various organizations around the world. A total of 18 parallel events were held led by a number of organizations, covering a wide range of topics.

### **PUSSY RIOT PERFORMANCE**

As part of the evening sessions of the International Civil Society Week, the collective Pussy Riot performed their renowned performance based on the book 'Riot Days' (Maria Alyokhina). The performance is a combination of music, documentary video material and sharp political commentary. As the band played jazz-punk music, slogans such as 'Anyone Can Be a Pussy Riot' and 'Revolution Requires a Big Screen' shone in bold.

## **FREEDOM RUNNER**

More than 200 civil society leaders, activists and human rights activists ran through the streets of Belgrade as part of the final action of International Civil Society Week. Action Freedom Runner has launched a global campaign calling on people around the world to run on behalf of human rights defenders, those who are oppressed and threatened.

The Freedom Runner campaign was launched in collaboration with the Belgrade Marathon on April 14, 2019.

The first race of this global campaign was dedicated to Marija Lukić, a victim of sexual violence, who continues to fight for her rights on behalf of all of us.

## **THREE FREEDOMS**

The Three Freedoms Platform for the Protection of Civic Space in Serbia is a declaration of civil society organizations in Serbia signed by 20 CSOs during ICSW2019. The International Civil Society Week was a great opportunity to launch a front that, like the "watchdog" mechanism, would timely warn of the tendency to reduce the space for action of civil societies. Such a mechanism has proved necessary following the numerous obstructions that have befallen the civil society sector in recent years through the narrowing of freedoms of assembly, association, and expression.

## **ICSW 2019 IN NUMBERS**

- 700+ participants
- 74 volunteers
- 42 partner organizations
- 37 guest lecturers
- 25 local events on "The Power of Togetherness"
- Online reach of plenary sessions streaming -124,331
- 5872 Tweets # ICSW2019
- More than 160 articles written about ICSW 2019 (in national and global media)