



NGOs and the state - a relationship of clients, partners or opponents?

What is the reality of NGO-government partnerships in the diverse countries of this region, are NGOs **contractual implementers** or **advocating for change**? How do we maintain independent voices while depending on sustenance **funding** from government sources? Where is the space for supplementing each other and what is the cross-sector experience of coalitions? The purpose of this discussion is to explore how EU mechanisms impacts NGO-government relations and what the interaction is on the practical level in the various CEE countries and to outline the key challenges and opportunities for effective interaction of NGOs with governments at different levels.

Dusan Ondrusek Moderator (Mod): We know what happened in the last 20 years. Now, we want to turn to the next 10 or 20 years, if the prognosis and vision are describing some future possibilities, what does it mean for us to do in the next 3 or 5 years? The relationship between the state and the CSO is very diverse, in parts of the region, for various issues, it's complimentary. In some cases we have the overlap of services; in some we have models of substitution and delegation of some services to CSOs. In some cases there is no communication at all. We would like to first hear from you what we need to change in the relationship based on your current experience from this region.



Basically civil
society has
grown up

Participation (P): I would not really generalize; I would start with the Czech Republic and the situation I see now. First in the Czech Republic the relationship between civil society and the state has gone through 2-3 phases. In first phase, basically civil society has "grown up;" it took 5-7 years. A lot of that development was really about establishing civil society organizations as service providers and in that time the state was not a real partner of civil society organizations. Then slowly, in the second phase, the state started to realize that civil society is not the enemy, it is not a bunch of incompetent emotional individuals but it's a genuine partner which can do some things more effectively and cheaply. This change in the mindset of the government, was a direct consequence of EU influence, and the consequence of the failure by the state to do a lot of things. In the meantime, civil society has grown from learning to provide services, gaining a trust in constituencies, learning how to work with media, and has developed to the level where it shifted towards proposing systematic change and really started to formulate policies. This development which I believe is relatively positive, has been facilitated and helped through the availability of flexible funds and through the influence of the EU accession process. Right now, I think we find ourselves often in a situation when there is more space to influence politics than the capacity of NGOs to really advocate well. There is lack of capacity of civil society to advocate professionally. In the meantime, the flexible funds have disappeared and now we face serious negative consequences for civil society because the only available funds are basically state funds, which corrupt in many different ways the way civil society behaves, acts, speaks etc. The other option is EU funds which are also devastating in making a negative impact. If you know how to advocate, there is nobody to whom you can advocate because there are no stable governments. Another important development is the parallel development of the service provider branch of civil society and the watchdog type branch of civil society. To come back to your question: is civil society organizations partner or watchdog critic of the state? Basically, healthy civil society needs both, although there are a lot of problems of providing funds for the civil sector in general; it's much more complicated and hard when it comes to the watchdog organizations.

Mod: You are mentioning the Czech Republic example, are you speaking about the whole sector or your experience in the development aid area specifically?

P: I am speaking about the trend over there in Czech Republic,

P: I think [that in] defining the roles and the relationships between the state and the civil society or NGOs, you should clearly distinguish three levels of the state: [elected] central, [elected] local and public administration, because they

3 levels of state: national, local and public administration

have very difficult, sometimes complex and sometimes complementary relationship with civil society. Unless we distinguish these roles, it will be very difficult to discuss without mixing too much. Secondly one of the angles from which we can see transition is the redefinition of the purpose and sense of shared values and shared interests. I think what we see now during the crisis in particular, is that we have increasing needs to rediscover the common space and the common shared values, and I think civil society is one of the actors that can provide this. There is strong competition on these three levels of the state on who's supposed to be defining and defending those common, shared values. Unless we have the civil society angle and build some kind of partnership, we are going into one of two extremes: either just autonomous individuals with difficulty to survive or some kind of collectivists' project, which we have already seen. So, I would think that we can discuss what is the optimum balance between those two different levels and the ways that we can reach different roles in defining those common purposes and common goals.

P: It's symbolic what's happening between the state and CSOs; if the distance is too big we have to shout, if the distance is not so big and take all necessary steps, maybe, we don't need to shout so much.

P: But if become too close, we might have no difference.

Mutual trust

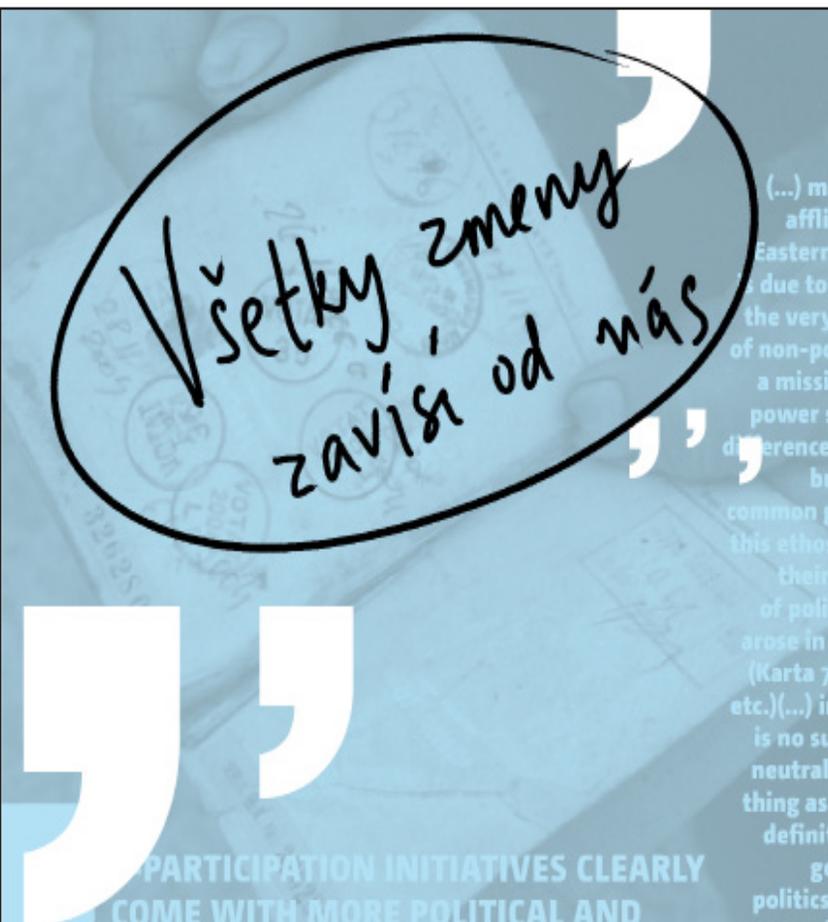
P: I think that one of the important issues is to see whether the mechanism of the interrelationships between the state and the NGO is developed enough, in some countries, it has already developed but it doesn't work properly. It means, sometimes it stops, continues and then stops again. In other countries the mechanism, for NGOs and state authorities to collaborate with each others, in order to achieve the same goal doesn't exist. In many situations NGOs and the state have the same goal to achieve something, but the proposal on how to achieve it may be different. So there should be mechanisms for interrelationships between NGOs and the state plus, there is a need to develop mutual trust between them so they can work together better.

P What I have seen among mechanisms is: in order to achieve the goal the NGO propose collaboration to the state. It means, they work together, draft regulation for example, and the most important thing is the involvement of the representatives of the NGO in decision making and the legislative reform process. If restriction exists in such instances, then the state will decide something on behalf of the society without involving society itself.

Mod: So, one concrete mechanism is to create a joint working group of the governmental and the NGO experts, in the legislative reform.

Making policy makers accountable

P: I am coming from a civic group and therefore, my idea is linked to what I'm doing. For others who for example work in the social or environmental field this may look different. From my perspective, we have to look at new means of making policymakers accountable. First, there are some mechanisms that help them appear efficient, sophisticated and making us believe that they are accountable for their work, which in fact is not always true. Secondly we should also try to change, at least in Romania from where I come, the general perception of NGOs as being biased, representing more a political platforms than their own views. I find it quite intriguing as the matter of objectivity and non partisan-



ship is the key elements for making us have a voice with an impact upon policy makers.

P: I want to add regarding legislation and legal framework, which are actually the base for any kind of relationship between the NGOs and the government. An example from the Czech Republic: after the reform of public administration in 2000 there are much better relationships between the local and regional governments with NGOs in the region. I believe they started to think differently about it. On the other hand, on the central level, the preparation of the new Czech civil code and discussions about the law on public benefit status and public benefit organizations, are quite lively in Czech Republic, and there is enough space for NGOs to be part of it. The problem is that it's difficult to find somebody to do it, I get the feeling that there is

no union between the NGOs on what they would like to have in this law, and when there is no unity of NGOs, it's very difficult to go into some kind of confrontation with the government. Another point is that there may be a prepared law, but it's completely out of question to lead it through parliament and - two completely different stories.

Paternalism and feudalism

P: I'll be blunt but I think there are two words that describe the state approach towards NGOs in our region, and they are paternalism and feudalism. While there are rules and procedures regulating partnership and cooperation between the state and civil society, civil servants mostly implement these regulations if and as they please. Attitudes like: "All right, I can partner with you, I can support you if you do it on my terms and my terms only" are common. The approach is the most fundamental thing that needs to be changed. And on the fact that NGOs have different opinions and see things differently in terms of regulation, I think that is natural, and it will be always the case: my usual example is that antiabortion groups and feminist groups are both NGOs and they will never ever agree on an abortion law.

Consultative processes rarely work

P: An additional issue since we were speaking about participation of NGOs in making policies and in legislation and in my country very often these relationships don't work well. NGOs are beginning to take part in different consultative councils with different ministries, increasingly what these councils do is: an official opening ceremony and they never get to real work. Real problems are not solved in such councils; they don't work in practice in Bulgaria. The second issue is because consultation with NGOs is important for the EU, it forces governments to do it and there are many cases when we receive a draft regulation or a policy by a ministry and they ask us:" Can you give us a comment on these

50 pages by the end of the day? "This is not consultation, this is what needs to change. Related to state funding, in Bulgaria, especially now with the structural funds, EU funding goes through the state, through ministries which means that the ministries choose who should receive the funding or not. This process has resulted in a lot of NGOs created by political figures or mayors of municipalities and they receive the funding. Because this is a lot of funding, the state has the power to decide which part of the NGO sector would be active and which not

The state is made by elected and nominated people

P: In relation with the state, in my opinion, we have to change our approach to the state. The state is made by elected and nominated people. They look at us, the civil society, like the father is looking at his child, thinking about the general good as well as about their specific interests for a mandate or for a year. Our approach should be to understand their thinking, and we have to prepare first of all our NGOs' offer to the government: What do we offer to the government that is added values; that they need for solving public policy issues and for the general good? If I ask everybody around this table what your offer is, I don't know how many of us can say what it is. Looking at NGOs working in my country in Romania, they don't know how to offer their services to the government and not all of the NGOs are prepared to discuss with the state. There are NGOs more or less oriented towards giving services to their constituencies, and there are NGOs with strong voices, related to the government. In the end NGOs have to structure themselves in different sectors or services, find the best leaders and the best voice to discuss with the government. We have to learn how to discuss with the government, we have to learn their administrative language if we want to register some victories. So, we have to do a lot by ourselves in order to change the perception government has of NGOs, showing the added value that we put on the table and why they have to listen to us.

What do we represent?

P: I agree, if we really want to change something in our relations to the state, maybe we should start from some reflection on ourselves as an NGO sector. From my point of view, one of the crucial things is the question of legitimization and what we really represent. If we answer to this question, then we can try to negotiate our position not only as a service provider but as a real partner. What we are finding now, for example in Poland, is that yes, the state recognizes us, they are giving us more money than they used to a few years ago, but they are also more and more asking: who are you, who do you really represent and how can you prove that you represent them? They say: we have the mandate to build a system, we are representing people through elections, but who are you? I think this is a crucial thing that we have to answer to, and there are some ways to do it. Especially in the European context, what we can use, in my opinion, is the principle of subsidiary. This is a value that we should focus on if we want to prove that we want and should be treated as a partner by the government.

Expertise without representation

P: I wish to link to the two previous speakers because I would see those two challenges slightly different. I see a very close link between the "specific offer" issue, the specialization of NGOs, meaning NGOs are becoming experts, more think tanks than civil society representatives, and the legitimization issue. If you are an expert, then perhaps you are not exactly representing anyone anymore? This is really a major movement right now and a major challenge for us in terms of developments in the NGO sector: what avenues are certain NGOs taking, are they becoming experts? Are they representing anyone? Are there differ-

ences in terms of how they should be governed, their legal framework etc?

Maybe we shouldn't look down on beekeeper associations

P: About the nature of civil society and the role of NGOs within that framework, which needs to be explored and understood better. It has been kind of an inductive exercise [so far]: we go out and do what we do; whatever works - we do more; what doesn't work - it takes us a while to recognize. I think, we would benefit by some vigorous examination of what is the proper role of civil society versus the state. Maybe it's taking us back to the basics of civic education, but I think this meeting is one of the first times that we've really examined this thing as a group. There was a case in the Czech Republic, I think, when the government decided to start funding NGOs. There were lots of complaints in the group working on watchdog efforts that a lot of the money was going to beekeepers associations and alpinists' clubs etc. These types of organizations don't do anything, they are just local, and I think we look down on them in some way and maybe we shouldn't. Maybe we should try to learn a bit more about what they are doing and the function that they play.

Independent despite governmental funding?

P: We have to touch on [the issue] to what extent NGOs can be independent if they are dependent on funding from governments? I'm an activist in my heart and participate in organizations but more and more organizations cannot voice out messages from their constituencies because they depend on the state [for funding]. I am observing now in Bulgaria and maybe also in Romania, a so called tendency of "capturing the civil society", which means that many "Gongos" and quasi NGOs are absorbing money from the European funds. The question is how strong are advocacy groups or service providers NGOs to make this transparent? [How to] send a clear message who they are and to distinguish themselves a little bit from ad hoc NGOs appearing in the last two years? This is a very crucial question with regards to legitimacy and how NGOs are gaining public support?

Don't try to include everybody

P: You say that we have a serious problem with the EU funding going to Gongos. Then create a platform of non-Gongo NGOs - don't try to include everybody there - and through that platform establish a watchdog system, which will systematically criticize the misuse of funds! Believe me, in three years time you can make a change in the society. I really think that the question whether "we" can - not everybody can do everything. The same organization cannot be a critical watchdog and service provider and a constructive advocate vis-a-vis the government. There has to be a division of the labor also within civil society and among NGOs when you look at its complexity, somebody today described it as an eco system, then we can really significantly influence policy making and achieve a bit more, first maybe in countries like the Czech Republic, then in Romania and Bulgaria. Don't be pessimistic about our powers.

Would division of labor really work?

P: I don't think division of labor would work. As mentioned, if I provide services for people with disabilities, and the legislation in this case is not working, there is something wrong with it - if its not me doing something about policy making, who else? Whom should I divide my labor with, if I'm the one who works for people with disabilities? I don't think division of labor works and this is one of the problems we face when we relate to the state.

P: My understanding of the division was more about that both roles are needed, but maybe not necessarily done by the same people. Maybe, the organization

may split, sometimes the organization is transformed from service provider to watchdog or opposite. Both roles are necessary and we may be more efficient if we are specialized.

Understand who our partner is

P: Our task is to learn, even though I may dislike it, to understand who our partner is. Our partner may not be ideal, well-minded civil service, but a more or less corrupt political system. Basically we have to learn from business how they do lobbying and e.g. use the media to make critical point, use quiet advocacy and use tactics to achieve something.

Mutual transparency in CS

P: I think we cannot use the example of business in advocacy. The priority in all relationship between NGOs - no matter if it's advocacy, service providers, or watchdogs - and the state is transparency. We need it, [first], from our side, so that we are transparent among each other (not to hide information about calls for proposals, for example). [Secondly], we need to force the state on every level to be transparent and to hold it accountable. Transparency is the beginning of



real partnership. One of the core values of NGOs is that we are open and want to create a better world. A better world is when everybody participates, and without clear information available to everybody we cannot make informed decisions. The decision may be different for different groups, but still we need to have this common level of public information about each other, this is the way to hold these fake NGOs and fake grassroots organizations accountable.

Human nature exist also among NGOs

P: This transparency among each other in the NGO sector, I like it, but find it very idealistic. This is not human nature, we are all human beings, we like advantages; we like to be better and have more than others. I'm sorry, but it's human nature and it's not only like this in the business sector, among NGOs it is exactly the same. I would love it, but it doesn't work this way in society, because society is constructed of various components that are all human beings.

Mod Moving to the second area, some good examples on how to achieve something are already mentioned, like creating a platform, consultative status, internal educating. What more concrete examples could you bring leading us to real partnership?

Need of legal expertise

P: The civil sector needs to develop legal expertise. If you want to influence the state and parliament, you need to be able and capable to formulate in legal terms. Not every NGO has a lawyer but a bunch of NGOs can find a good lawyer if they work together. Many things are not decided anymore in domestic politics, because they are decided on the central European levels, so NGOs need to develop capacity on how, as a group, they can influence policy in Brussels. None of us can do it individually, but some of us in a group can develop mechanisms and basically influence domestic issues through influencing Brussels. Sometimes in Brussels they will listen more to you than your own domestic policy makers.

Improving
argumentation

P: This is again a different type of the problem, do we really have connection? Are we really connected with those groups acting on that international level in Brussels? I have a feeling that they very often are doing their business without any connection with what is going on in specific countries. You mention that if we want to influence government we just need legal expertise, I disagree, what we need are arguments. Without arguments we are just simple lobbyists, lobbying for something that is suitable for us but not lobbying for some general and public purpose.

Consulting
governments
time
consuming

P: One thing that I have noticed: consulting the government requires a lot of effort. You need to really devote time and this is something that a lot of NGOs don't have, they like to shout something and then they go on to another problem. The other problem is the business attitude of NGOs: very often you don't get paid when you provide advice on legislation and this means that certain NGOs lose interest in doing it.

P: Do we have any real examples from countries with official consultation as a working mechanism, regular, ongoing, sustained?

P: I have an example from Lithuania, which doesn't work in practice. There is a law defining that the state, the authorities, and the government should have formal consultations with civil society within a month before the law or the decision being adopted. It doesn't work in reality.

P: I am thinking about Estonia, they are quite developed in implementing consultations and involving citizens in the decision making processes.

Sources of
legitimacy:
specific expertise
or representing
members

P: You have to be very clear when you are an actor that wants to consult the government, from where your legitimacy comes. There are basically two sources: one is you, the expertise that you have in place and that's why they are interested in consulting you. The second is that you are representative: a membership organization or that you have your own branches which you represent, and that's why you are actually interesting for the government. Those are the two sources of legitimacy in Bulgaria, and we have this problem: organizations, which are more or less representative, do not have the expertise in place. And even though they are a [desirable] partner for the government, because the government can legitimize its policies through them, they are not very useful in terms of providing specific advice. Organizations that have expertise are not representative, that's why they are easily dismissed by the government as they are simply not interested to listen. I am wondering if in some of the more advanced European member states there are examples of combining both: representation and expertise, for the sake of having a stronger voice and being heard by the government.

Mod: Do we have such an example of a country where they have been more or less successful with having NGOs that are at the same time representative and can serve as experts in the consultative process toward governments?

P: To some extent in Poland, we can say that in the area of legal professions, NGOs have worked as monitors since the 1990s, they have been heard and right now there is ongoing reform of the organization of legal professions. Some

representatives of NGOs are part of the process, acting as experts. Whether the outcomes of these reforms are successful and positive, that's another issue, but it's an example. Having said that, I also wanted to tell you something from my experience of the legislative process: I wouldn't be surprised if there weren't too many examples around our region with really good combination of top expertise and representation. The problem is that very often, even when the state does provide consultative mechanisms, it's difficult to collect the necessary expertise, and this is why, I think, the comment on specialization is quite to the point. Funnily, even in the most organized and funded areas, such as finance (I used to work for the finance sector, in the regulatory process there), even there you have full consultation and facilities provided for the associations that represent different interest groups in the sector. They all sit around the table and deliberate, and the ministries are happy to hear what they have to say. The only problem is that these guys, again like many NGOs, don't have time to elaborate on topics in need of discussion with the government. So, it's really hopeless how those consultations came out.

P: It is my feeling that we are talking about NGOs as a consultancy companies. Some other roles should be associated in the discussion, such as watchdogs putting some pressure on the government, etc. I hope the discussion will not solely be about how we can better become consultants for the government.

Mod: My understanding was that [we are talking about NGOs] having consultative status in reforms and regulative changes; [of] their representatives being invited to panels and expert groups not only with the possibility of commenting, but also sometimes elaborating on the new regulation. In some countries this is regulated, in some countries it's not, and there is good and bad practice in this field.

P: I am sure there are a lot of successful examples, I know of one from Hungary, just from this spring when an NGO was actually preparing a resolution for a so called climate law in their Parliament. In order to have such successful achievement a very, very important factor that is not new to any of us although we don't mention it, is that the government and their representatives need to be interested in what you have to offer. The combination of expertise doesn't matter, as long as the government doesn't want to listen then don't mind the message you put in front of them, no matter how clever or intelligent or feasible economically and socially it is, it cannot get through.

Government has to be interested in what you have to offer

P: There are mechanisms and techniques for vigorous and efficient public consultation, which have had really good outcomes and changed policies. Maybe the strategy for public consultation has to be organized in different stages, from the concept phase until the very end of the regulation process. We have to learn good mechanisms for advocacy, working with public consultation, and to know the legislative process in our countries as well as at the European level. We have to use the so-called Economic and Social Council where we as NGOs have chairs, at the national level and at EU level. We have to use tools to interfere with the state or with the government to influence public policy, we can do it. To be good partners and not children in the relationship with the state, we have to learn a lot about advocacy.

Improve advocacy skills

P: I just want to add an argument, I think the main and most important thing in

Need to identify common interest

the relationship between an NGO and the state is to know how to approach it. There are many NGOs who are successful today, and they know how to approach governments. If there is a conflict of interest, you can't implement anything. If there is a common interest, then you can negotiate with the state authorities in order to implement a proposal which has the same goals, but how do you do it is not by looking for problems and saying that the state cannot solve them, but show how the NGO can help to the authority to solve it. If there is an additional interest by the NGO, like receiving money or do something else, then nothing can be done. As an NGO member you need to put yourself into the position of the state authority and see what they can accept, what they like and don't like - and the approach should be based on that.

What about the future? Grounded expectations, not fantasies

Mod Now we want to speak about how you would like to have this relationship in the future? How will the situation and relationship between the state and the NGOs look in next 15 to 20 years? We would like to hear realistic, down to the ground expectations, not fantasies - we know very well what happens during the past twenty years, and there might be a difference between what we were dreaming about 20 years ago and what we achieved. Let's have realistic expectations how these relationship might look, and what are the crucial things to keep in mind. [Group discussion] I need to interrupt your discussion, sorry, but please, let's listen to each subgroup and hear some of the main ideas.

European legal frameworks for NGOs?

P: We were discussing legal framework and the possibility of preparing something like a European level legal framework for NGOs, some kind of basic principles. Will national governments be pressed, maybe from the top [by the EU], to deal with the situation in their own countries, maybe there are some principles from more developed civil societies in the other EU states that could be used.

Building trust is a long process depending mainly on us

P: We've been talking mainly about building trust and we hope that in one or two decades the relationship will have more trust, especially from the state towards civil society. This is a long process and depends mainly on us. Hopefully the state will understand that there is a space which is filled by civic activities and initiatives, they will create conditions so that these initiatives can be born and flourished, and there will be a friendly environment for this.

P: We were maybe more pessimistic. It depends; we can't know what the politics are going to look like in 10 or 20 years. The hope is that civil society [will be] able to react and [adjust] the way it works to address the politics of the moment. When



the states are authoritarian, it's the watchdog role that is primary; when they are generally liberal with the small "l", and then it's more capacity building and service delivery. So, it depends on the direction politics take. One thing, however that we could state as positive and inspirational is a goal to increase the efficiency in the system, e.g. it's much more efficient to have a consultation on a particular law at the beginning of the process, than when the law is already passed and creates a lot of problems and you have to make a big campaign to overturn it.

Advocacy groups having problems finding funding

P: In our group we discussed some pessimistic and some optimistic visions. The optimistic includes good communication and consultations between ministries/state institutions and NGOs, more synergies between NGOs based on individual contacts and being able to penetrate different structures. Probably the pessimistic view is that more and more NGOs will become professional NGOs and consultancy groups, and there will be less small grassroots NGOs with constituencies behind them. Also how advocacy groups will find alternative ways of funding and there is fear of what kind of advocacy groups will emerge in the future, e.g. nationalistic movements, or other extremist kinds of advocacy groups.

Young people doing things differently

P: I think there will be another type of self organizing happening quite outside of this NGO sector. Most of this NGO sector, in my opinion, might go towards professionalization, which completely deletes what it is about. As subcontractor to the government, it [the sector] can do some good work which is OK, but the movement type of NGOs that we believed in some years ago will be a different type with young people doing things differently. The question is whether this will be the good or the bad civil society and what would be the motivation factor: racism or doing something good? European funding will be shrinking and this will be a big challenge for good service NGOs because then what, where do they find the money? Important issue is how to identify alternative funding, and assess what will be the damage when the European funding shrinks.

Mod: So, we have some more optimistic and some skeptic or pessimistic scenarios, so what does this mean for us in the near future, over the next 3 to 5 years? What do we really need to focus on? What is needed to do in order to have real partnerships and to avoid these pessimistic scenarios?

The money question

P: One of the easiest issues to focus on, although not necessarily to solve, is the money question. Now NGOs are raising funds locally with mixed success, but it's not all about government money and it's not all foundation money anymore. There are some corporate funds, there's membership dues, there is event fundraising and I think some attention to these alternative ways of feeding organizations would be helpful.

EU developments matter

P: I am not an expert in the region but don't you think that whatever happens to the EU will have an effect on the role of NGOs? If there is a constitution, will there be more cohesive policy within the EU? That would certainly affect how NGOs will develop or how they have to develop, and how to interact with the state. Just an observation: I think that what NGOs have to do is to cooperate and interact more with the government, and the same has to happen from the government side, in order to be more effective in implementing the future EU policies within the country.

Exchange of staff

P: We are an environmental NGO with a public participation program, and we try to write a common project with a university to teach future officials at local, regional and national level how to discuss with people and how to motivate people to participate: methods, tools, when it is possible, when not etc. So, I hope this can be an idea for you all.

P: One alternative mean could be for some NGO representatives to work for the government for a while, or maybe [have on administrative positions] people who have the experience of working with NGOs. If such a person has a good position in the administration, [s/he] could understand and help to support NGOs.

P: Coming back to the issue of building trust I think it's about proving that an NGO or civil society organization can build their own sustainability, even independently from government funding, that they can involve constituencies, prove that they work effectively and produce results - that they can communicate their impact and mobilize stakeholders around the issue. It's a long process, but I think it's important to show results, to communicate them and aim to build trust, persuade, convince.

P: I would like to see during the next 20 years that developing proper relations between NGOs and the state becomes part of the agenda, of the policy of the EU. It is already happening somewhat because of the Lisbon treaty which includes a discussion on civil dialogue.

Transparency and accountability of NGOs

P: The EU is an economic union, not a civil society union. It seems thought, that there can be some way to introduce issues such as civil society, but it may be too idealistic. I would say that transparency and accountability of NGOs - that NGOs really act transparent enough, that they gain trust from their partners and it doesn't matter if it is government or if it's business sector - I think this is the only way.

P: In the next 3 years, I'll recommend for us to organize ourselves and develop our common links, common strategy on how to work with the state, organizing a small "civil society army" in relation to the state because they have to know we are here and we have a lot of things to solve together.

P: One thing I want to add to the argument of NGO-government relationship part of EU policy - a first step is to make this issue part of [national] policy. So, whenever there are elections, this will be one of the issues that are promoted and talked about by politicians, not only judicial or economic reform, but also the relationship with citizens and with civil society.

P: I would like to see in 3-5 years groups of citizens asking some coalition of NGOs to represent them and to lobby for them and their problems in the government structure.

P: Some sort of training program, academic program for NGO leaders, NGO management, some of that has already started but to make it more wide spread.

P: I would add a training program for public official [on] civil society.



Litigation case for misuse of funds

P: I would like to have one good litigation case of misuse of funds having to give them back to the state. Maybe, because of some whistle blowing from NGOs from the inside that we know they are being misused and we want it back as citizens.

Watchdog work will remain crucial

P: I think it's very important to create independent funding for critical but highly professional NGO watchdog work because having the level of sophistication of corruption that we have on the political scene today, you really need on the other side some critical watching with high levels of professionalism following everything for years. For those types of things you could never have trust from the governmental side, so to provide long term sustainability of this type of critical thinking it has to be created differently than just waiting for the state to provide the funding. Another thing, today funds are controlled by the state, perhaps it should be the effort by the NGO sector to somehow move this money as much as possible to agencies. Out of the hands of the civil servants in ministries because people in ministries change and you are so dependent on them, when you have set up specialized agencies to follow certain issues, you get bigger space for maneuver. For a significant part of civil society it's extremely important to join forces and tackle corruption and radicalization. These are two important issues of our society, corruption is undermining the basic trust in political institutions and as a consequence of the economic crisis we are getting radical forces, being well organized and mobilizing public discontent. Today the neo-Nazis are ready to mobilize themselves and dedicate their weekends to activism; the NGO sector is not ready to dedicate their weekends to try to mobilize counter activism.

P: On NGOs and the state working together: first thing is that when I talk about involving NGO people with the government, it may also be government officials going to NGOs to work together. The second thing is when the government drafts legislation, because everything starts from the legislation, if there is a gap in the law between the government and the NGO versions, they should work together to find [and close] the gap. The third thing could be to ask the ministries for some money of the budget, why not?

Let's not miss the train for next programming period of the EU

P: Very practically the new programming period of the EU is coming, and if we miss the train a lot of the priorities of those that we claim we serve might be missed. It's very important to have this type of action groups in the country, more coordinated who participate in a meaningful way in the consultative process so that the priorities that are needed are there. It's also really important to

have real monitoring and shadowing to see what was the damage of not using these all these structural funds that were for people in need to the full extent. We need to do monitoring, we need to do assessment and in order not to be screwed individually, it's very important to work as a coalition. There is a need of citizen feedback to the EU about this funding, and I do believe some of it can be changed.

Mod: Thanks to all of you for your ideas.

