

Project Proposal (introductory phase)

1. Problem Identification and Context analysis

Civil society is an essential – and vulnerable - part of democracy. We see in numerous countries that have recently made the transition from dictatorship to democracy that the lack of or an underdeveloped civil society causes serious problems, especially when the transition institutionally is completed. We can observe in these places that the functioning of democratic institutions is far from being perfect, the participation of the people in political life and in general, shaping their lives is limited and, therefore, disappointment and false nostalgia for the stable “good old” system is growing. The lack of or weak civil society is partially the reason for the vulnerability of these societies against populism: insufficient participation leads to the alienation of democratic institutions and, thus, is the breeding ground for populism.

When the fight against dictatorship was the objective, and also in the beginning of transition, a lot of attention was paid to the development and support of civil society, including both political and financial support. After the “completion” of the transition and the stabilization of democratic institutions it is all too common that this attention shrinks. It is also interesting – and alarming – to observe that while in the beginning of transition democratic politicians heavily support and even rely on civil society – in many cases they come from there -, but after a certain period of time, after the consolidation of democracy the civil society becomes a “disturbing” factor and both politically and in legislation they become less and less supported.

At the same time, we observe can another process, namely a slow but continuous involvement of – the institutionalized –civil society in decision-making and welfare service provision. In these places the state realized, that it is not capable “to run” the society alone. The distribution of work must have an effect on the redistribution of income. The state support is transforming into cost of service-purchase.

So in line with keeping distance, a cooperation between governments and civil society is also emerging. However, we can be a witness to the appearance of weakness of civil society during this development. The condition of stable operation is the stable and independent economic background, which, nevertheless, in most cases can be assured by the state, what endangers the independence.

With other word, we can talk about political and economic weakness of civil society.

2. Goal of the Project

In order to think about the problems and the possible solutions, first we have to size up the real situation of the civil society in the World. The goal of the project is to describe the condition of civil society in different countries, determine the main questions, explore the real demand and possibilities.

3. Objectives

Therefore we believe it would be useful to develop a system, which will measure, how developed civil society is in different countries, how much it is or is not supported by the Government and the politicians in general, if and to what extent their participation in shaping the life in the country is real and substantial.

- to create a system, which will be able to assess the situation regarding civil society in different countries
- to provide the Community of Democracies with a new tool to play an increasingly important role in promoting democracy
- to help civil society institution all over the world

4. Starting point

The aim of this phase is to provide a collection of basic knowledge to the participants of the project about the conditions of the civil societies of each participating countries. It also forms the foundation of a future comparative analysis that is to be carried out later during the project. Researchers will reflect on the different sections in more details later at the conference in November.

In order to get a picture about each country, we need a contribution from all local experts such as a paper of around 10,000-12,000 characters (including spaces) consisting of the following sections:

1. The emergence of an independent third sector
2. Chronology of regulatory events
3. Types of organisations
4. Size, structure, and functions of the nonprofit organisations
5. Revenue structure and financial characteristics of the nonprofit sector
6. Relationships between the government and the civil sector, the government's civil strategy

In order to put together the different papers, and make them available for other participants, the deadline is 31 of December.

Budapest, 27/11/08