

## CIVICUS/ODI Research Report

# How Civil Society Influences Policy:

A Comparative Analysis  
of the *CIVICUS Civil Society Index*  
in Post-Communist Europe

Lorenzo Fioramonti & V. Finn Heinrich





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- Citizen bodies are able to interact openly and legitimately with government and business; and
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# **How Civil Society Influences Policy:**

## **A Comparative Analysis of the *CIVICUS Civil Society Index* in Post-Communist Europe**

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CIVICUS – World Alliance for Citizen Participation

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## Executive summary

This working paper presents an analysis of the policy-relevant findings of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index in a group of countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia: Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine.

Since the heyday of civil society mobilisation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, most of these countries have seen a decline of citizen participation in civil society activities, in spite of steady economic growth and epochal events, such as the accession of many of these countries to the European Union (EU). The analysis of the main problems affecting civil society in these countries provides information on how to make civil society organisations (CSOs) sustainable in the long run and strengthen their contribution to policy-making.

### *Structure of analysis*

1. In Part 1 of the paper, the methodology, research approach and main goals of the CSI project are introduced. The two primary goals of the CSI are to enhance the strength and sustainability of civil society, and to strengthen civil society's contribution to progressive social change. To achieve these goals, CSI stakeholders make use of participatory and other research methods to assess the state of civil society in their country. This assessment is then used to collectively set goals and create an agenda for strengthening civil society in the future.
2. Part 2 presents the preliminary results of the CSI in post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. This analysis is organised thematically and the results are presented along the four CSI dimensions, namely *structure*, *environment*, *values* and *impact*. According to the analysis, CSOs in these post-communist countries still suffer from limited citizen participation and a lack of financial resources. Moreover, a political and cultural environment, affected by widespread mistrust in institutions and fellow citizens, does not facilitate the relationship between CSOs and society at large. Also, many CSOs, especially urban-based NGOs, are often perceived as donor-driven elitist organisations that do not meet societal needs and do not address people's concerns. In terms of the values practised and promoted by CSOs, this research found that even though most CSOs hold positive values (e.g. tolerance and non-violence) they often fail to promote them in society at large. Interestingly, the analysis notes that environmental sustainability is a widely and effectively promoted value by CSOs in post-communist countries, thanks to the activities of a number of environmental organisations that have successfully elicited public support and set the public agenda on environmental issues. Finally, the impact that CSOs' activities have on institutional processes (that we have termed 'impact on political system') and on society at large are analysed. In this regard, the analysis suggests that poor impact on society is mainly due to the fact that most CSOs are not embedded in society at the grassroots level and, therefore, struggle to empower citizens, especially marginalised groups. At the political level, the lack of advocacy and research skills further undermines CSOs' contribution to policy-making and reduces their capacity to acquire expertise and collect evidence that could be utilised to influence policy.
3. Part 3 delves into the issue of policy influence and describes how CSOs in these post-communist countries interact with government institutions, what channels they have to elicit policy-makers' attention and which strategies they adopt to influence policy. The analysis applies the RAPID framework, which focuses on four factors: political context, links, evidence and external influences. The importance of these factors is confirmed by the CSI findings, which confirm that the political context affects CSOs' contribution to policy-making and that research-based evidence and external influences can be exploited to improve the policy impact of civil society. As the analysis of these post-communist countries shows, the interaction between civil society groups and policy-makers is affected by a political context in which personal links to key political

actors turn out to be the most effective way to influence policy-making. However, private contacts with policy-makers can easily turn into clientelistic (and even corrupt) relationships that jeopardise CSOs' credibility in society at large. Moreover, a type of policy influence, which is almost completely based on private contacts and political allegiances, does not encourage CSOs to develop specific expertise, since their contribution to policy-making is not dependent on their know-how. In this regard, the analysis suggests that donors (and other actors interested in strengthening civil society) should focus on assisting CSOs in gaining specific skills to collect evidence, to make effective use of this evidence in the political process and to encourage them to build networks with like-minded stakeholders, so that civil society can play a stronger role in important policy processes, such as the national budget process.

Since the CSI is an action-planning tool for civil society, the final section of Part 3 explains how the CSI project is already generating research-based evidence that might be used by CSOs to strengthen their role in society and their influence on policy. Here, a number of examples regarding how some CSOs have *already* employed the CSI project to achieve specific policy goals are provided.

4. Finally, conclusive remarks and a series of recommendations on how to improve the policy influence of CSOs operating in post-communist countries are offered.

### *Conclusions and recommendations*

This analysis suggests that a positive and respectful relationship between CSOs and the state is a crucial factor to ensure CSO long-term sustainability. Moreover, CSOs should focus on consolidating their role at the grassroots level, to enhance their credibility as 'voice of the people' and, in turn, strengthen their capacity to influence public policy. At the same time, donors (and other actors interested in strengthening civil society) should assist CSOs in building networks, gaining specific skills to collect evidence and make effective use of this evidence in the political process. In this respect, the CSI project constitutes a useful example of how research capacity can be built with the aim of strengthening the contribution of CSOs towards positive social development.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Civil society's crucial role in promoting good governance and people-centred development is widely acknowledged. Given the fact that Communist Europe lacked an independent civil society for almost half a century, a major focus of donors' work in the 1990s was to 'build civil society' as a key ingredient of the recipe for a successful transition to a market economy and liberal democracy. However, research conducted on post-communist Europe has underlined that civil society in these countries is still significantly affected by limited citizen participation and widespread civic disillusionment (Howard 2003), while the activities of civil society organisations (CSOs) often remain donor-driven, thus raising concerns about the long term financial sustainability of CSOs' work (Carothers and Ottaway 2000; Carothers 1999).

To put civil society in the driver's seat in identifying and developing strategies for its development, the international civil society network CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation developed the Civil Society Index (CSI), a participatory needs assessment and action planning tool for civil society at country level. The CSI aims to create a knowledge base and a momentum for civil society strengthening initiatives and is initiated and implemented by, and for, CSOs at the country level. It actively involves and disseminates its findings to a broad range of stakeholders, including government, donors, academics and the public at large. In its 2003-2006 implementation phase, the project is being implemented in more than 50 countries around the world.

This working paper reports on the policy relevant findings of the CSI project in the following post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine. Post-communist Europe is the region where the current implementation phase is most advanced and is also the region with the largest number of CSI studies by far, indicating a strong interest or need in this region for a widely-owned and transparent process for assessing the state of civil society and charting its way forward.

Most of the countries analysed in this paper experienced a climax of popular mobilisation and civil society involvement in public life in the late 1980s and early 1990s (i.e., Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Slovenia) when countrywide protests brought about the fall of the Soviet-controlled communist regimes, which had ruled for more than 40 years. However, during the last ten years, popular participation in civil society has remained low and the capacity of CSOs to stimulate civic engagement has fallen far short of its expectations. At the same time, anti-social attitudes have grown among the populations of these countries. This is epitomised by the rise of nationalist movements and xenophobic groups like those who led to the civil war that destroyed the Former Yugoslavia.

Apparent exceptions from this trend are Georgia and Ukraine, where two waves of popular mobilisation brought the Russian-sponsored regimes of Shevardnadze and Kuchma to an end in 2003 and 2004 respectively. Although it is too early to draw conclusions on the destiny of civic engagement in these two countries, it appears that the level of sustained citizen participation has fallen short of the expectations raised by the 'Rose' and the 'Orange' revolutions.

In some of the countries analysed in this paper, such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia, economic growth has been significant, though not always equitable. The European Union's (EU's) enlargement has been another major event affecting this part of Europe. In May 2004, Poland, the Czech

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<sup>1</sup> A particular acknowledgement is due to the staff of the National Coordinating Organisations that implemented the CSI in this region and that collected most of the data and information discussed here. The authors are particularly grateful to Gojko Bezovan (CERANEO – Centre for Development of Non-Profit Organisations, Zagreb, Croatia) and Tereza Vajdova (NROS – Civil Society Development Foundation, Prague, Czech Republic) for reviewing a draft version of this paper. A special recognition is also due to Julius Court, former Research Fellow at the ODI, for his support and guidance. Finally, the authors wish to thank the CIVICUS CSI team for the invaluable assistance and constant support and, in particular, Mahi Khallaf, Regina Martyn, Priscilla Ryan and Hannelore Wallner for their comments on the paper.



Republic and Slovenia, along with other post-communist countries not included in this paper, were granted access to the EU and, hence, have become eligible for structural funds. In 2007, two other countries, Bulgaria and Romania, will be granted membership. As will be discussed in more depth in this paper, the EU enlargement provides opportunities, but also poses challenges to CSOs. The main challenge is that international donors have begun to phase out their commitments in these countries and are moving eastwards, where new political pressures and humanitarian crises are attracting the attention of the donor community.

Thus, a new phase might begin for civil society in these countries. In this new phase, the relationship between CSOs and state institutions is likely to be crucial for at least two reasons. First, for countries that have accessed, or will access the EU, the EU *acquis communautaire* requires that an established system of interaction between public authorities and CSOs exist. Second, for all of the countries analysed here, national financial support (with the state being the most relevant one) will be the only long-term sustainable resource for CSOs. In this regard, supporting the establishment of a mutually respectful and functional relationship between CSOs and the state (e.g. government, bureaucracy) will be of utmost importance for those who aim to strengthen civil society in post-communist countries.

The final analysis of CSOs' policy influence draws upon the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) framework, developed at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), and investigates how CSOs can improve their skills in order to influence the decision-making processes in their countries. The RAPID framework helps the analysis focus on the relationship between CSOs' policy influence and crucial factors, such as the political context, the links between CSOs and other important players and the evidence generated through CSOs' work.

The key questions that have been leading the analysis are:

- What similarities and differences concerning civil society in these post-communist countries have been identified by the CSI project?
- What can we learn from the CSI project with regard to strengthening civil society in these countries?
- Do CSOs influence policy-making in these countries? If so, how do they impact policy? What best practices can be identified?
- What are the main challenges limiting civil society's policy impact? How can they be addressed?
- To what extent is evidence-based research important for CSOs to impact policy-making in these countries?
- How can the CSI enhance civil society's influence on policy-making?
- To date, how has the evidence generated by the CSI project been utilized by local organizations to affect policy?

# Part 1 – Project methodology and implementation approach

## 1.1. Introduction

Civil society is playing an increasingly important role in governance and development around the world. In most countries, however, knowledge about the state and makeup of civil society is limited, and there are few opportunities for civil society stakeholders to come together to discuss and reflect on the current state of civil society and the challenges it is facing.

The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) is a participatory needs assessment and action planning tool for civil society around the world, with the aim of creating a knowledge base and momentum for civil society strengthening initiatives. The CSI is initiated and implemented by, and for, civil society organizations at the country level, and actively involves and disseminates its findings to a broad range of stakeholders including: government, donors, academics and the public at large.

The two primary goals of the CSI are: to enhance the strength and sustainability of civil society, and to strengthen civil society's contribution to positive social change. To achieve these goals, civil society stakeholders make use of participatory and other research methods to assess the state of civil society. This assessment is then used to collectively set goals and create an agenda for strengthening civil society in the future.

The CSI was initiated in the late 1990s, when Helmut Anheier developed a basic methodology for the project (Anheier 2001, Anheier 2004, Holloway 2001). From 2000 to 2001, CIVICUS piloted the project in 13 countries (Heinrich/Naidoo 2001) and has subsequently evaluated and refined the project approach and methodology. In its current phase, the project is being implemented in more than 50 countries around the world.<sup>2</sup>

This first part describes the methodological and operational foundations of the current project approach.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2. Project methodology

Civil society is a complex concept. The task of defining and operationalising the concept, identifying civil society's essential features and designing a strategy to assess its state is, in itself, a complex and potentially controversial process. This section describes the key features of the CSI's civil society definition, analytical framework and research methodology.

### 1.2.1. Civil society definition

The CSI defines civil society as “the arena, outside of the family, the state and the market where people associate to advance common interests”.

One of the key features of this definition is the concept of civil society being an arena. The term ‘arena’ is used to describe the particular space in a society where people come together to debate, discuss, associate and seek to influence broader society. Another key feature is the acknowledgement of the ‘fuzziness’ of the boundaries between the spheres of civil society, the state, the market and family, since, in practice, many forms of collective citizen action are difficult to categorise into a specific sphere. Here, the CSI

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<sup>2</sup> See Annex 1 for a list of CSI partners in the implementation phase 2003-2006.

<sup>3</sup> The following sections are a substantially shortened version of a comprehensive account of the project's conceptual framework, research methodology and implementation approach (Heinrich 2004).

emphasises the function, namely collective citizen action to advance common interests, over the specific organisational form, in which the action takes place (Heinrich 2005, Uphoff/Krishna 2004). Based on the CSI's practical interest in strengthening civil society, the project also conceptualises civil society as a political term, rather than an economic one, which would be synonymous to the non-profit sector. The CSI focuses on collective public action in the broader context of governance and development, rather than on the economic role of non-profit organisations in society. This political perspective leads the CSI to focus on issues of power within the civil society arena, and between civil society actors and institutions of the state and the private sector.

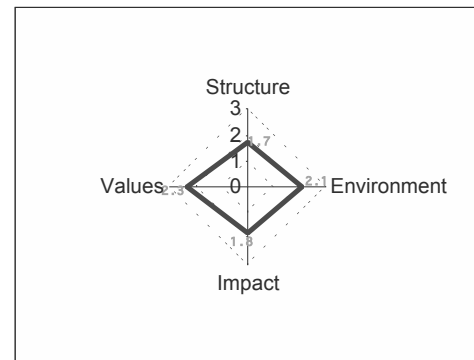
### 1.2.2. CSI analytical framework: indicators, sub-dimensions and dimensions

To interpret the current condition of civil society holistically, the CSI uses a broad understanding of the concept of the 'state of civil society'. This covers the structural and normative manifestations of civil society, and also encompasses the conditions that support or inhibit civil society's development as well as the consequences of civil society's activities for society at large.

The CSI uses 74 indicators for its civil society assessment, each of which measures an important aspect of the state of civil society.<sup>4</sup> These indicators are grouped together into 25 subdimensions, which are grouped into four dimensions: *structure*, *environment*, *values* and *impact*. These four dimensions can be represented graphically in the form of a Civil Society Diamond (see figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 – The Civil Society Diamond

- The **structure** dimension looks at civil society's make-up, size and composition, and examines the actors within the civil society arena, their main characteristics and the relationships among them.
- The **environment** dimension examines a variety of factors influencing civil society, including: political, legal, institutional, social, cultural and economic factors, as well as the attitudes and behaviour of state and private sector actors towards civil society. Although not part of civil society itself, civil society's environment is nonetheless crucial, as it may point towards root causes of potential problems.
- The **values** dimension addresses the principles and values adhered to, practised and promoted by civil society. To date, this aspect of civil society has not received much attention, partly because civil society's values are typically pre-defined as positive, progressive or democratic due to the definition chosen for civil society. The CSI holds that the ratio of tolerant vs. intolerant, progressive vs. fundamentalist and pro-poor vs. anti-poor civil society actors in a country is crucial for judging its overall state. Values such as democracy and transparency are also critical measures of civil society's legitimacy and credibility.
- The **impact** dimension measures the impact that civil society has on people's lives and on society as a whole. This dimension, therefore, adopts a broad notion of impact, which refers not only to the end result, or how much influence civil society has had in a particular area, but also the process, or how actively civil society is engaged in a particular area.



<sup>4</sup> The CSI scoring matrix is annexed to this working paper (Annex 2).

The project utilizes a mix of the following data collection methods and instruments to collect information on the indicator set:

1. Secondary data review
2. Regional stakeholder consultations
3. Population surveys
4. Media review
5. Fact-finding studies

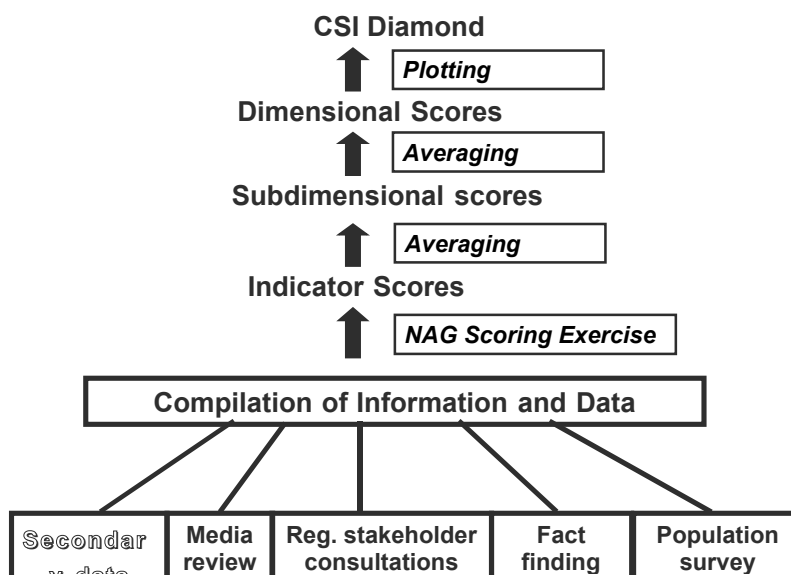
Together, these instruments collect the data required for preparing a narrative report on the state of civil society and scoring the indicators. Most indicators rely on more than one instrument, making it possible to apply methods of triangulation and cross-checks. The CSI research mix in a given country may include all or some of the methods listed above.

### 1.2.3. Indicator scoring

In order to increase comparability across countries and make the outcomes more easily understandable and communicable, a specific methodology was designed to reduce the complexity and diversity of the information gathered through the CSI research. The outcomes are indicator scores ranging from 0 to 3, which are aggregated into sub-dimension and dimension scores, and then used to form the Civil Society Diamond for each country.

Indicators are scored by a National Advisory Group (NAG) using a ‘citizen jury’ approach (Jefferson Center 2002), in which a group of citizens come together to deliberate and take decisions on a public issue, based on presented facts. In the case of the CSI, the NAG’s role is to give a score (similar to passing a judgement) on each indicator based on the evidence presented by the CSI country team. Figure 1.2 depicts the process and data sources used for scoring the indicators.

**Figure 1.2 – The CSI scoring methodology**



The scoring exercise and the resulting Civil Society Diamond is only one part of a larger analysis of civil society captured in the comprehensive country reports on the state of civil society in specific countries. The main purpose of the indicators is to point to crucial issues and to make essential components of civil society comparable across countries. The purpose of the country report is to provide as rich a picture as

possible, drawing on all available information without necessarily being constrained by demands for quantifiable information and comparability.

### 1.3. Implementation approach

The project is implemented by national-level CSOs, or research institutions, which receive guidance from the NAG and training and ongoing technical assistance from CIVICUS. The implementation approach can be broken down into the following steps, which have been followed in the countries presented in this paper<sup>5</sup>:

1. The national CSI partner **identifies** a three person National Index Team (NIT) who carries out a preliminary stakeholder analysis and puts together a National Advisory Group (NAG) to guide the project implementation process. The NIT includes:
  - Project Coordinator (representing national CSI partner)
  - Civil society expert
  - Participatory researcher
2. A **review of secondary data** is conducted by the NIT and an overview report is prepared and distributed to the NAG and CIVICUS for feedback.
3. A NIT representative attends a five-day **training workshop** on how to implement the CSI, which is conducted by the CIVICUS CSI team.
4. The **NAG meets** to:
  - Review the overview report
  - Discuss and adapt the project methodology
  - Discuss the definition of civil society
  - Conduct a social forces analysis
  - Assist in identifying participants for the regional stakeholder consultations.
5. **Primary research** is carried out through a mix of the following potential instruments:
  - Regional stakeholder survey & consultations
  - Population survey
  - Media review
  - Desk studies
6. Findings are submitted to the civil society expert who **drafts a country report**.
7. The NAG meets to **score indicators**, based on the draft country report and according to the project's scoring guidelines.
8. The **country report is updated** with results from the NAG scoring meeting.
9. A **national workshop** is convened to review and validate findings, to analyse principal strengths and weaknesses of civil society and to identify potential civil society strengthening activities.
10. Final scores and national workshop results are incorporated into a **final country report**, which is reviewed by CIVICUS.
11. A CSI **evaluation** is conducted by CIVICUS.

Of all the steps outlined above, the national CSI workshop deserves to be described in greater detail, since it is at the heart of the CSI's knowledge-action link. The workshop brings together a variety of civil society stakeholders, many of whom have been actively involved in the CSI research process, for instance as NAG members, participants in the regional stakeholder consultations or as key informants for specific research questions. The goal of the national workshop is twofold. First, it aims to engage stakeholders in a

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<sup>5</sup> The only exception is Georgia, where due to time and financial constraints, the CSI's Shortened Assessment Tool (CSI-SAT) was implemented. Based on the original CSI methodology, the CSI-SAT has been developed to respond to situations where a wealth of secondary information on civil society is available and/or resource mobilisation for primary research proves to be difficult. Also, as participation by national-level organisations in the full CSI is only possible approximately every three years, the CSI-SAT offers a useful tool to prepare for a full CSI and gain knowledge on the state of civil society through an analysis of existing information. Different from the full CSI, the CSI-SAT only relies on secondary data and does not entail any participatory activities, such as the regional stakeholder consultations or national CSI workshop.

critical reflection on the results of the CSI initiative in order to arrive at a common understanding of civil society's current state and its major challenges. This is a prerequisite for the second goal, which is for participants to use the findings as a basis for the identification of specific strengths and weaknesses, as well as potential areas of improvement for civil society. If deemed appropriate, the national workshop could culminate in the development of a specific action agenda, which is subsequently carried out by the stakeholders. This cycle of assessment, reflection and action, coupled with the general participatory nature of the project, are at the core of CSI's attempt to successfully link research with action. Discussions, results and follow-up activities of the national CSI workshop in participating countries of post-communist Europe will feature prominently in the remainder of this paper.

### *Current status of the project*

As stated above, the CSI is a participatory assessment of the state of civil society, drawing on qualitative as well as quantitative indicators, expert assessments and statistical information. In strict methodological terms, such studies fall short of comparability standards, since they cannot escape the subjectivity of their measurement process. Nevertheless, the CSI attempts to limit the problem of subjectivity by requiring the judges (as explained in Part 1) to base their assessment on the results of a range of primary (e.g. population surveys, stakeholder surveys, and media reviews) and secondary data for each indicator. Clearly, this does not solve completely the problem of comparability, which remains a challenge for the CSI, as well as most social research studies. However, focusing the analysis on a group of countries with similar historical, political and social backgrounds renders this comparative investigation methodologically less challenging and makes the findings more suitable for generalisation across countries in this region.

The CSI project is still underway in some of the post-communist countries analysed here, which poses certain limitations with regard to the scope of this paper. As is clarified throughout the analysis, most of the findings presented are preliminary and, hence, the conclusions drawn are still tentative, even though they are based on a significant amount of already available information.

Due to its ongoing implementation, it is still too early to document the impact that the CSI is likely to have on civil society strengthening and on CSOs' policy influence in the countries analysed in this paper. Nevertheless, we attempted to collect all of the information that is available to date. A regional workshop with representatives from most of the countries analyzed in this paper was held in April 2006. The workshop provided a fruitful opportunity to discuss the ways in which the CSI has strengthened the policy impact and research capacity of CSOs in post-communist Europe.

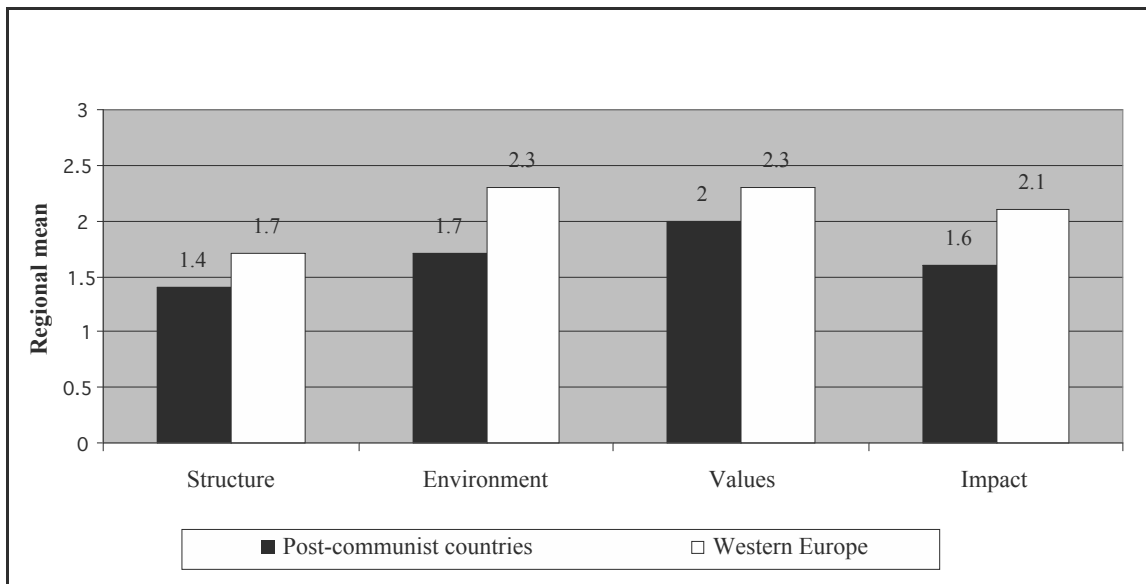
## Part 2 – Analysis of the CSI dimensions

### 2.1. Overview

The following sections focus on the CSI's four dimensions of civil society, *structure*, *environment*, *values* and *impact*, and describe the main preliminary findings in several post-communist countries from Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia: Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine. The analysis has been organised thematically, along the four-dimensional conceptualisation of civil society employed by the CSI project.

Initially, it is useful to locate the overall state of civil society in the post-communist countries in a broader setting through a comparison with the Western European countries participating in the CSI.<sup>6</sup> This type of comparison helps us understand how the post-communist countries analysed in this paper fare vis-à-vis neighbouring countries with which they have political contact, especially now that the EU has commenced its enlargement towards the East. From the graph below (figure 2.1), it becomes clear that civil society is consistently weaker in post-communist countries than in Western European democracies. The CSI research found that this overall 'weakness' is mainly due to limited citizen participation in civil society activities and CSO's lack of financial resources. Moreover, the CSI noted that the political and cultural environment in post-communist countries is affected by, among others, institutional deficiencies (i.e. weak rule of law, widespread corruption and low institutional effectiveness) and limited social capital, which is likely to hamper the strengthening of civil society. In general, CSOs in post-communist countries adhere to universally accepted values, but often fail to promote them in society at large. Furthermore, their impact on policy-making and their capacity to meet societal needs is limited.

Figure 2.1 – CSI dimensions in post-communist countries and Western Europe compared



According to the CSI findings, the post-communist countries analysed in this paper share a number of similar characteristics. When these common features are compared with those of countries from Western Europe, the data clearly points out that post-communist countries are distinguishable as a regional group, even though some specific differences exist within the group. As a result, the CSI analysis maintains that the differences among post-communist countries should be seen as 'differences in degree', rather than 'differences in kind' (Howard 2003: 6). This means that what differs in the countries analysed in this

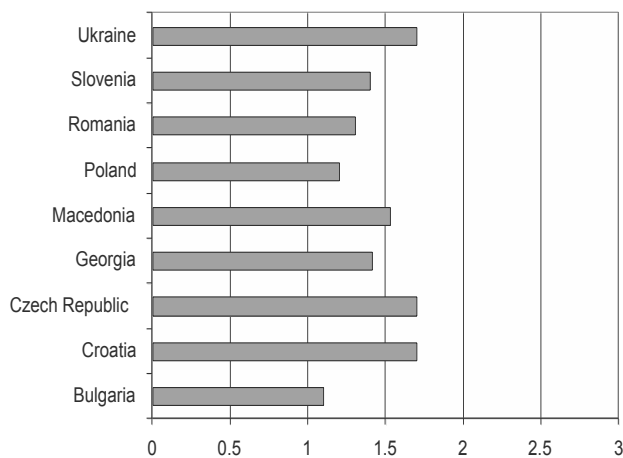
<sup>6</sup> The data labelled as Western Europe refers to Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

paper is not the types of factors affecting civil society, but rather the extent to which these factors undermine or encourage the development of civil society in each country.

## 2.2. Structure

According to the CSI, the structure of civil society denotes the structural characteristics of the civil society arena and its actors, their main characteristics and the relationship between them (see also Salamon *et al.* 1999; Welzel 1999; Bratton 1994).

**Figure 2.2 - CSI scores for structure**



The CSI found that citizen participation in civil society activities is rather low in all countries, which presents challenges to the future of civic activism.<sup>7</sup> Besides citizen participation, this section also discusses two major structural features of civil society: the main internal divides affecting civil society (e.g. urban-rural divide, skewed social composition) and the financial resources available to CSOs. These three components of civil society's structure, namely participation, internal divides and financial resources, were selected because of their relevance for the development of civil society. Indeed, according to the CSI findings, these three structural issues pose the most

significant threats to the future of organised civil society in the post-communist countries analysed here. Thus, understanding these structural elements is crucial to help CSOs and relevant stakeholders define appropriate strategies to strengthen civil society.

### 2.2.1. Citizen participation

The CSI project analyses citizen participation on the basis of the *extent* of citizen involvement in civil society and its *depth*.<sup>8</sup> As is clear from the preliminary results of the CSI, all post-communist countries analysed here exhibit a rather low level of citizen participation in various civic activities (e.g. signing a petition, volunteering for an organisation and donating for charity), especially when compared with Western European neighbours. The findings maintain that limited participation is a common characteristic in the post-communist countries. Consequently, it is crucial to grasp the reasons for this phenomenon if CSOs are to increase citizen participation and support for their work.

The CSI study found that one of the major factors affecting participation in CSOs in these post-communist countries is the legacy of communism. Although with some slight differences, the post-communist societies analysed here exhibit a somewhat negative attitude towards voluntary work, which citizens strongly associate with the communist era, during which people were coerced into volunteering for state-controlled organisations. As a result, in an attempt to regain control over their spare time, most citizens simply refuse to participate in any type of collective civil initiative (see also Howard 2003). Nevertheless, those who do participate in civil society initiatives often do it in organisations that survived the fall of communism, rather than in organisations that were created after 1989 (see also Fric *et al.* 1999; Saulean *et*

<sup>7</sup> In this respect, the CSI analysis broadly confirms what academic research concerning civil society in post-communist Europe has found over the last years. See for instance, Howard 2003; Zimmer and Priller 2004; Celichowski 2004; Rose 1996, 2001; Rose *et al.* 1997; Tempest 1997; Bunce 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Indicators for these two subdimensions include: percentage of citizens who undertake non-partisan political action, donate to charity, belong to CSOs, do voluntary work and participate in community activities, and (for *depth*) how much people donate to charity, how much volunteer work they do and to how many different CSOs they belong to.



al. 1999). Indeed, the CSI data confirms that the myriad of recreational associations (e.g. sport clubs and cultural groups) and trade unions are the types of CSOs with the highest level of participation. During communism, these types of CSOs were generally supported by the totalitarian state in an attempt to use associational life to spread socialist values and homogenise society at large (Bunce 1999; Zimmer and Priller 2004; Hann 1992). Moreover, as argued by most stakeholders participating in the CSI project, the communist legacy also explains the particularly low level of participation in organisations that address social welfare, since most people in post-communist countries hold the opinion that the responsibility for addressing social issues rests with the state and not with the citizens.

In Bulgaria, limited citizen participation was seen as the major weakness for civil society by the participants involved in the CSI assessment who maintained that CSOs are often regarded by the public as advisors to the authorities rather than as citizen organisations. Also in Romania and Macedonia serious concerns were raised by local stakeholders, who recognised that many CSOs have been historically driven by donor priorities and have failed to gain widespread support. Poland, in spite of its closeness to Western European countries and its accession to the EU, shows the lowest percentage of citizens participating in legal or illegal demonstrations or having regular contact with politicians.<sup>9</sup> In the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, the CSI found a particularly low level of citizen participation in the activities of organised civil society, even though in the last years (mainly in the aftermath of the Rose and Orange revolutions) civic engagement has steadily grown.

As far as citizen participation is concerned, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and, to a lesser extent Croatia, can be viewed as partial exceptions. In these countries, the level of citizen participation in civil society activities is comparatively higher than in the other post-communist countries analysed, even if it remains somewhat lower than in Western European countries.

The Czech Republic distinguishes itself as the only country where citizen's voluntary activity takes place in a wide range of organisations, including a number of advocacy groups and, especially, environmental organisations. As early as 1999, the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project had already noted that in the Czech Republic employment and volunteering in advocacy groups greatly exceeded the regional trend, 'perhaps reflecting the civic activities that produced the Czech Republic's "velvet revolution" of 1989' (Fric *et al.* 1999: 294).

#### **BOX 1– Low levels of citizen participation**

Most post-communist countries experience low levels of citizen participation in civil society's activities, and very few CSOs can boast a widespread membership (with the only exception of trade unions, some charitable associations, and some environmental organizations). The CSI found that most organisations were created in response to donor requirements or to carry out specific projects, instead of having grown out of citizen mobilisation. Consequently, CSOs' activities end up informing and supporting citizens without really empowering them, let alone building active citizens or communities.

#### *2.2.2. Unbalanced geographical distribution and under-representation of marginalised groups*

The capacity of CSOs to reach out to the most marginalised groups in society is particularly important due to the limited ability of these groups to further their interests and voice their concerns. However, in most countries around the world, CSOs are distributed unevenly and are often concentrated in urban, usually, wealthier areas (Carothers & Ottaway 2000; Robinson 1996). In most newly democratised countries, such an imbalance is usually due to a dearth of infrastructure in the rural and remote areas of these countries and, particularly, to the extreme reliance of CSOs on foreign donors. Foreign donors require CSOs to follow sophisticated procedures to obtain funding which is more easily accessed by urban-based, professionalized and often English-speaking organisations (Ottaway & Chung 1999).

The CSI research confirmed that post-communist countries are no exception to this trend. In the countries analysed here, few organisations are in close contact with the most disadvantaged groups, this is mainly

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.esds.ac.uk/International/access/ess.asp> (accessed on 30th October 2006).

due to the uneven distribution of CSOs and the limited presence of marginalised social groups in the membership of existing organisations. For instance, the majority of CSOs are based in the most developed urban areas, while only a few groups are active in rural areas (see also USAID 2005). At the same time, CSO membership is highly correlated to education and socio-economic status (most of the people who participate in CSOs' initiatives have a higher level of education, live in large settlements and are middle-aged). Therefore, important marginalised social groups – such as religious minorities and the rural poor – remain under-represented in the membership, let alone leadership, of CSOs.

In the post-communist countries analysed here (similarly to most newly democratised nations), this aspect becomes particularly important if one considers that disadvantaged groups often struggle to have their demands heard in new democratic systems. This is due to their limited empowerment and the tendency of electoral rules to marginalise minority groups.<sup>10</sup> The CSI found that even when donors specifically design programmes to target marginalised groups, the latter seldom become active participants in these initiatives but remain recipients of services. In some cases (e.g. in Bulgaria) disadvantaged groups are on the receiving end of projects undertaken by organisations that are often urban-based and whose staffs come from a different socio-economic and cultural background. The elitist composition of many CSOs inevitably affects their credibility as a voice of the 'people' and tends to negatively impact their public image. Moreover, this dearth of grassroots representativeness is likely to discredit them vis-à-vis democratically-elected public authorities.

With regard to differences 'in degree', the CSI shows that Romania and, to a greater extent, Bulgaria are the countries where CSOs are least representative of different social groups. By contrast, the Czech Republic is the only country where the representation of socially marginalised groups in CSOs was regarded as appropriate by the regional stakeholders who participated in the CSI assessment. It is also where CSOs are distributed rather evenly throughout the national territory.

Another interesting common trait worth noting is the existence of an overall balance between men and women's participation in civil society activities in all of the post-communist countries analysed here. In all countries, gender has not been found to have any significant barring effect when it comes to being active in CSOs (even though men are more likely to occupy positions of leadership). This is not a completely unexpected finding given that, although to varying degrees, women's participation was highly valued in the socialist tradition and the participation of women in collective structures, such as trade unions and cultural associations, was directly encouraged by the state (Funk & Mueller 1993; Bunce 1999).

The capacity of CSOs to be more representative of different needs and interests appears to remain a crucial issue that both organisations and donors should address. Organised civil society would definitely benefit from a more accurate representation of societal interests and needs, which would increase its credibility as a public voice of society at large. This, in turn, would make CSOs stronger and more determined vis-à-vis other important players in society, above all, governments.

### *2.2.3. Financial resources*

An important element to take into account when analysing the structure of civil society is the amount and types of financial resources available to organisations. Financial resources are extremely important to understand the strengths and weaknesses of organised civil society, since they deeply affect the existence of organisations and their capacity to achieve their goals. In general, CSOs' financial resources come from members, donors or public authorities and can take the form of in-kind (e.g. equipment and office space) or monetary contributions.

In general, the CSI found a general shortage of financial resources for CSOs. Similarly to other regions of the world where CSOs receive significant amount of resources from international donors, the inflow of

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to imply that similar problems cannot be detected in consolidated democracies as well.

funding tends to privilege professionalized NGOs (often urban-based) at the expense of other organisations, which might be closer to the population but lack the financial expertise to comply with the requirements imposed by donors for releasing funds. For instance, in Georgia most CSOs receive funding (up to 100 % of their overall budget) from foreign donors and urban NGOs receive the lion's share.

In Romania and Bulgaria, financial viability continues to be an essential issue for the development of the NGO sector, as most of the organisations currently depend on foreign grants which will be reduced in the next years, due to their upcoming EU accession (see also USAID 2005). In Poland, overall financial resources for CSOs have gradually decreased since 2001, and most participants in the CSI project agreed that the financial situation of Polish CSOs posed major problems for the future. Even in the Czech Republic and Slovenia, the CSI survey of regional stakeholders revealed that the overwhelming majority of CSO representatives regard financial resources as insufficient and decreasing.

Even in Croatia, which is the post-communist country with highest level of financial resources for CSOs, most regional stakeholders lamented that these resources were not always sufficient to accomplish their organisations' goals. According to respondents, these financial issues are more acute in regions where foreign donors are less active, but the absence of stable institutional support systems for CSOs also plays a role. Moreover, experts speaking at the CSI national workshop confirmed that financial issues, as in all other post-communist countries, are likely to become a crucial obstacle for the sustainability of Croatian civil society in the long run.<sup>11</sup>

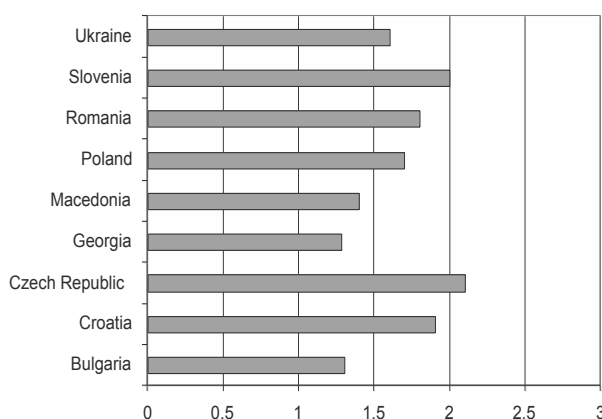
#### BOX 2 – Financial resources and international donors

The CSI findings largely confirm what other studies have maintained regarding the financial resources of CSOs in post-communist countries, and the role played by foreign donors (USAID 2004; Carothers 1996, 1999; Henderson 2002). Most CSOs operating in the countries analysed in this paper remain donor-driven, especially in Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, and Ukraine. State support and other forms of contributions (such as donations or corporate social responsibility) are minimal and are the exception rather than the rule. The CSI observed that civil society stakeholders are generally aware of the risks and challenges that lie ahead, and are conscious of the fact that relying on international donors might seriously jeopardise the sustainability of civil society in the future. For countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, the common view is that the upcoming accession to the EU will present both challenges and opportunities for CSOs' financial sustainability, and these organisations will need to acquire new skills if they intend to survive in the new environment.

### 2.3. Environment

The CSI's conceptualisation of civil society's environment seeks to give space to a range of different theoretical approaches on the contributing factors to a strong civil society. In doing so, the CSI takes into account political, institutional, social, cultural and economic factors. Although not a part of civil society itself, the environment is crucial in assessing civil society's status and devising potential strengthening initiatives. In analysing civil society's environment in post-communist countries, this paper focuses on the *political*, *cultural* and *socio-economic* contexts, with the aim of assessing whether and how these different settings are

Figure 2.3 - CSI scores for *environment*



<sup>11</sup> In this respect, the establishment of the National Foundation for Civil Society Development in 2004 can definitely be seen as a significant contribution to the financial strengthening of CSOs at large. Ever since its inception, the Foundation has been providing educational opportunities for CSOs, as well as grants that support grassroots activities and programmes (see also USAID 2005). However, CSI participants agreed that it is still too early to assess its impact on the financial sustainability of organised civil society.

conducive for civil society and what type of challenges, if any, they pose to its future development.

### 2.3.1. Political context

The CSI analysis of the political context looks at the political situation within each individual country and its impact on civil society. It includes elements such as corruption, rule of law, state's effectiveness, decentralisation, the extent of political competition in the party system and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The CSI found that most post-communist countries are negatively affected by a significant level of corruption within the public administration. They are also affected by limited (e.g. Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Ukraine) or nonexistent (e.g. Georgia, Macedonia) decentralisation from central to local government. Expectedly, Macedonia's political context is also aggravated by the armed conflict that took place in 2001, which has deeply influenced the types of issues addressed by CSOs. In Georgia, state institutions are rather ineffective and lack the capacity to provide basic services (e.g. water, electricity and sanitation) to many citizens.

Exceptionally, the Czech Republic and Slovenia present a political context that is positively influenced by inclusive political competition and, to a certain extent, the upholding of the rule of law and state effectiveness. Interestingly, not only does Slovenia present the lowest level of perceived corruption in public administration among the countries analysed in this paper, but it also fares better than some longstanding EU member states (i.e. Greece and Italy).

#### **BOX 3 – Political context in Georgia and Ukraine**

Georgia presents the lowest scores in all CSI indicators concerning the political context and its conduciveness for civil society's development. Aside from widespread corruption and almost nonexistent decentralisation, Georgia also suffers from extremely limited political competition (dominated by a major party and a high threshold to enter parliament) and a low level of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of association and freedom of the press (see also USAID 2005). Although it is too early to assess to what extent the new phase in Ukrainian politics will affect the overall political context, the CSI registered at least one positive trend triggered by the Orange revolution, epitomized by a growing number of citizens that affirm having become more willing to mobilise themselves to protect their political and civil rights.

### 2.3.2. Cultural context

Socio-cultural norms and attitudes can also be conducive or detrimental to the development of civil society. Although civic norms, such as public trust, are often viewed as key components of social capital (Putnam 1993, 2001) and occasionally also as an element of civil society (Bratton 1994), the CSI examines these norms as an important *social resource* that civil society can benefit from and sees them as part of the external environment. In its assessment of civil society, the CSI looks at levels of trust, tolerance, public spiritedness and social capital among members of society.

In the post-communist countries analysed here, the study found rather common features with regard to socio-cultural attitudes and pointed out similar low levels of public trust and social capital. Citizens' trust in public institutions is particularly low. In our view, mistrust in public institutions must be interpreted as the outcome of a variety of factors pertaining to both present dynamics and past legacies. As maintained by recent research (Howard 2003), most citizens in post-communist countries have not only been unhappy with the widespread corruption affecting the communist state for a long time, but have had their expectations of radical change after 1989 frustrated by rising levels of corruption and clientelism in the new democratic institutions.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This general disappointment has been further exacerbated by the introduction of privatisation policies that have contributed to lowering the living standards of most citizens and skyrocketed unemployment.

In these countries, social capital is also very low, with only a minority of citizens believing that most people can be trusted (Inglehart *et al.* 2005). Low trust in fellow citizens is, at least in part, a hangover from the communist era. During communism, the state-induced surveillance, which citizens exerted on one another, encouraged individuals to hold conformist and cautious attitudes in public, while developing more sincere and trustworthy relationships within the family (Banfield 1979; Bunce 1999).<sup>13</sup> The CSI findings support this interpretation and show that, still today, widespread public mistrust does not pre-empt the establishment of strong relationships of trust within the family and close friends.

**BOX 4 – The exceptional case of Slovenia**

In terms of social capital, the only exception is Slovenia, where levels of public and interpersonal trust are as high as those of Western European democracies. According to the World/European Values Survey, only 15% of respondents trusted other fellow citizens in 1995, while this number increased to 22% in 1999. The CSI population survey confirmed this positive trend with around 37% of citizens trusting other compatriots in 2004. In this regard, though, the author of the CSI report on Slovenia argues that such an increased level of interpersonal trust is mainly due to a rapid transition to a liberal democracy (including respect and promotion of the rule of law, basic freedoms and rights) and a steady economic growth, rather than civil society activities (Verbajns 2006).

Such political and cultural context is likely to pose several challenges to the development of civil society. Owing to mistrust and poor social capital, most citizens in post-communist countries establish bonds and trustworthy relationships within private circles and distance themselves from the public dimension of social life, i.e. the arena of civil society. This threatens the very existence of a public sphere of civic engagement and renders the task of promoting citizen participation more difficult for CSOs.

At the same time, CSOs must be aware of the fact that such a generalised climate of mistrust inevitably affects the way in which citizens view CSOs and perceive the CSOs' role in society. Not surprisingly, the CSI found that a rather common

perception exists among citizens that CSOs are simply representatives of specific interests and do not address issues that are important to the people.<sup>14</sup> On a more positive note, the CSI found that, although the majority of citizens think corruption also affects CSOs, they believe that instances of corruption in civil society are much more rare than in any other sector of society.

### 2.3.2. Socio-economic context

Besides the political and cultural context, the socio-economic context can also hinder or facilitate the development of civil society. Indeed, civic engagement is made possible by the fact that people have the time and resources to devote to common causes. In this regard, social and economic inequalities and humanitarian crises can easily reduce the space for collective activities and dramatically undermine the existence of a civic sphere.

On the basis of this understanding, the CSI analysis of the socio-economic context looks at the country's socio-economic situation and its impact on civil society. It includes elements such as widespread poverty, severe socio-economic inequity, illiteracy, civil war and conflict. The CSI study found that, in general, all post-communist countries analysed here have a rather conducive socio-economic context for civil society.<sup>15</sup>

The CSI analysis concluded that, by and large, CSOs are operating in a somewhat conducive socio-economic environment where adult literacy is relatively high and there is no widespread poverty or major economic inequality within the population, except for marginalised groups such as the Roma and remote

<sup>13</sup> Personal connections also played an important role in the shortage economy, since people relied on their family, friends, and acquaintances to get things done rather than go through official channels.

<sup>14</sup> There are exceptions, though, such as religious organisations and the trade unions.

<sup>15</sup> Clearly, differences between countries do exist, owing to the specific characteristics of each country's communist regime and to the policies and the reforms adopted after the transition to democracy, which varied from country to country.

rural dwellers. Slovenia and the Czech Republic present the highest scores (comparable to those of most advanced democracies), with Macedonia being the sole exception where the socio-economic context is still negatively influenced by the consequences of the armed conflict of 2001 and by a comparatively high rate of poverty.<sup>16</sup>

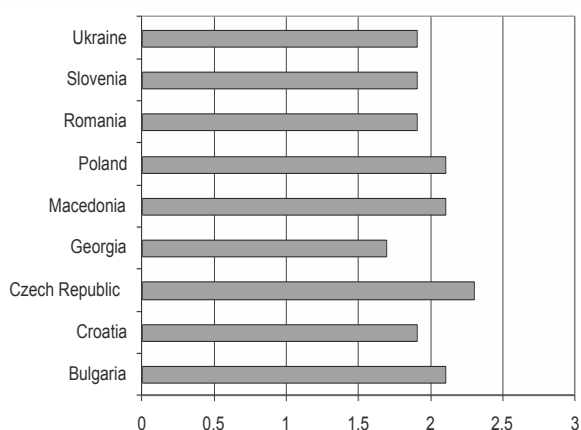
#### **BOX 5 – Socio-economic context is not an obstacle**

The socio-economic context in these post-communist countries is rather conducive for civil society thanks to a comparatively higher level of literacy and a relatively low level of economic inequality. Far from arguing that socio-economic problems do not exist in these countries, the CSI emphasizes the fact that socio-economic factors in this region of the world do not pose any relevant obstacle to the growth of civil society, especially if compared with other countries that have undergone transitions to liberal democratic rule.

## **2.4. Values**

This dimension is concerned with the principles and values adhered to, practised by and promoted by civil society. Unlike the other CSI dimensions, this aspect has received little attention in existing literature (Kopecky & Mudde 2003; Berman 1997, 2003; Whitehead 1997), partly because civil society's values have often been assumed as positive, progressive or democratic (Fine 1997; Heinrich 2005; Fioramonti 2005).

**Figure 2.4 - CSI scores for values**



The CSI holds that the values of civil society actors, instead of being assumed as progressive and civilising, should rather be examined empirically, since they are crucial for judging the overall state of civil society in a country. Therefore, the CSI analysis gauges if and to what extent civil society actors *practice* and *promote* a set of universally accepted norms. These norms are drawn from sources, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and CIVICUS' own values. In general, the CSI noted that values, such as non-violence and tolerance, are widely adhered to by CSOs operating in post-communist countries, even if the Czech Republic is the only country where the CSI found a specific

commitment to promote tolerance in society at large.<sup>17</sup>

### **2.4.1. Ecological sustainability and environmental organisations**

The CSI found that the protection of the ecosystem and ecological sustainability are values that CSOs in all post-communist countries widely share. Throughout post-communist Europe, environmental organisations began playing a significant role in the early 1980s, when they managed to channel the growing popular discontent with communist governments through their campaigns, and acquired an international popularity, after the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl. In Ukraine, where the disaster still affects people living in the contaminated areas, there are many environmental CSOs collaborating with central and local governments. The All-Ukrainian Ecological League (AUEL) has played a major role in stimulating a dialogue on environmental issues, including parliamentary hearings.

<sup>16</sup> The score for Macedonia is 1, while all other post-communist countries included in the analysis score at least 2, with the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Romania scoring 3. Of the total population in Macedonia, 33.54% live under the poverty line, which is specified as 70% of the average annual household income (179,809 MKD or 243 € per month).

<sup>17</sup> The World Values Survey (1999-2002) shows that Czech citizens reveal the most tolerant attitudes of all countries analysed in this paper. See [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org) (accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2006).

Ecological sustainability is currently a major theme for Czech civil society and is the focus of large membership organisations as well as advocacy organisations with a high media profile. In Croatia, CSOs also play a widely recognised and crucial role in environmental protection, and the media regularly covers issues related to the environment.<sup>18</sup> An interesting factor which, according to the CSI study, helped environmental organisations gain wide support and credibility in Croatia is that they managed to attract a wider group of citizens (including influential and well-known figures) than the average CSOs. Moreover, contributing to such initiatives has become a ‘status symbol’ for younger middle class Croatians.

#### 2.4.2. Transparency: the least practiced and promoted value

According to the CSI findings, the least practiced and promoted value for CSOs in post-communist countries is ‘transparency’. However, it must be underlined that the lack of transparency attributed by citizens to CSOs in these countries stems from the widespread opinion that corruption is present in all sectors of societal life, including civil society. According to the CSI stakeholders, the most relevant manifestation of this aspect is the abuse of personal contacts, which enable some CSOs to access the limited resources available to the sector more easily.

##### **BOX 6 – Personal links and transparency**

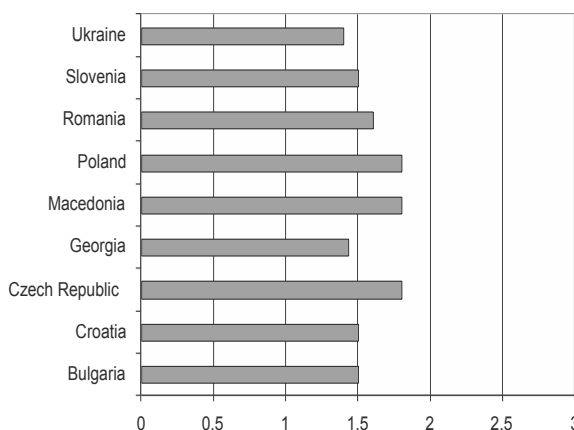
In a context of waning and rapidly changing financial resources, personal linkages to public officials are crucial assets for CSOs to receive valuable information (and preferential treatment) in accessing funding and grants from government. The CSI noted that such a reliance on personal contacts can easily undermine the financial transparency and accountability of CSOs. The lack of financial transparency is also a problem when CSOs rely mainly on foreign funding. For instance, in a country such as Ukraine, where foreign funding is still prominent, several short lived NGOs mushroom from time to time, especially during elections, and disappear shortly thereafter, without disclosing their sources of funding or their records (Narozhna 2004).

Since corrupt practices can sometimes be detected within civil society, which is generally expected to take the lead in combating this phenomenon, one can raise doubts as to the role of CSOs as promoters of civic values and public spiritedness in post-communist countries. It is important to note, as several CSI stakeholders did, that instances of corruption further affect the public image of CSOs in society at large, and inevitably jeopardise their capacity to attract public support and participation. Thus, it seems that issues around civil society’s accountability, transparency and legitimacy should take centre stage in civil society’s attempt to gain greater public recognition and support.

## 2.5. Impact

A final important measure of the state of civil society in these post-communist countries is the impact that civil society actors exert on political processes and on society as a whole. The types of roles that civil society can be expected to play in the areas of governance and development, and the desired impact of those roles, have been discussed extensively in the literature (Fowler 1999; Kendall/Knapp 2000; Salamon *et al.* 2000; Smith 1983). This section of the paper analyses *if* and *how* civil society activities impact on the ‘political system’, that is, the impact on the political and institutional process of the country and on ‘society’, or the societal context at large.

Figure 2.5 - CSI scores for *impact*



<sup>18</sup> In several cases, ecological organisations demonstrated that the public, which is generally concerned with the conservation of Croatian natural resources, can be sensitised and mobilised around environmental issues (e.g. the demonstrations against the oil pipeline project ‘Dru\_ba Adria’ in 2004).

### *2.5.1. Impact on political system*

Generally, CSOs can exert impact on political processes by monitoring government's policies and holding the state accountable to citizens, by cooperating with public authorities to implement specific plans of action and by lobbying them to pass laws that are deemed important to civil society interests. In general, the CSI found that interaction between CSOs and government institutions typically consists of various forms of cooperation (often led from above by government) and rarely includes lobbying activities (with the Czech Republic being the sole exception).

The preliminary findings of the CSI show that in some countries CSOs have been rather active in interacting with government on important social issues, such as the delivery of social services (i.e. Czech Republic and Macedonia), the protection of children (i.e. Romania) and the protection of women (i.e. Macedonia), and the opposition to torture and unlawful detention (i.e. Georgia).

However, when it comes to monitoring government and holding the state accountable on broader policy issues, the overall watchdog and advocacy capacity of CSOs appears rather low in all countries analysed here. In this regard, the only relevant impact on national institutional processes is wielded by trade unions and business associations and, to a lesser extent, environmental organisations.

One case in point is the national budgeting processes. CSOs do not always coordinate their activities in this area and, therefore, the range of organisations expressing an opinion on the national budget has been very limited. At the same time, most CSOs lack the resources and, especially, the research capacity to monitor budgeting processes or conduct advocacy campaigns and, more often than not, they do not possess alternative views on how the public budget could be allocated.

#### **BOX 7 - Limited influence on policy-making**

Sometimes, advocacy CSOs' reliance on state funding (or their interest in receiving state funding) is an obstacle to taking a critical stance vis-à-vis government. In some cases, like in the Czech Republic during Vaclav Klaus' tenure, governments have bluntly opposed the role of CSOs and hindered their contribution to policy-making. However, civil society activists and stakeholders are also aware that the limited influence on decision making is not only due to uncooperative politicians, but also to CSOs' lack of experience and capacity with respect to advocating their interests to government authorities. It is important for CSOs to gain the skills necessary to influence policy-making and interact with state bureaucracy as peers, especially in terms of resources and research-capacity (see section 3.4). One way to facilitate the acquisition of these skills would be to establish networks and coalitions between CSOs for sharing different expertises and specialisations.

### *2.5.2. Impact on society*

CSOs can impact society by addressing the interests and needs that are widely shared by all citizens or segments of the population and by empowering people, particularly the most disadvantaged groups. The CSI findings show that CSOs operating in post-communist countries have a limited capacity to respond to societal interests and to meet societal needs. Furthermore, it was found that civil society's work to inform and educate citizens on public issues is generally limited. Although many organisations are active in providing services to marginalised groups - often as a consequence of targets and priorities set by donors - there is a lack of campaigns and advocacy around social justice issues, which in turn reveals the limited capacity to represent the interests of disadvantaged groups and influence policy processes.

At the level of service delivery, CSOs in Poland appear to be more responsive towards social interests than organisations in any other post-communist country analysed in this paper. This is mainly owing to the activities run by the Catholic Church and faith-based organisations. Moreover, thanks to the activities of the Catholic Church and the main trade unions (which are seen as better at dealing with concrete workers' concerns), many citizens believe that large organisations and especially charity groups manage to meet the needs of the people and respond to their main concerns.



In Georgia, CSI stakeholders are aware that the overwhelming reliance on foreign funding renders most CSOs extremely issue-specific, with little or no interest in problems that do not fall within the areas delineated by donor funding. This could become a serious limitation for the development of an organised civil society sector, capable of responding to diverse societal needs and concerns, unless CSOs achieve financial autonomy or manage to influence the agenda of donors. For instance, in the last year, several organisations, concerned with the overall capacity of CSOs to be responsive towards their citizens, have begun to address this problem and have managed to obtain foreign funding to develop programmes aimed at supporting civil society advocacy in all fields (USAID 2005).

In Macedonia, some CSOs have demonstrated the ability to use media campaigns and new social technologies (i.e. wikis and blogs) to inform citizens and lobby for providing public services. Mainly due to the lack of services provided by the state and the overall deficiencies of the public sector, a significant number of Macedonian CSOs have been targeting marginalised groups and promoting non-violent conflict resolution activities to address ethnic tensions and rivalries that have remained from the 2001 conflict. In the area of women's empowerment, the Macedonian civil society sector has probably been the most active and the most successful actor in organising women at all levels to further their interests and protect their rights.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, the CSI found that the media is widely believed to be playing an important role in informing and thereby empowering citizens. In most post-communist countries analysed here, not only does the media empower citizens by informing them about socio-political issues, but it also demonstrates a significant capacity to influence (not to say determine) the agenda of foreign donors and CSOs. For instance, in Romania the media has attracted the attention of policy-makers and civil society activists on child abuse, and this has quickly become a major field of activity for NGOs and donor-funded programmes. CSOs would definitely improve their capacity to impact decision-making and society at large by cooperating more closely with the media. As the participants at the CSI national workshop in Croatia specifically recommended, closer cooperation with the media would help CSOs acquire skills that could, in turn, be employed to prepare and pursue public campaigns.

## **2.6. Synthetic conclusions**

### *2.6.1. Regional similarities and differences in degree*

This brief comparative analysis of the preliminary CSI findings in post-communist countries has revealed many commonalities, while also underlining some important differences. In general, the differences found by the CSI should be interpreted as 'differences in degree' rather than 'differences in kind' (Howard 2003). Indeed, all countries present similar features of their civil societies, whereas their differences mainly regard the extent to which these common factors hamper or bolster the development of civil society in each single country.

Among others, this general analysis has shown the following:

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<sup>19</sup> As an example, the Macedonian Women's Lobby (MWL) was established in March 2000 as a coalition of women participating in NGOs, trade unions, political parties, government, the media and minority groups with different backgrounds. The goal of MWL is to achieve gender equality by improving the present legal framework, developing a strategy and increasing public awareness. MWL has been actively lobbying for the inclusion of a gender quota in the laws that regulate the parliamentary and the local-municipal elections. In March 2003, the club of women-Members of Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia was established. The goal of this club is to secure support for female Members of Parliament from all political parties and promote gender equality.

- CSOs often have inadequate financial resources, which is aggravated by the fact that many foreign donors have been decreasing their commitment to countries that have gained access to the EU (i.e. Czech Republic, Poland) or that will become members in the near future (i.e. Bulgaria, Romania).
- If, on the one hand, the EU accession poses significant threats to the sustainability of many CSOs, on the other hand it constitutes a potential resource, provided that CSOs adapt themselves to the new environment and acquire the necessary skills to access the resources available within the EU structural funds.
- In this new environment, the state and the private sector will play a major role. On the one hand, regular partnerships between CSOs and public authorities will be crucial for accessing the EU's financial resources. On the other, national public funding, individual donations and private sector donations are likely to become the main financial resources for CSOs, now that these countries have moved from the transitional phase to political and economic stabilisation. As most stakeholders and civil society activists involved in the CSI assessment maintained, CSOs must develop new partnerships and common strategies with governments, private corporations as well as individual citizens if they want to successfully ensure financial sustainability.
- CSOs should also strengthen their capacity to respond to societal concerns and address the needs of the people. Not only should CSOs ensure that their initiatives meet crucial social demands, but they also need to strengthen their presence at the grassroots level in close proximity to their beneficiaries, which would improve their public image and reinforce their credibility vis-à-vis government. A closer connection with the population will strengthen the capacity of the CSOs operating in these countries to influence policy-making or, at least, to mobilise relevant segments of the citizenry to support their lobbying activities.
- Since the early 1980s, the strategy outlined in the previous paragraph was adopted by many environmental organisations operating in these countries. Due to their capacity to address issues widely regarded as crucial by most citizens, environmental organisations have been able to mobilise citizens and have demonstrated a significant capacity to influence decision-making and propose alternative policies. Owing to their successful strategy, most environmental organisations now focus on a wide variety of issues, which include respecting human rights and democratic values, and the transparency of policy-making processes.

### *2.6.2. The legacy of communism*

As was pointed out in the analysis of the political and cultural context (and, to a certain extent, in the analysis of the values held and promoted by CSOs), there appear to be several reasons to support the argument that the legacy of communism is alive in the region. In the opinion of many community dwellers and civil society activists interviewed during the CSI implementation, the state - rather than voluntary organisations - is in charge of addressing the needs of the poor and marginalised (see also Juros *et al.* 2004). At the same time, very few organisations conduct advocacy campaigns on issues regarding social justice and social welfare. If one considers that the current trend in post-communist countries is to reduce the role of the state in social welfare areas, the limited commitment of CSOs to advocacy campaigns on social justice might pose significant challenges to the role of civil society in social development in the long run.

Furthermore, as the CSI analysis has shown, a common characteristic of post-communist societies is mistrust of public administration and social institutions (Inglehart 2005; Rose 1996, 2001). As some scholars of post-communist societies have remarked, this might be partly linked to the social control mechanisms that permeated these societies during communism, which significantly led most people to trust only the closest relatives within their family structure (Buchowski 1996; Howard 2003; Bunce 1999; Tarkowska & Tarkowski 1991). This phenomenon is undermining civic engagement in post-communist societies and, to reverse this tendency, CSOs need to promote attitudes and values that encourage social capital.

Nevertheless, CSOs are often seen as vertical organisations that do not respond to crucial societal concerns and as being more interested in pleasing foreign donors and grant givers, than paying attention to what people need and what they say. In this regard, the high level of corruption that affected public administrations during communism – which still permeates many post-transitional states – negatively influences the public image of CSOs, even though the CSI findings demonstrate that civil society in the countries is perceived as less corrupt than any other arena of public life.

**BOX 8 – Communist and post-communist civil societies**

In investigating the structure of civil society in these post-communist countries, the CSI study found an interesting fusion between associational forms that date back to the communist era and recent forms of civil society activism, which more closely resemble the types of organisations active in most liberal democracies. It is worth noting that, in the midst of generally limited participation, recreational associations and trade unions have a larger membership than recently constituted CSOs (Saulean *et al.* 1999 and Fric *et al.* 1999). Since these organisations already existed during the communist era and were often supported by the state apparatus, they were and still are deeply rooted in the social context of these countries (see Szabo 2004; Hann 1992; Bukowski 1996). On the contrary, most of the new CSOs (i.e. the NGOs founded after 1989) are not embedded in the social fabric of post-communist societies and, therefore, are less likely to attract citizens.

The CSI confirmed that one of the reasons for the current limited participation in civil society activities stems from a widespread refusal of the institutionalised system of civic engagement enforced during communism. Since, public participation in state-run or state-controlled organisations was a duty of all citizens during communism, most people today are reluctant to participate in any public activity, irrespective of whether they agree or disagree with the general focus of activities (see also Howard 2003). After the heyday of citizen mobilisation that brought about the collapse of communism, a phase of public disillusionment has ensued. Political corruption reasserted itself, demonstrating that it was not simply a defining feature of the socialist administration, and pro-market reforms have severely limited the economic rewards that most citizens expected to materialise after dismantling the system of planned economy.

In this context, CSOs could act to reverse this tendency by taking on the difficult task of promoting participatory values and finding new venues for civic engagement in public life. This might carve out new spaces of interaction with government institutions and convince citizens to mobilise themselves to influence public policies and hold their governments accountable. In turn, this shift could significantly improve the quality of liberal democracy in these countries.

## Part 3 – Civil society and policy: advocacy and research capacity

### 3.1. CSOs and policy influence: an overview

In academic and practitioner literature alike, a number of authors have discussed how CSOs can best influence policy-making.<sup>20</sup> Although all authors recognize that a variety of different factors can undermine or enable CSOs' impact on policy-making, some of them give more prominence to 'external' factors, such as the political context (e.g. political culture, legal environment, corruption, etc.), while others give more importance to 'internal' factors such as CSOs' expertise, networks and mobilisation capacity.<sup>21</sup>

According to some authors, the policy impact of CSOs is heavily dependent on the political context within which they operate (Grugel 1999). For instance, the political context might lead to different types of engagement/disengagement between CSOs and political actors (Edwards 2004). Some of the academic literature on policy influence specifically stresses the role of linkages between CSOs and decision-making institutions and investigates the importance of, among others, policy networks (Marsh 1998; Marsh & Smith 2000), epistemic communities (Hass 1991), and advocacy coalitions (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999).

Looking at the case of new democracies in Eastern Europe, some have suggested that the way in which CSOs try to 'capture' policy-makers is affected by the formal or informal rules of engagement between government and civil society (Pleines 2005, see also box 9). In a similar vein, Coston has proposed a typology of NGO relationships with government to help classify different modes of influence on policy processes, ranging from NGOs that are wholly alienated from formal policy processes and concentrate on what they can achieve on their own terms, to NGOs that are completely aligned with government's positions (Coston 1998).<sup>22</sup>

In terms of 'internal' factors, some observers have focused their attention on issues such as capacity-building, competence, know-how and mobilization capacity as key factors affecting CSOs' influence on policy processes. For some, CSOs' policy influence is based on the specific activities undertaken by CSOs and their niche expertise (Najam 1999). For others, CSOs' legitimacy and competence are crucial factors to explain CSOs' influence on policy processes (Brown 2001). Similarly, some have maintained that it is the capacity to generate information, call upon symbols and powerful actors (Keck and Sikkink 1998) and the moral position vis-à-vis global political powers (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor 2001) that increases the policy influence of transnational civil society and its watchdog role. Obviously, CSOs' influence on policy and their strategies also depend on the different stages of the policy-making process. Several authors have emphasized how, for instance, steering the political agenda of government requires approaches and skills that are different from those necessary to provide input in the drafting process of a piece of legislation or to monitor the implementation of a specific law (see Pollard and Court 2005).

Bearing all these different aspects in mind, in the next section we present the framework developed by the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme at the Overseas Development Institute. The

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<sup>20</sup> According to the classical definition provided by Anderson (1975), a policy is a 'purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors'

<sup>21</sup> As a matter of fact, external/internal factors are not the only key issues discussed in the literature. For instance, some authors have argued that the specific modalities of policy influence depend on what level CSOs operate on, from the international to the local level (MacDonald 1997; Fisher 1998), while other authors have argued that 'level' differences should not be overemphasized as they create false divisions among organisations that could join forces to impact policy (Gaventa 1999; Lewis 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Coston identifies eight types of relationships, from those with maximum distance from government to those where organisations are closely connected to policy-makers. The types are as follows: repression, rivalry, competition, contracting, third party government, cooperation, complementarity and collaboration (Coston 1998).

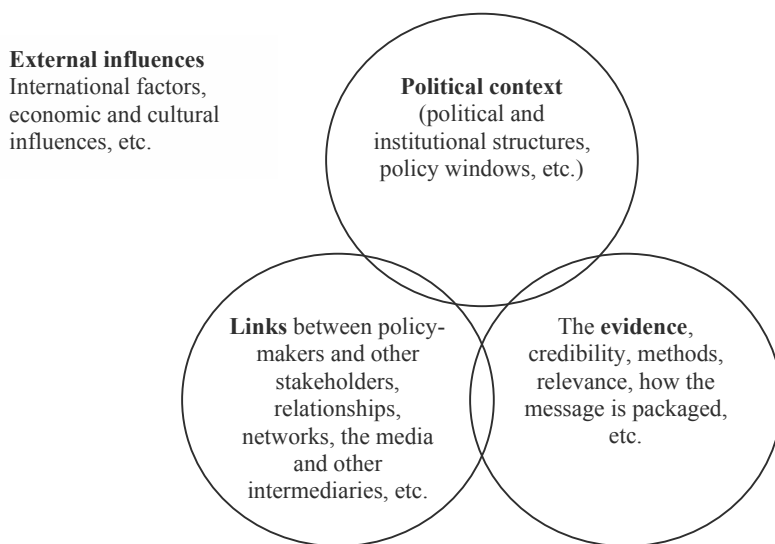
RAPID framework seeks to condense the various elements highlighted in the current debate on CSOs' policy influence and will guide the analysis of the policy-relevant findings of the CSI in the post-communist countries analysed in this paper.

### 3.2. Integrating the RAPID framework in the analysis of civil society and policy: context, evidence, links and external influences

The Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) aims to improve the use of research and evidence to influence policy processes and views CSOs as significant actors in influencing policy and as important reservoirs of research expertise (Court and Pollard 2005). Not only do a number of researchers work in NGOs, trade unions and religious groups, but important research also takes place as part of the action of community-based organisations, as they reflect on their own daily practice and find ways to improve their activities. For many CSOs, aiming to influence policy, a critical part of their work is to improve (sometimes, even to just acquire) their research skills and use research-based evidence to influence policy.

In examining the relationship between CSOs and policy in post-communist countries, the RAPID framework can be employed as a useful analytical tool, since it stresses the importance of four factors that deeply affect the way in which CSOs can influence policy through their research activities: political context, links, evidence and external influences (see figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 – The RAPID framework adapted to CSO policy influence<sup>23</sup>



According to the RAPID framework, the 'political context' is an important element to take into consideration when it comes to influencing policy. Political contestation, institutional pressures and vested interests influence greatly the ability of CSOs to influence policy, as do the attitudes and incentives among officials, local history and power relations.

As will be analysed in more detail in the next section, political strategies and power relations are sometimes clearly related to specific institutional processes and, therefore, CSOs can exploit institutional channels to contribute to policy-making. Yet, in most cases, institutional arrangements prove not to be as crucial as personal contacts to policy-makers and other stakeholders. In this regard, it is interesting that the

<sup>23</sup> This figure is taken from Pollard and Court 2005.

RAPID framework emphasises the importance of ‘links’ between communities, networks and intermediaries (e.g. the media) in affecting policy change.

Moreover, it is important that CSOs learn to collect ‘evidence’ and utilise it to influence public policy. As the RAPID framework notes, the way in which this evidence is collected and organised matters when it comes to influencing policy processes. CSOs produce evidence and gain knowledge of social phenomena every day through their activities and experience. Yet, if CSOs do not acquire research skills that allow them to organise evidence in a consistent way, their knowledge might be of little use in influencing the policy processes. Probably, CSOs’ research capacity can benefit from establishing coalitions among themselves and from networking with other actors in society. As RAPID notes, the way in which CSOs can ‘package’ their evidence could become particularly important. In this case, solid interaction with the media is likely to boost CSOs’ capacity to use their evidence to influence the public agenda and, in turn, impact policy.

Finally, the framework emphasises the impact of external forces and donor actions on research/policy interactions (Pollard and Court 2005). In some countries, international processes (such as the European Union’s enlargement processes) or donors’ programmes can have an enormous influence on the capacity of CSOs to impact political processes and generate research-based evidence to support their activities to affect policy.

The following sections draw upon the CSI findings in post-communist countries and show that several strategies (especially informal links) have been adopted by CSOs to influence policy processes. Following the RAPID framework, the analysis indicates that, although the political context of these countries is crucial to explain why CSOs have resorted to some specific strategies to impact policy (section 3.3), the way in which certain CSOs have been able to package their research-based evidence and interact with other key actors turns out to be a key factor explaining their success in terms of policy influence (section 3.4).

### **3.3. State – civil society engagement: institutional dialogue and informal links**

As outlined above, the dialogue between state institutions and civil society groups can occur in different ways, from official meetings in specifically designed venues to informal (and often illegal) exchanges of information and favours. This section discusses the different forms of state-civil society engagement in the post-communist countries under review and distinguishes between formalised institutional dialogue and informal links between CSOs and policy-makers. As will become clear from the analysis, both formal and informal avenues are available to CSOs in post-communist countries, but informal mechanisms play a predominant role.

#### *3.3.1. Institutional dialogue*

The most institutionalised type of dialogue between civil society and government occurs via the so-called ‘tripartite’ institutions. Based on the model of corporatist structures in European social democracies, tripartite institutions are forums where government representatives, business and trade unions come together to discuss, advise policy-makers and possibly strike deals on socio-economic policies, salaries, workers’ rights and the like (Schmitter & Lehmbruch 1979; Reutter 1996).

#### **BOX 9 – State-civil society rules of engagement**

The way in which CSOs try to attract the attention of public authorities and influence their policies depends on the rules of engagement, which can be formally outlined in a specific institutional framework, translated into advisory and consultative bodies for civil society, or informally shared by the main political actors involved in policy-making. Such rules can either lay down mandatory guidelines of behaviour for all non-state actors or, by contrast, be actor-specific, that is, they privilege an individual or an organisation at the expense of another (e.g. when the state privileges a religious community *de jure* or *de facto*). Depending on whether the rules of engagement are formal or informal, CSOs can choose from a vast array of legal (e.g. cooperation, lobbying, donations or popular mobilisation) or illegal ‘capture’ strategies (e.g. clientelism or corruption) in order to influence public policy.

In several post-communist countries, most of the institutionalised dialogue between CSOs and the state occurs via the tripartite negotiating table and mainly involves trade unions and business associations.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, these forums are advisory in nature and rarely allow for significant CSO influence on policy-making. In some countries, the dialogue between CSOs and the state is not as institutionalised. In Georgia, for example, the state chooses if and when to involve CSOs in decision-making and often grants some organisations a special status vis-à-vis others, as is the case with the Orthodox Church. Likewise, in Bulgaria the state interacts with social partners such as business associations and trade unions, but does so on an ad hoc basis and, in most cases, other CSOs are completely excluded from participating in consultative forums.<sup>25</sup>

In Croatia, during the 1990s, the relationship between the state and CSOs was ridden with conflict. Apart from the humanitarian sector, there were no areas of cooperation or partnership between the state and CSOs. However, after 2000, the state-civil society relationship steadily improved. Government and CSO representatives established joint institutions addressing issues such as child rights, minority rights, human rights, gender equality and environmental protection.<sup>26</sup> At the regional level and in larger towns, similar bodies involving CSO representatives were also established. Unfortunately, that initial cooperation between public authorities and civil society groups seems to have reached a stalemate in the past year, especially since the new government took office in 2004.

#### **BOX 10 – Social dialogue institutions and the EU**

Some countries have seen several so-called ‘social dialogue’ institutions emerge in the past few years, at different levels of government. In these countries, social dialogue institutions range from national consultative bodies for NGOs to local forums where grassroots organisations are invited to meet with local authorities. An important incentive for developing institutionalised dialogue with civil society was the EU accession process, since the principle of partnership between public administration and CSOs is a major tenet of the EU’s structural policy and must be applied to all levels of government.

#### **BOX 11 – The relevance of consultative forums**

Some of the experts interviewed during the CSI implementation in Croatia remarked that by using consultative forums as façades, the government might succeed in presenting itself as collaborative to the international public without actually having to accommodate CSOs’ views and requests. According to the stakeholders involved in the CSI assessment, social dialogue institutions in Poland are devoid of any significant political leverage and, therefore, do not provide CSOs’ with concrete avenues to influence the policy agenda. In Bulgaria, institutional arrangements aimed at supporting CSOs’ participation do not translate into significant CSO contributions to policy-making in practice. Although CSO representatives can take part in various forums, including district councils for regional development, these forums have a very restricted composition and an almost nonexistent influence on policy. At the same time, CSOs are seldom invited to take part in bodies where real decision-making power rests. As a consequence, in Bulgaria – like in most countries analysed in the paper – interaction between CSOs and government institutions typically consists of various forms of cooperation, in which CSOs perform the role of service providers contracted by the state, usually excluding any type of lobbying activities.

The CSI findings offer reasons to believe that, at least in some cases, these advisory and consultative bodies might serve as smokescreens for governments that are not genuinely interested in the contribution of CSOs to policy-making processes. By establishing forums that do not provide any real decision-making power, governments might succeed in pleasing foreign donors (whose funding is often subject to the establishment of partnership schemes between government and CSOs) and other international actors

<sup>24</sup> According to the media review conducted during the implementation of the CSI in the Czech Republic, 70% of the dialogue between the state and CSOs occurred via the tripartite system. In the Czech Republic, the main tripartite forum is the Council of Economic and Social Agreement, while in Poland it is the Trilateral Commission.

<sup>25</sup> According to the EU, local NGOs are not at all involved in regional development councils in Bulgaria (European Union 2004).

<sup>26</sup> The most important venue in this regard is the Council for Civil Society Development of the Republic of Croatia. It is a counselling and professional body of the Croatian Government, which works on the implementation of the *Cooperation Programme of the Government with the Non-profit Sector in the Republic of Croatia*.

(primarily the EU), without really allowing for a constructive role for CSOs in decision-making (Ost 2000; Reutter 1996).

What emerges from the CSI findings is that a major reason for CSOs' hesitations to engage governments on delicate matters is their desire to obtain public funding. This often prevents them from taking a critical stance towards public authorities and forces them to focus on securing some kind of financial cooperation with state institutions, even when this might curtail their capacity to hold authorities to account. Financial dependence on the state further challenges CSOs' policy influence, since in most cases the state is the major source of financial resources for CSOs. In Croatia, specifically, civil society stakeholders lamented that it is difficult to exert influence on policy or hold government accountable when public authorities can easily challenge organisations that ask unpleasant questions by curtailing funds or, indirectly, by amending the legal provisions regarding non-profit entities.<sup>27</sup>

In short, this analysis shows that institutionalised forums for state-civil society engagement do not necessarily provide CSOs with concrete opportunities to influence public policy. In this respect, donors and other actors concerned with strengthening civil society's policy influence should bear in mind that the existence of institutional arrangements does not equate to CSOs' effective policy influence. As the RAPID framework points out, the political context is a factor that contributes to strengthening (or weakening) CSOs' policy influence. Moreover, the specific characteristics of the political and social context are also likely to affect the way 'links' and 'evidence' can be used to strengthen the policy capacity of organised civil society.

### 3.3.2. Informal links

#### **BOX 12 – 'Informal' strategies to influence policy**

Legal 'informal' strategies usually comprise CSO support of state actors who have commenced their political career within civil society structures, as is the case with many former trade unionists that have moved to government positions. In other cases, they can take the form of assistance to likeminded politicians who can be emboldened by CSOs' support to oppose other political groups on specific policies or exploit it to pave their way to higher ranks within the government structure (Pleines 2005).

These informal strategies typically occur via the intermediary role of political parties and often turn into clientelistic relationships. Generally, CSOs that receive such preferential treatment are granted privileged access to policy-making at the expense of other groups that do not possess similar linkages to key political gatekeepers.

A Ukrainian politician, interviewed by the national CSI team, stated: *"During my working experience both in parliament and government, I always felt pressure – in a positive sense – only from entrepreneur's organisations. They are the most active... I do not recall any other organisations, maybe besides environmental ones, who are that active"*.

According to the CSI findings, informal contacts play a prominent role and provide CSOs with more concrete avenues to impact on public policy than institutionalised channels.<sup>28</sup> Personal contacts with public servants or politicians are key resources for CSOs to attract the attention of public authorities on specific issues, irrespective of whether venues for institutional dialogue exist. In part, this can be seen as a consequence of the limited influence that CSOs exert through formal channels, as was discussed in the previous section. Nevertheless, it also appears to be a legacy of the communist era, when personal contacts played a major role in securing access to political and economic benefits for groups or individuals (Bunce 1999).

Clientelistic relationships are usually developed with the aim of gaining access to government funding or tenders and, at times, take the form of full-blown corruption. Owing to this blurred overlap between formal and informal strategies, in which informal (and also illegal) activities can help carry out formal interactions, most citizens seem to have developed a general suspicion of all types of interaction between CSOs and public

<sup>27</sup> CSI survey respondents mentioned recent legal amendments with respect to VAT as an example of the state's involvement in civil society activities, indicative of a systematic governmental policy aimed at jeopardising the watchdog role of CSOs.

<sup>28</sup> For a compelling and exhaustive discussion of how CSOs can exploit the so-called 'structural holes' within public administration and turn political competition in their favour, see Burt 1992.



authorities. As the CSI revealed in the case of Poland, most citizens hardly distinguish between legal and illegal strategies and, owing to prevailing informal mechanisms, they end up perceiving legal methods, such as lobbying, as a form of corruption.

When this is associated with the widespread mistrust that was previously examined in section 4.3, regarding the post-communist cultural environment, it becomes clear that CSOs could be easily dragged into a vicious circle. By aiming to play a role in the political arena and influence policy outputs, they adopt strategies that might further weaken their public image and the already frail confidence citizens have in them. In turn, a publicly discredited CSO community would have a hard time justifying to governments why CSOs should be seen as valuable contributors to democratic policy-making.

Moreover, such a pervasive system of informal contacts provides little incentive for CSOs to acquire specific expertise. Since their involvement in decision-making processes is seldom due to their knowledge and research capacity on specific issues, most CSOs pay little attention to acquiring the technical skills necessary to grasp political and economic issues and, in doing so, might perpetuate their subordinate role vis-à-vis government and remain on the receiving end of policy-making processes.

Informal strategies, based on personal contacts and network positions (Burt 1992), are particularly widespread and commonly adopted by CSOs in post-communist countries. Interestingly, even in cases of cooperation and lobbying, the CSI found that CSOs are not regularly involved with government on the basis of their expertise on specific issues, but rather because of personal liaisons with public officials or policy-makers.

Irrespective of the rules of engagement and the strategies adopted by CSOs, their influence on public policy remains limited, though not absent, as a number of cases demonstrate. This is partly a consequence of uncooperative attitudes on the part of government, but is also due to a lack of resources and expertise on the part of CSOs that have not yet acquired appropriate skills to influence policy-making and monitor policy processes. In this respect, the evidence collected by the CSI suggests – in line with the RAPID framework – that foreign donors and other institutions aiming to strengthen civil society’s policy role should focus more specifically on strengthening the advocacy and research capacity of CSOs, with a view to assisting them in acquiring the skills necessary to influence decision making at the national and local levels. As will become clear in the next section, research capacity and learning through networks and coalitions can turn out to be extremely important for CSOs’ influence on policy-making and the overall strengthening of the civic sector.

### **3.4. Policy influence and research capacity**

The CSI found that limited CSO influence on policy-making is not only due to institutional deficiencies and reluctant governments, but also to CSOs’ limited capacity. Most CSOs operating in post-communist countries lack the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully monitor and influence political processes. The following sub-section examines the role of CSOs in influencing the national budgeting process, in order to highlight the capacity challenges and recommends that CSOs acquire specific research skills and learn how to better utilise the evidence they collect, if they want to stand a better chance of improving their capacity to influence policy. The second sub-section provides examples of CSOs that managed to influence policy and might serve as best practices for the entire sector.

#### ***3.4.1. CSOs’ influence on national budget***

Due to the high relevance of the national budget for all policy areas, the CSI project included case studies on the influence of CSOs on national budgeting processes. The budget is the government’s most important economic policy instrument and, since all public policies eventually have to confront the need for financial resources, the contribution of CSOs to national budgets is of utmost importance and holds the potential to affect all state policies. What emerges from the CSI case studies is that monitoring policy-making around the national budget, and proposing alternative allocations, require specific research skills and knowledge that very few CSOs possess.

**BOX 13 – CSOs’ contribution to national budget in the Czech Republic**

Since the Czech Republic has the highest CSI score for civil society influence on policy-making among post-communist countries, it serves as a good example of civil society capacity problems. In the Czech Republic, the CSI study found that the national budgeting process is fairly open and, therefore, suitable for CSOs to participate and provide government institutions with input. However, CSOs contribute very little. According to the stakeholders that participated in the CSI’s regional consultations, this rather limited capacity is due to the fact that most CSOs are issue-specific, that is, they are mainly concerned with their niche of activity and seldom focus on broader issues affecting society at large. Furthermore, they rarely coordinate their activities in order to share resources and know-how. As a consequence, the range of Czech CSOs expressing an opinion on the budget as a whole is very limited and is primarily made up of think-tanks with a right-wing orientation concerned with budget deficits, or isolated cases of ecological organisations focusing on environmental taxes.

In order for CSOs to have a stronger influence on the national budget, it would be useful to establish linkages with other likeminded actors in society and promote national coalitions to monitor budget policy-making. For instance, CSOs would benefit from stable interactions with researchers working in Universities or research institutes. This would help CSOs save resources by utilising research capacity that is already in place. Furthermore, it would add credibility to CSOs’ proposals for alternative allocations in the national budget, thus eroding the widespread conviction that only policy-makers and their advisors possess the necessary knowledge to design state economic policy.

Moreover, networks and coalitions of CSOs would more easily attract the attention of the media. In this regard, CSOs should remember that, as the RAPID framework points out, the way in which a message is packaged is crucial to making particular research-based evidence gain currency and wide support.

### 3.4.2. Success stories

As discussed above, CSO policy influence is based on a variety of factors, from CSOs’ capacity to gain public support, to their informal linkages to policy-makers and their research expertise, including their capacity to utilise different tools to achieve their goals (e.g. communications, the media and IT facilities).

In the end, although there is no perfect formula for exerting significant influence on policy-making, the CSI project collected some information about success stories which often seem to be based on the right mix of networking capacity, popular support and research skills.

- In most countries, environmental organisations have demonstrated an ability to utilise a number of skills to exert influence on policy and are, with the exception of trade unions and specialised think tanks, the only type of CSO that regularly monitors and proposes amendments to national budget laws. In countries such as the Czech Republic and Croatia, environmental organisations utilise their research capacity and networks to run advocacy campaigns that are not necessarily limited to environmental problems, but that regard broader societal issues, such as respect for human rights and democratic values as well as transparency of policy-making processes.
- In several countries, including Croatia and Georgia, environmental organisations’ activities are regularly covered by the media. In this regard, the CSI managed to create particular interest around the case of ecological organisations and their relative success in influencing policy and gaining popular support and credibility. In the Czech Republic, the CSI national workshop proposed conducting an in-depth study to ascertain why ecological organisations have managed to become government and corporate watchdogs more than any other type of CSO. The widespread opinion was that environmental groups enjoy significant citizen support, cooperate successfully at the international level and thereby import foreign know-how, but they have also acquired the necessary research skills to monitor legislative processes and propose amendments.

- In the Czech Republic, a campaign against domestic violence, carried out in 1998, showed that CSOs are capable of forming relatively broad and stable coalitions around a specific theme. More importantly, this example demonstrates that CSOs succeed in reaching their goals when they are able to use a host of educational and activating methods (e.g. training, publications, studies and market research). In the field of human rights monitoring, Czech CSOs confirmed to be able to form alliances and networks. A case in point was provided by an obviously racially motivated police attack on a Roma family in May 2003. After a controversial verdict by the judiciary, a coalition of NGOs protested against the investigations conducted by the authorities. These NGOs also criticised public authorities for not conducting thorough investigations on the recurrent human rights violations perpetrated by the police at the expense of Roma individuals. By way of forming a coalition Czech NGOs managed to attract the attention of the media and pressured the authorities to account for their actions.
- In Macedonia, NGOs have led a number of successful initiatives based on policy advocacy. They advanced network and coalition building initiatives as specific tasks to strengthen the sector. The Citizen Platform, an NGO coalition, has been working to devise a strategy to advance the sector and address sector-wide obstacles.
- In Romania, CSOs learned from other countries' experiences (particularly, the Czech Republic and Hungary) and successfully lobbied for the introduction of the 1% tax law, which enables citizens to donate 1% of their taxes to charitable organisations. Moreover, the media managed to highlight the dramatic situation of child abuse and, as a consequence, a variety of CSOs, with the support of public authorities, gave birth to activities devoted to child protection.

With respect to policy impact, the CSI study notes that, in most countries, CSOs have committed themselves to influencing policy-making especially in those areas where international donors have invested more resources and carried out specific programmes.

As the CSI Country Report on Romania (CSDF 2006: 60) states,

*[T]he most discernable impact by CSOs remains dependent on the support of international actors such as states, international organizations (e.g. World Bank, IMF, UN agencies and EU) and other foreign donors or international NGOs. [...] CSOs' input has been generally successful on aspects that corresponded to international institutions' concerns. The policy impact studies carried out within this project have revealed a pattern in CSO's actions aimed at influencing public policy. In order to be successful in negotiations with the Government, they seek first of all international support for their causes.*

Drawing on the CSI findings regarding CSOs' influence on public policy, the analysis suggests that donors should focus more consistently on strengthening CSOs' contribution to policy-making as a whole, without assuming that the existence of institutionalised forums equates to functional avenues for civil society to have a say on policy. At the same time, donors should assist local CSOs in defining policy priorities and goals, instead of establishing them from the outside. Invariably, such a shift in donors' approach would help create a locally generated policy agenda capable of increasing the level of grassroots ownership.

Additionally, donors' programmes should attempt to encourage CSOs to acquire a stronger research capacity, which was seen by many CSI stakeholders as a necessary asset if organisations want to exert any influence on technical matters pertaining to policy-making. For instance, as regards national budgeting processes, the analysis showed that, in post-communist countries, there is a lack of CSOs which systematically focus on the overall budget or monitor the national budgetary process. In this regard, there is a need for capacity-building programmes that focus on how to help CSOs monitor the budgetary process and conduct research to propose alternative allocations of public spending. Additionally, donors could promote the establishment of networks among CSOs, in order to share responsibilities, avoid dispersing financial resources and to benefit from different expertises and specialisations.

**BOX 14 – Policy influence and the role of international donors**

In Romania, the CSI report pointed out that CSOs have been more successful in exerting influence on policy-making in those areas that correspond to the concerns of international donors and institutions. In Croatia many organisations have acquired specific skills in holding government to account on issues related to human rights and environmental protection, which were described by CSI stakeholders as sensitive areas for foreign donors. In Georgia, too, CSOs have carried out programmes to unveil the numerous cases of torture perpetrated by the police and have gained significant credibility in this field (see also Human Rights Watch 2005). More often than not this was thanks to the support they received from donors.

**3.5. Research-based evidence: how the CSI can contribute (and is contributing) to strengthen civil society in post-communist countries**

As was discussed in the introduction, the CSI is a participatory action-research project that links the assessment of the state of civil society to an action-planning process involving civil society stakeholders, with the aim of strengthening civil society in those areas where weaknesses or challenges are detected. By seeking to combine valid assessment, broad-based reflection and joint action, the CSI attempts to make a contribution to the perennial debate on how research can inform policy and practice.

The following sections discuss how the CSI can contribute to civil society strengthening and describe the first policy-relevant research-based outcomes that the CSI implementation has produced in the post-communist countries analysed in this paper.

**3.5.1. How the CSI can contribute to strengthening civil society**

Among other cognitive undertakings, research provides social actors with frameworks and approaches to interpret social phenomena and act upon these interpretations to affect change. In this sense, research can influence policy in a variety of ways (Weiss 1977). The link between research and policy can be viewed as a linear process, whereby a set of findings is shifted from a technical to a political context, and then exerts some impact on policy-makers' decisions. However, the link between research and policy can seldom be described as such a simple and linear process. Even when research-based findings do not have a direct impact on policy, the production of research may still exert an indirect effect, for example through introducing new terms and ideas, thereby shaping the policy discourse.

Applied participatory research, such as the CSI, as opposed to strictly academic research, is also concerned with generating policy outcomes. Clearly, the CSI understands 'policy' in a broad sense, which does not restrict the concept to government policy, but takes into account that organisations, institutions and companies also have policies.

In order to exert direct or indirect impact on policy, the CSI seeks to identify aspects of civil society that can be *changed* and to generate information and knowledge relevant to action-oriented goals. In this regard, the CSI project aims to spread knowledge regarding the state of civil society, in order to trigger action by a variety of stakeholders, but primarily by local stakeholders. The CSI can enable dialogue between different groups and individuals, and ultimately lead to a reflection process that transcends the narrower interests of specific sectors of civil society. In turn, this can facilitate a new kind of interaction among CSOs and other important players, especially government and the private sector.

Participation is the key word for understanding the research-policy link made by the CSI. By taking the lead in the CSI research phase, local actors learn by doing, acquire important skills and empower themselves. Moreover, through training local stakeholders in the assessment process, the CSI aims to provide CSOs with a broader understanding of their role in society and with research-based evidence. This research-based evidence can help CSOs acquire those skills that might help strengthen the sector. The contribution to domestic political change is further enhanced through dialogue, building local capacity and strengthening local action for civil society development. For society as a whole, dissemination of findings

can contribute to ongoing public debate about the role of civic participation and to the identification of reform priorities.

### *3.5.2. How the CSI contributes to strengthening civil society in post-communist countries*

This section presents some direct outcomes and spin-off initiatives that were either caused or triggered by the implementation of the CSI in the post-communist countries analysed in this paper.

#### *Contributions on the policy level*

- Bulgaria is the first country where the implementation of the CSI project resulted in concrete actions undertaken by local civil society actors. Early in 2004, the CSI national coordinating organisation, the Balkan Assist Association (BAA), organised a national workshop to share and discuss the CSI findings among more than 80 stakeholders. During the workshop, stakeholders identified funding and the sustainability of Bulgarian civil society as major challenges to the sector. Initially, workshop participants identified the need to benefit from citizens' taxes for financing civil society's activities. As a result, a task force made up of civil society representatives was formed to work on drafting a law that would enable citizens to voluntarily donate 1% of their taxes to a civil society organisation of their choice. While analysing how state funding is being used to support CSOs, the task force found out that government does not provide reasons why certain NGOs are subsidised and others are not. According to their findings, there are no clear rules regarding application procedures and selection criteria. As a consequence, the task force decided to conduct a campaign to unveil the unequal treatment of CSOs and promote transparency in the decision-making process of public tenders and funding. The following actions were undertaken:
  - Formal request to the Ministry of Finance to disclose the criteria and rules for determining which NGOs are selected for state subsidization and tenders;
  - Through the intermediation of a parliamentarian (who is also a member of BAA), this issue was discussed by the relevant parliamentary commission;
  - A nationwide campaign was planned;
  - A working group was established, with the aim to formulate clear and specific criteria for the disbursement of public funding to NGOs and;
  - An action plan was drawn up, with a view to assessing the feasibility of a claim before the Constitutional Court and the National Ombudsman.
- In mid-2005, the Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation (MCIC) used the recommendations generated by the CSI consultative process to provide (via a consortium of international organisations) technical assistance to government in a programme aimed at strengthening civil society in Macedonia. The objective of this programme, which is funded by the European Agency for Reconstruction, is to improve the relationship and cooperation between CSOs and government. In the next phases of the programme, MCIC will assist the Macedonian government in developing and implementing a strategy for cooperation with the third sector and will conduct study visits in other countries in order to learn best practices and work closely with a variety of partners in the South-Eastern European region. As the MCIC confirmed to the CSI staff at CIVICUS, all activities undertaken during the CSI project and the end-of-project recommendations will serve as relevant guidelines in designing and implementing their new programme.
- In Croatia, the CSI national coordinating organisation was invited to present the findings at the municipal assembly of Zagreb. As a consequence, a dialogue ensued with the aim of setting up channels and institutional structures for the involvement of civil society actors in the local administration.

#### *Contributions to analytical and research capacity*

- In the Czech Republic, a follow-up study on umbrella organizations was undertaken by the team that implemented the CSI.

- In Romania, the CSI triggered a debate on how more informed and research-based planning could strengthen the credibility and the impact of CSOs.
- In Macedonia, the CSI also served as a methodological tool to strengthen the capacity of the organisation that implemented the CSI project. As a consequence, the media review and opinion surveys have become regular activities for this organisation.

*Improved understanding of civil society and a platform for interaction*

- In several countries, participants pointed out that the implementation of the project provided an opportunity to interact with other civil society actors. In some countries, the National Advisory Groups did not disband after the conclusion of the project but became regular forums to promote interaction and mutual learning among participants, particularly when donors and politicians were members of these groups.
- Participants from all countries included in this paper remarked that the CSI provided them with a more thorough understanding of their civil societies – often defying preconceptions and impressions.
- Finally, the CSI offered a platform for interaction among the organisations involved in the project at the regional level. A regional workshop was held in April 2006 and common plans to encourage regional interaction and impact were generated.

It is likely that the most important and widespread contribution of the CSI to policy escapes our attention. The CSI's outputs, particularly the final country reports,<sup>29</sup> constitute a publicly available resource on the current state of civil society in particular countries and the specific strengths and weaknesses and recommendations for how to make civil society stronger. Thus, in its transparent design, flexible and widespread use and participatory approach, the CSI coordinator in the Czech Republic likened the CSI to a type of open source software.

Its open source character, as helpful as it may be to its users, makes examining the extent of the CSI's usage and its impact on civil society strengthening extremely difficult. However, there are already several indications that show how the CSI can provide a major input into a comprehensive civil society strengthening programme (e.g. the example of Macedonia mentioned above). It is likely that there exists a myriad of other examples, which CIVICUS is not aware of at present. Several in-depth evaluation studies of national CSI projects, as well as an impact evaluation scheduled for 2007, will help collect more information on the policy impact of the CSI.

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<sup>29</sup> Published country reports can be found under the CSI programme's pages at [www.civicus.org](http://www.civicus.org).

## Part 4 – Conclusions and recommendations

The post-communist countries analysed in this paper present low levels of citizen participation in civil society activities, although in varying degrees. In most of these countries, limited civic engagement has co-existed with economic growth and successful transitions to liberal democratic governments. In countries such as Ukraine and Georgia, the high level of popular mobilisation experienced during the recent Rose and Orange ‘revolutions’ has not (yet) translated into a sustainable and long-term role for civil society groups. In the new EU member states, the enlargement process does not seem to have kick-started a new phase of civic participation, and it remains to be seen whether it will do so in the future.

Civil society in these post-communist societies is characterized by a number of deficiencies, including structural problems (e.g. limited citizen participation, dearth of financial resources and donor-driven activities), contextual factors (e.g. a political and cultural environment affected by widespread mistrust in institutions and other citizens), scant promotion of important values in society at large (e.g. transparency and social justice) and a limited capacity to influence policy-making. These problems are likely to affect the sustainability of CSOs and their contribution to social development.

Overall, the CSI provided sufficient evidence to argue that organised civil society in post-communist countries lacks a proactive strategy for much of its work. Operating in a context of limited civic engagement and low levels of membership, CSOs’ activities tend to be driven by the need to attract funding rather than address pressing social concerns. As a consequence, initiatives and programmes are often designed to meet donors’ priorities and agendas or to suit governments’ requirements in order to win tenders.

To examine civil society’s policy influence in these countries, the paper has focused on the different elements identified by the RAPID framework, that is, political context, links, evidence and external influence. In this respect, the analysis has shown that the political context significantly shapes CSO-government interaction and favours informal links at the expense of a formalised policy role for CSOs. Without underestimating the obstacles posed by uncooperative governments and the overall political context, this paper has argued that a crucial problem is the lack of resources and expertise of CSOs, which have not acquired appropriate skills to monitor policy processes, rarely cooperate with other key actors (e.g. the media and academia) and lack research-based evidence to influence policy-making. Based on some successful examples of CSO policy influence, the evidence collected by the CSI suggests that agents aiming at improving civil society’s policy role (including international donors) should focus more on encouraging networks between CSOs and other key actors, as well as strengthening the advocacy and research capacities of CSOs.

This overall analysis of the state of civil society in post-communist countries has therefore pointed out a number of weaknesses that limit the contribution of CSOs to democratic governance. This final section summarises the most relevant conclusions of the analysis and attempts to put forward recommendations based on the evidence collected by the CSI research. Most of the recommendations touch on issues such as transparency, research-based advocacy and policy influence and, due to their overlapping nature, the same recommendations can be useful to address different weaknesses of civil society.

- **Sustaining civil society:**

- **Conclusions:**

- According to this analysis, CSOs in post-communist Europe suffer from a lack of financial resources and low levels of citizen participation. Additionally, the declining foreign donor commitment, due to the accession of many of these countries to the EU, poses serious challenges to the sustainability of civil society. In financial terms, the main challenge for CSOs operating in these countries is to

diversify sources of revenue and, at the same time, maintain their autonomy, so as to strengthen their credibility in society at large.

- **Recommendations:**
  - CSOs should strive to broaden their membership. The fact that civic engagement in post-communist societies has been declining in the past few years should not be seen as a sign of an irreversible process. An honest and concerted effort, involving organisations and groups from different areas of civil society, could help reverse the negative trend and attract support from the grassroots. This would broaden the constituencies for CSOs, strengthen their contribution to social development and generate sustainable long-term revenue (e.g. through membership fees), as is the case with CSOs operating in other regions of the world (e.g. Western Europe or Latin America), in which the financial commitment of international donors has not been as significant as in the post-communist countries analysed here.
  - A stronger interaction between CSOs and the state appears to be another crucial factor for ensuring long-term sustainability, as it would make it easier for CSOs to access public funds to support their activities. For this interaction to be positive, though, the rules of engagement need to be set out clearly and the allocation of public funds must become transparent. An institutionalised interaction between organised civil society and government would also create the conditions for a more open policy-making process, possibly characterised by more significant input from CSOs. It is important to note, however, that a closer relationship with governments could threaten the autonomy and the watchdog's role of CSOs, which are often viewed as elitist organisations and money-seekers rather than citizens' advocates.
  - On a different level, CSOs should strengthen dialogue and interaction with the private sector. The business-civil society interaction is particularly underdeveloped in the post-communist countries analysed in this paper, and it deserves particular attention. However, it must be kept in mind that the private sector's agenda and the disparity of resources between the two sectors could endanger the public mission of CSOs. In this regard, it would be advisable for CSOs to establish appropriate and effective common codes of conduct in terms of transparency and accountability, to prevent the risk of being perceived as agents of private corporations.
- **Grounding civil society:**
  - **Conclusions:**
    - In the post-communist countries analysed in this paper, an extremely limited level of citizen participation in civil society's activities is coupled with a political/cultural environment characterised by widespread mistrust in institutions and fellow citizens. Such a context does not enable a positive relationship between CSOs and society at large. Furthermore, since many CSOs (especially urban-based NGOs) are often donor-driven and not embedded in the social fabric of post-communist societies, they are perceived as elitist organisations with little interest in meeting societal needs and addressing people's concerns.
  - **Recommendation:**
    - The analysis undertaken in this paper suggests that CSOs should focus on consolidating their role at the grassroots level, as a means of regaining public support and encouraging citizen participation. As some positive examples (i.e. environmental organisations) show, this would enhance their credibility as 'voice of the people' and would also strengthen their capacity to influence public policy and achieve greater financial sustainability (e.g. through membership fees).



- **Transparency and accountability:**
  - **Conclusions:**
    - The issue of transparency is neither addressed prominently within CSOs, nor is it promoted as a societal value. Lack of transparency affects citizens' trust in CSOs and easily blurs the boundaries between civil society and the political/economic arena. Instances of corruption further affect the public image of CSOs in society and jeopardise their capacity to attract public support.
  - **Recommendations:**
    - CSOs should fully embrace the importance of financial transparency. In societies in which corruption and clientelism affect various sectors of social and economic life, it is of utmost importance that CSOs strive to distinguish themselves as transparent and honest actors.
    - The same applies to notions such as accountability and legitimacy. While there is no 'one size fits all' approach to building legitimacy and accountability, it is important that civil society as a whole recognizes these challenges and responds to them. Responses can range from establishing codes of ethics and accreditation procedures to specific tools to assess an organisation's social performance. Overall, what is most important is that CSOs can prove that they (individually and collectively) take their legitimacy and accountability extremely seriously.
    - Potentially, transparent and accountable organisations would be considered more favourably by the media which is often suspicious of CSOs and their legitimacy as 'voice of the people'. As the media was considered to be an important resource by most civil society stakeholders interviewed during the CSI project, it becomes clear that a specific focus on transparency and accountability should be an integral part of a strategy to build a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship between CSOs and the media.
- **Advocacy on social policies:**
  - **Conclusions:**
    - CSOs' advocacy on social policies is particularly limited. Moreover, limited advocacy around social justice issues is coupled with a widespread conviction among citizens that only public authorities have the responsibilities to address social injustices. The limited commitment by civil society towards advocacy on social policies raises the question of how civil society will be able to speak for the marginalised and the poor in the future, particularly if one considers that most governments have introduced policies of fiscal austerity and cuts in social expenditure.
  - **Recommendations:**
    - A stronger role in advocacy would benefit the long-term sustainability of CSOs by complementing the service-delivery profile of many organisations operating in these countries.
    - Possibly, a more significant advocacy role would also contribute towards reshaping the public image of many CSOs that, due their service-delivery profile, are often perceived as state agents rather than autonomous civic actors. In this context, international donors could play a significant role by investing in programmes aimed at building the capacity of CSOs in advocacy and campaigning.
    - Finally, CSOs should develop specific skills to attract the attention of the media, which could be an important ally in supporting advocacy campaigns.
- **Influence on policy-making and research-based evidence:**
  - **Conclusions:**
    - This paper has shown that the political context shapes the interaction between civil society groups and public authorities, and that personal links to key political actors turn out to be the most effective way of influencing policy-making. The

flip-side of this is that private contacts to policy-makers can easily turn into clientelistic – and even corrupt – relationships that jeopardise CSOs' credibility in society at large. Interestingly, the analysis has noted that, since CSOs' contribution to policy-making is often not dependent on their know-how, they are not encouraged to develop specific expertise. Moreover, lack of expertise and research capacity does not allow for a meaningful contribution of organised civil society to important policy processes, such as the national budget. As a consequence, important policy-making processes remain under the exclusive control of policy-makers, in spite of legal provisions that emphasise the importance of civil society input.

- **Recommendations:**
  - In those countries where government-civil society forums exist, CSOs, public authorities and donors (including the EU) should work hand in hand to make such institutional dialogue effective.
  - Furthermore, donors (and other actors interested in strengthening civil society) should focus on assisting CSOs to gain specific skills to collect evidence and to make effective use of this evidence in the political process.
  - Donors should also encourage CSOs to build networks with like-minded stakeholders so as to share responsibilities, exchange know-how and expertise, and build critical mass to support campaigns and play a stronger role in policy processes. For instance, CSOs would benefit from stable interactions with researchers working at universities or research centres. This would help CSOs save resources by utilising research capacity that is already in place. It would also add credibility to CSOs' proposals for alternative allocations in the national budget, thus eroding the widespread conviction that only policy-makers and their advisors possess the necessary knowledge to design state economic policy.
- **Environmental NGOs as best practice:**
  - **Conclusions:**
    - Environmental sustainability is a widely promoted value in civil society, thanks to the activities of a number of environmental organisations that have been successful in eliciting public support and in influencing the public agenda on environmental issues. Thanks to their capacity to conduct independent research and 'package' their research-based evidence for the wider public, environmental organisations have been able to attract the attention of the media and, currently, are the CSOs that, along with the trade unions, receive the most significant media coverage and contribute most to policy-making in the post-communist countries analysed in this paper.
  - **Recommendations:**
    - In this regard, the case of environmental organisations can serve as a best practice for the whole sector, since these groups managed to combine public support and research capacity to acquire agenda-setting power. The example of environmental organisations could be effectively used to design similar strategies for other CSOs, share lessons and build capacity for civil society as a whole.
- **CSI as research-based evidence:** Being an action-planning tool for civil society, the CSI is already generating research-based evidence that can be usefully employed by CSOs to strengthen their role in society and their policy influence. This paper reported a number of examples showing how the CSI has thus far contributed to strengthening CSOs and how it has successfully impacted on policy-making in these post-communist countries.
  - On the 'policy' level, the CSI provided CSOs with data and information to build networks and engage with public authorities.
  - The CSI offered an opportunity to build or strengthen the analytical capacity of the CSOs involved in the project. Furthermore, the CSI stimulated further research on civil society,

particularly in the Czech Republic (where a spin-off study on umbrella organizations was conducted by the team that implemented the CSI) and in Macedonia (where the local implementing organisation decided carry out the media review and community survey on a regular basis).

- Finally, the CSI provided local organisations with a more thorough understanding of their civil societies within their national context (as well as the possibility to compare the national findings with information regarding civil societies in other countries). Furthermore, the project helped local organisation attract the attention of the media (a number of newspapers published articles on the topic and radio interviews were conducted with the national coordinating organisations). Participants pointed out that the implementation of the project provided an opportunity to interact with other civil society actors and various stakeholders (including government officials and donors). The CSI also offered a platform for interaction among the organisations involved in the project at the regional level, e.g. through a regional workshop held in April 2006.

As seen in the various examples analysed, an action-research tool, such as the CSI, can be purposefully employed by local civil society activists to make use of experiences from other countries, acquire analytical skills as well as establish new networks. In short, the CSI's participatory research approach can empower civil society groups and organisations to make a greater contribution to governance and development in their countries.

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## Annex 1 : CSI National Coordinating Organisations

No	Country	Organisation
1.	Argentina	Grupo de Análisis y Desarrollo Institucional y Social (GADIS)
2.	Armenia	Center for Development of Civil Society (CDCS)
3.	Azerbaijan	International Center for Social Research (ICSR)
4.	Bolivia	Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Center for Rural Research and Promotion (CIPCA)
5.	Bulgaria	Balkan Assist Association
6.	Burkina Faso	Civil Society Organization Network for Development (RESOCIDE)
7.	Chile	Fundación Soles
8.	China	NGO Research Centre (NGORC)
9.	Costa Rica	Fundación Acceso
10.	Croatia	Centre for Development of Non-Profit Organisations (CERANEO)
11.	Cyprus North	Management Centre
12.	Cyprus South	Intercollege
13.	Czech Republic	Civil Society Development Foundation (NROS)
14.	East Timor	East Timor National NGO Forum
15.	Ecuador	Fundación Esquel
16.	Egypt	Center for Development Services (CDS)
17.	Fiji	Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS)
18.	Georgia	Centre for Training and Consultancy
19.	Germany	Maecenata Institute for Philanthropy and Civil Society/ Third Sector Studies
20.	Ghana	Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development (GAPVOD)
21.	Greece	Access2Democracy
22.	Guatemala	Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) Guatemala
23.	Honduras	Centro Hondureño de Promoción para el Desarrollo Comunitario (CEHPRODEC)
24.	Hong Kong	The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)
25.	India (Orissa)	Center for Youth and Social Development (CYSD)
26.	Indonesia	YAPPIKA
27.	Italy	Cittadinanzattiva
28.	Jamaica	Association of Development Agencies (ADA)
29.	Lebanon	International Management and Training Institute (IMTI)
30.	Macedonia	Macedonian Center for International Corporation
31.	Mauritius	MACOSS
32.	Mongolia	CEDAW Watch Network Center
33.	Montenegro	Center for Development of NGOs (CRNVO)
34.	Nepal	Institute of Cultural Affairs Nepal (ICA Nepal)
35.	Netherlands	The New Dialogue
36.	Nigeria	ActionAid & Development Information Network (DevNet)
37.	Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
38.	Palestine	Bisan Center for Research and Development
39.	Poland	KLON/Jawor
40.	Romania	Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF)
41.	Russia	St. Petersburg Center for Humanities and Political Studies "Strategy"
42.	Scotland	The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)
43.	Serbia	Center for the Development of Non-Profit Sector (CDNPS)



No	Country	Organisation
44.	Sierra Leone	Community Research and Development Organization (CREDO)
45.	Slovenia	Legal Information Centre for NGOs
46.	South Korea	The Third Sector Institute at Hanyang University
47.	Taiwan	Center for International NGO Studies at National Sun Yat-Sen University
48.	Togo	Federation des ONG au Togo (FONGTO)
49.	Turkey	Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV)
50.	Uganda	Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (Deniva)
51.	Ukraine	Counterpart Creative Center (CCC) and Center for Philanthropy (CFP)
52.	Uruguay	Instituto de Comunicación y Desarrollo (ICD)
53.	Vietnam	Vietnam Institute for Development Studies and SNV
54.	Wales	Wales Council For Voluntary Action

## Annex 2: The CSI Scoring Matrix

### 1. STRUCTURE

Indicator	Description
<b>1. 1. Breadth of citizen participation</b>	<b>How widespread is citizen involvement in civil society? What proportion of citizens engage in civil society activities?</b>
1.1.1. Non-partisan political action	What percentage of people have ever undertaken any form of non-partisan political action (e.g. written a letter to a newspaper, signed a petition, attended a demonstration)?
1.1.2. Charitable giving	What percentage of people donate to charity on a regular basis?
1.1.3. CSO membership	What percentage of people belong to at least one CSO?
1.1.4. Volunteering	What percentage of people undertake volunteer work on a regular basis (at least once a year)?
1.1.5. Collective community action	What percentage of people have participated in a collective community action within the last year (e.g. attended a community meeting, participated in a community-organised event or a collective effort to solve a community problem)?
<b>1. 2. Depth of citizen participation</b>	<b>How deep/meaningful is citizen participation in CS? How frequently/extensively do people engage in CS activities?</b>
1.2.1. Charitable giving	How much (i.e. what percentage of personal income) do people who give to charity on a regular basis donate, on average, per year?
1.2.2. Volunteering	How many hours per month, on average, do volunteers devote to volunteer work?
1.2.3. CSO membership	What percentage of CSO members belong to more than one CSO?
<b>1.3. Diversity of civil society participants</b>	<b>How diverse/representative is the civil society arena? Do all social groups participate equitably in civil society? Are any groups dominant or excluded?</b>
1.3.1. CSO membership	To what extent do CSOs represent all significant social groups (e.g. women, rural dwellers, poor people, and minorities)?
1.3.2. CSO leadership	To what extent is there diversity in CSO leadership? To what extent does CSO leadership represent all significant social groups (e.g. women, rural dwellers, poor people, and minorities)?
1.3.3. Distribution of CSOs	How are CSOs distributed throughout the country?
<b>1.4. Level of organisation</b>	<b>How well-organised is civil society? What kind of infrastructure exists for civil society?</b>
1.4.1. Existence of CSO umbrella bodies	What percentage of CSOs belong to a federation or umbrella body of related organisations?
1.4.2. Effectiveness of CSO	How effective do CSO stakeholders judge existing federations or umbrella bodies to be in achieving their defined goals?
1.4.3. Self-regulation	Are there efforts among CSOs to self-regulate? How effective and enforceable are existing self-regulatory mechanisms? What percentage of CSOs abide by a collective code of conduct (or some other form of self-regulation)?
1.4.4. Support infrastructure	What is the level of support infrastructure for civil society? How many civil society support organisations exist in the country? Are they effective?
1.4.5. International linkages	What proportion of CSOs have international linkages (e.g. are members of international networks, participate in global events)?
<b>1.5. Inter-relations</b>	<b>How strong / productive are relations among civil society actors?</b>

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>
1.5.1 Communication	What is the extent of communication between CS actors?
1.5.2 Cooperation	How much do CS actors cooperate with each other on issues of common concern? Can examples of cross-sectoral CSO alliances/coalitions (around a specific issue or common concern) be identified?
<b>1.6. Resources</b>	<b>To what extent do CSOs have adequate resources to achieve their goals?</b>
1.6.1 Financial resources	How adequate is the level of financial resources for CSOs?
1.6.2 Human resources	How adequate is the level of human resources for CSOs?
1.6.3 Technological and infrastructural resources	How adequate is the level of technological and infrastructural resources for CSOs?

## 2. ENVIRONMENT

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>2.1. Political context</b>	<b>What is the political situation in the country and its impact on civil society?</b>
2.1.1. Political rights	How strong are the restrictions on citizens' political rights (e.g. to participate freely in political processes, elect political leaders through free and fair elections, freely organise in political parties)?
2.1.2. Political competition	What are the main characteristics of the party system in terms of number of parties, ideological spectrum, institutionalisation and party competition?
2.1.3. Rule of law	To what extent is the rule of law entrenched in the country?
2.1.4. Corruption	What is the level of perceived corruption in the public sector?
2.1.5. State effectiveness	To what extent is the state able to fulfil its defined functions?
2.1.6. Decentralisation	To what extent is government expenditure devolved to sub-national authorities?
<b>2.2. Basic freedoms &amp; rights</b>	<b>To what extent are basic freedoms ensured by law and in practice?</b>
2.2.1. Civil liberties	To what extent are civil liberties (e.g. freedom of expression, association, assembly) ensured by law and in practice?
2.2.2. Information rights	To what extent is public access to information guaranteed by law? How accessible are government documents to the public?
2.2.3. Press freedoms	To what extent are press freedoms ensured by law and in practice?

<b>2.3.</b>	<b>Socio-economic context</b>	<b>What is the socio-economic situation in the country and its impact on civil society?</b>
2.3.1.	Socio-economic context	How much do socio-economic conditions in the country represent a barrier to the effective functioning of civil society?
<b>2.4.</b>	<b>Socio-cultural context</b>	<b>To what extent are socio-cultural norms and attitudes conducive or detrimental to civil society?</b>
2.4.1.	Trust	How much do members of society trust one another?
2.4.2.	Tolerance	How tolerant are members of society?
2.4.3.	Public spiritedness	How strong is the sense of public spiritedness among members of society?
<b>2.5.</b>	<b>Legal environment</b>	<b>To what extent is the existing legal environment enabling or disabling to civil society?</b>
2.5.1.	CSO registration	How supportive is the CSO registration process? Is the process (1) simple, (2) quick, (3) inexpensive, (4) Following legal provisions (5) consistently applied?
2.5.2.	Allowable advocacy activities	To what extent are CSOs free to engage in advocacy / criticize government?
2.5.3.	Tax laws favourable to CSOs	How favourable is the tax system to CSOs? How narrow/broad is the range of CSOs that are eligible for tax exemptions, if any? How significant are these exemptions?
2.5.4.	Tax benefits for philanthropy	How broadly available are tax deductions or credits, or other tax benefits, to encourage individual and corporate giving?
<b>2.6.</b>	<b>State-civil society relations</b>	<b>What is the nature and quality of relations between civil society and the state?</b>
2.6.1.	Autonomy	To what extent can civil society exist and function independently of the state? To what extent are CSOs free to operate without excessive government interference? Is government oversight reasonably designed and limited to protect legitimate public interests?
2.6.2.	Dialogue	To what extent does the state dialogue with civil society? How inclusive and institutionalized are the terms and rules of engagement, if they exist?
2.6.3.	Cooperation / support	How narrow/broad is the range of CSOs that receive state resources (in the form of grants, contracts, etc.)?
<b>2.7.</b>	<b>Private sector-civil society relations</b>	<b>What is the nature and quality of relations between civil society and the private sector?</b>
2.7.1.	Private sector attitude	What is the general attitude of the private sector towards civil society actors?
2.7.2.	Corporate social responsibility	How developed are notions and actions of corporate social responsibility?
2.7.3.	Corporate philanthropy	How narrow/broad is the range of CSOs that receive support from the private sector?

### 3. VALUES

Indicator	Description
<b>3.1. Democracy</b>	<b>To what extent do civil society actors practice and promote democracy?</b>
3.1.1 Democratic practices within CSOs	To what extent do CSOs practice internal democracy? How much control do members have over decision-making? Are leaders selected through democratic elections?
3.1.2 CS actions to promote democracy	How much does CS actively promote democracy at a societal level?
<b>3.2. Transparency</b>	<b>To what extent do civil society actors practice and promote transparency?</b>
3.2.1 Corruption within civil society	How widespread is corruption within CS?
3.2.2 Financial transparency of CSOs	How many CSOs are financially transparent? What percentage of CSOs make their financial accounts publicly available?
3.2.3 CS actions to promote transparency	How much does CS actively promote government and corporate transparency?
<b>3.3. Tolerance</b>	<b>To what extent do civil society actors and organisations practice and promote tolerance?</b>
3.3.1 Tolerance within the CS arena	To what extent is CS a tolerant arena?
3.3.2 CS actions to promote tolerance	How much does CS actively promote tolerance at a societal level?
<b>3.4. Non-violence</b>	<b>To what extent do civil society actors practice and promote non-violence?</b>
3.4.1 Non-violence within the CS arena	How widespread is the use of violent means (such as damage to property or personal violence) among CS actors to express their interests in the public sphere?
3.4.2 CS actions to promote non-violence and peace	How much does CS actively promote a non-violent society? For example, how much does civil society support the non-violent resolution of social conflicts and peace? Address issues of violence against women, child abuse, violence among youths etc.?
<b>3.5. Gender equity</b>	<b>To what extent do civil society actors practice and promote gender equity?</b>
3.5.1 Gender equity within the CS arena	To what extent is civil society a gender equitable arena?
3.5.2 Gender equitable practices within CSOs	How much do CSOs practice gender equity? What percentage of CSOs with paid employees have policies in place to ensure gender equity?
3.5.3 CS actions to promote gender equity	How much does CS actively promote gender equity at the societal level?
<b>3.6. Poverty eradication</b>	<b>To what extent do civil society actors promote poverty eradication?</b>
3.6.1 CS actions to eradicate poverty	To what extent does CS actively seek to eradicate poverty?
<b>3.7. Environmental sustainability</b>	<b>To what extent do civil society actors practice and promote environmental sustainability?</b>
3.7.1 CS actions to sustain the environment	How much does CS actively seek to sustain the environment?

## 4. IMPACT

Indicator	Description
<b>4.1. Influencing public policy</b>	<b>How active and successful is civil society in influencing public policy?</b>
4.1.1. – 4.1.2. Human Rights & Social Policy Impact Case Studies	How active and successful is civil society in influencing public policy?
4.1.3. Civil Society's Impact on National Budgeting process Case Study	How active and successful is civil society in influencing the overall national budgeting process?
<b>4.2. Holding state &amp; private corporations accountable</b>	<b>How active and successful is civil society in holding the state and private corporations accountable?</b>
4.2.1. Holding state accountable	How active and successful is civil society in monitoring state performance and holding the state accountable?
4.2.2. Holding private corporations accountable	How active and successful is civil society in holding private corporations accountable?
<b>4.3. Responding to social interests</b>	<b>How much are civil society actors responding to social interests?</b>
4.3.1 Responsiveness	How effectively do civil society actors respond to priority social concerns?
4.3.2 Public Trust	What percentage of the population has trust in civil society actors?
<b>4.4. Empowering citizens</b>	<b>How active and successful is civil society in empowering citizens, especially traditionally marginalised groups, to shape decisions that affect their lives?</b>
4.4.1 Informing/ educating citizens	How active and successful is civil society in informing and educating citizens on public issues?
4.4.2 Building capacity for collective action	How active and successful is civil society in building the capacity of people to organise themselves, mobilise resources and work together to solve common problems?
4.4.3 Empowering marginalized people	How active and successful is civil society in empowering marginalized people?
4.4.4. Empowering women	How active and successful is civil society in empowering women, i.e. to give them real choice and control over their lives?
4.4.5. Building social capital	To what extent does civil society build social capital among its members? How do levels of trust, tolerance and public spiritedness of members of CS compare to those of non-members?
4.4.6 Supporting livelihoods	How active and successful is civil society in creating / supporting employment and/or income-generating opportunities (especially for poor people and women)?
<b>4.5. Meeting societal needs</b>	<b>How active and successful is civil society in meeting societal needs, especially those of poor people and other marginalised groups?</b>
4.5.1 Lobbying for state service provision	How active and successful is civil society in lobbying the government to meet pressing societal needs?
4.5.2 Meeting pressing societal needs directly	How active and successful is civil society in directly meeting pressing societal needs (through service delivery or the promotion of self-help initiatives)?
4.5.3 Meeting needs of marginalised groups	To what extent are CSOs more or less effective than the state in delivering services to marginalised groups?

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