

CIVIS CIVIS INFO

Association of Non-Government Organisations of Southeast Europe

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THE PRESIDENT OF CIVIS ASSOCIATION

ZORAN PUSIĆ,
President of Civic Committee for Human
Rights, Croatia

CIVIS HAS TWO HONORARY PRESIDENTS:

ŽIVORAD KOVAČEVIĆ,
President of European Movement in Serbia
BORIS VUKOBRAT,
President of Peace and Crisis Management
Foundation

VICE-PRESIDENTS OF CIVIS ASSOCIATION ARE:

ALEKSANDAR POPOV,
Igman Initiative
GORDANA SILJANOVSKA - DAKOVA,
Kiro Gligorov Foundation, Skopje, Macedonia
MARKU MARANAJ,
Maltese, Shkoder, Albania
MILJENKO DERETA,
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NEDELJKA SINDIK,
LIBERTASK Podgorica, Montenegro
VEHID ŠEHIĆ,
Forum of Tuzla Citizens, Bosnia and Herze-
govina
ZEF ŠALJA,
Mother Theresa, Pristina

SECRETARY GENERAL:

MAJA BOBIĆ,
on behalf of European Movement in Serbia

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARY GENERAL:

MIRJANA PRLJEVIĆ,
on behalf of Peace and Crisis Management
Foundation

DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL:

BOJANA POPOVIĆ,
on behalf of European Movement in Serbia

Bearing in mind that in the Council of Europe, within one of its main pillars, Conference of INGO' – International Non-Governmental Organizations, there is no single organization which would represent interests of South-East European civil society, we decided to initiate the founding and strengthening of a unique umbrella organization, named CIVIS.

In April 2007, during the visit of Mr. Boris Vukobrat, the president and the founder of Swiss Peace and Crisis Management Foundation, to the Secretary General of Council of Europe, Mr. Terry Davis, we stressed that non-existence of a joint organization which would gather SEE countries in COE, discouraging citizens of SEE. On this occasion we have received an official support to initiate, together with local associations and foundations of all countries in the SEE region, founding of such an organization.

In cooperation with the European Movement in Serbia, than with the representatives of Civic Initiatives, Igman Initiative, Legal Forum, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, Associations of Multiethnic towns in SEE – Philia and Centre for Development of Non-profit Sector, we succeeded in gathering more than 140 nongovernmental organizations, foundations and associations.

On June 4th 2007, CIVIS (lat. citizen) was founded, aspiring to contribute not only to the development of dialog within civil society in the region, but also with civil society of Western Europe. Our intention for CIVIS it to be a unique platform for dialog in the region and a communication bridge with flows of ideas, projects, studies and thoughts in both directions; it should represent a bridge to COE and initiate common proposals to governments and parliaments of the SEE countries.



MISSION

CIVIS association gathers non-governmental organizations, foundations and citizens of Southeast Europe aiming to promote and improve the rights of all citizens in SEE region along with achievement of the highest standards of civil society, stimulating civic dialog in the region as well as among the regions of SEE and European Union member countries.

CIVIS promotes the European idea and European values, stimulates the cooperation among non-governmental organizations of SEE region countries in fostering the process of European integration of the countries which intend to be EU members and cross border and regional cooperation of non-governmental organizations, municipalities, companies and citizens.

GRANTING PARTICIPATORY STATUS TO CIVIS

THE INGOs OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE, ENJOYING PARTICIPATORY STATUS



The INGO's (International Non-Governmental Organizations) are citizen's organizations which are important players in European societies, from a local to international level. On the one hand, they provide essential services for social cohesion and bring fundamental values into every day life. On the other hand, they pass on the experience, the propositions and the visions of the citizens to the political and economic decision-makers, and are often at the origin of political, legal and social progress.

The Council of Europe is the only international organization to have taken this a step further: the former consultative status for INGOs which had existed since 1952 was changed to participatory status in 2003, thus making the INGOs one of the Organization's pillar. Around 400 INGOs enjoying participatory status constitute the Conference of INGO's.

Together with the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Conference of INGOs has become an integral part of the Council of Europe. The "Quadrilogue" is the term often applied for this new form of institutional governance – "an expression of democratic pluralism and an essential element for the further development of a citizen's Europe"*.

CIVIS association was granted participatory status with the Council of Europe as from 28 December 2007.

*taken from the Resolution (2003)8 of the Committee of Ministers on participatory status for INGOs with the Council of Europe.



CIVIS delegation meets Mr. Jean-Louis Laurens

FIRST SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF IONGS, HELD IN STRASBOURG 21 -24 JANUARY 2008.

The Conference of IONGs holds its sessions four times per year. The first session was held in Strasbourg, 21 – 24 January. The

PARTICIPATORY STATUS - WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN PRACTICE

In practice, this means that these INGOs:

- may address memoranda to the Secretary General for submission to the committees, as well as to the Commissioner for Human Rights;
- may be invited to provide, through their specific activity or experience, expert advice on Council of Europe policies, programme and actions;
- shall receive the agenda and public documents of the Parliamentary Assembly in order to facilitate their attendance at public sittings of the Parliamentary Assembly;
- shall be invited to public sittings of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe;
- shall be invited to activities organized for them by the Secretariat;
- shall be invited to attend seminars, conferences, colloquies of interest to their work according to the applicable Council of Europe rules.

For their part, the organizations enjoying participatory status undertake to:

- keep themselves regularly informed of Council of Europe activities and developments in standards by means of the numerous sources of information available, including the Internet;
- furnish, either spontaneously or at the request of the Council of Europe's different bodies, information, documents or opinions relating to their own field(s) of competence on matters which are under consideration or which could be addressed by the Council of Europe;
- work to promote the respect of the Council of Europe's standards, conventions and legal instruments in the member states, and assist in the implementation of these standards, and this in close contact with local, regional and national NGOs;
- give maximum publicity to the initiatives and achievements of the Council of Europe in their own field(s) of competence;
- disseminate information on Council of Europe standards, instruments and activities, as well as information from the INGO thematic groupings, to their members, on a regular basis, and ensure that they too work actively to fulfill the requirements of the participatory status;
- submit every four years a report to the Secretary General.

Delegation of CIVIS association was represented by: Mr. Zoran Pusić, president, Mr. Boris Vukobrat and Mr. Živorad Kovačević, honorary presidents and Mrs. Mirjana Prljević, International Secretary General.

The delegation had a chance not only to participate in the Conference meetings but also to have direct meetings with the highest representatives of the Council of Europe. On Tuesday, January 22nd, the delegation had a meeting with Jean-Louis Laurens, Director General of Political Affairs. The delegation thanked to Mr. Laurens and Mrs. Jutta Gutzkow, Head of the NGO and Civil Society Division on their efforts in the process of granting participatory status and agreed on fostering further cooperation by informing and exchanging information and comments on regular bases.

On Wednesday, the Delegation had several meetings, two of which were very important. The first one was with Mr. Thomas Hammarberg, the Commissioner for Human Rights. Since the Commissioner has in its 2008 Agenda visits to Macedonia and Serbia, CIVIS was invited to help in preparation of these visits mainly in securing information about NGOs, dealing with human rights issues from these two countries. It was stressed that at the end of 2007 began a process of conducting information on the situation of human rights (focusing on children's rights, the rights of disabled people and problems related to the judiciary, minorities and anti-discrimination policies) in the Balkans. CIVIS will suggest NGOs, individuals and experts from these countries which will be the first step in promoting dialog between its members and Council of Europe.



CIVIS delegation meets Commissioner, Thomas Hammamberg

The second meeting was at the European Court of Human Rights with the judges Mrs. Nina Vajić, and Mr. Dragoljub Popović. The focus was on the work of this institution, possibilities for citizens to address the Court, problems of victims of terrorist acts, and their view of judiciary procedures in Balkan countries. Cooperation on concrete cases was agreed.

On January 24th, a special meeting was organized for 15 new INGOs which have been granted participatory status. CIVIS delegation exchanged contacts with all of them especially with those who are also "umbrella" organizations.



President Zoran Pusić at the Conference of IONG

EXPERT COUNCIL ON NGO LAW

A new ground-breaking initiative was undertaken by the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organizations of the Council of Europe. It is the establishment of the Expert Council on NGO Law. This council will work under maxim by NGOs for NGOs.

The Mandate of the Expert Council is to contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for NGOs throughout Europe by examining national NGO law and its implementation, and promoting its compatibility with Council of Europe standards and European good practice. The first thematic study of the Expert Council will deal with the conditions for the establishment of NGOs.

Associate members of CIVIS took part in this first thematic study providing opinion considering the situation in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia.



CIVIS delegation meets Judge Dragoljub Popović

The next session of Conference IONG is scheduled for April 2008.

The First Annual Assembly of CIVIS

CIVIS organized its first annual Assembly on December 1 - 2 2007. On this occasion, main bodies of CIVIS were elected. (Please see more on www.civis-see.org/sr/organization.htm).

On December 2nd 2007, a conference was organized with the topic "Status of civil society in the countries of SEE region". This provided an opportunity to discuss the position of civil society in the region and draw some conclusions and recommendations. Speakers were:

- Zoran Pusić, President of Civic Committee for Human Rights (Croatia), and president of CIVIS association, and
- Miljenko Dereta, Executive Director of Civic Initiatives (Serbia), and member of Executive board of CIVIS association.

A special guest was Kiro Gligorov, founder and President of Kiro Gligorov Foundation (Macedonia).

Mr. Pusić said that the majority of NGOs were founded in the countries in transition where tradition of civil society did not exist. Many of them were founded in the period of wars and ethnic conflicts as a reaction on numerous violations of human rights in former Yugoslavia. The work of these NGOs developed with the aim to provide concrete assistance, legal and humanitarian.



Organizations that founded CIVIS, through many years, have promoted and motivated development of good neighboring relations. At the beginning of this process, very often, these activities were judged from politicians and one part of media. The situation now days, is different.

Mr. Pusić stressed that the main comparative advantages of these NGOs are flexibility, readiness to change and apply different approach in achieving of set goals: to increase democratization of our countries, and achieve higher civilization level, particularly in the field of protection of human rights. During implementation of their activities, these NGOs had strong orientation towards European integration which is the best choice for our countries and the entire region. The experience of other Europe-

an countries in achieving high civilization standards in the field of human rights, freedoms and democratization is of the utmost importance for us.



Mr. Pusić concluded his speech answering the question what should NGOs do, primarily NGOs dealing with protection of human rights. Mr. Pusić' opinion is that they should act in two directions – providing assistance in concrete cases, and pursuing long-term change of public opinion. In long-term, this aim could make war as unacceptable tool for conflict resolution just as slavery became an unacceptable system in economy.

Mr. Dereta stressed that it is very important to have deep insight at the roots of civil society in the countries of former Yugoslavia, especially having in mind the experience of socialist self-governing. We should not forget that NGOs are dealing also with many different fields ranging from education; health and social protection. It is very important not to disregard this fact. Status of civil society in SEE region is extremely different. It differs in legal and financial aspect, and in relation with the state. The perception and culture of civil society in our countries differs from the countries that didn't get through the war in twentieth century. Especially, the reasons for founding NGOs are different.

Mr. Dereta said that NGOs in former Yugoslavia expect recognition for their work and for their role in the society. Also, the legal aspect is very important since the situation in SEE region differs from one country to another. The experience of Croatia, for example, could be very useful for other former Yugoslav countries. Also, it is very important to have **Strategy for providing friendly environment for the development of civil society**.

Mr. Dereta said that the financial aspect should be carefully examined since major foreign donors are leaving. On the other hand, the state funding could cause dependency of NGOs. This process will affect especially small NGOs which won't be able to respond to the demands of EU funds for example and NGOs oriented mostly on political issues.

Mr. Dereta stressed that the power of our NGOs is based on the possibility to influence more on international actors than inside their own countries, concerning some policies. Mr. Dereta con-

cluded his speech stressing the fact that NGOs are not decision makers but the ones that influence decision makers and that we should always be aware of that. Also, his opinion is that we lack new ideas and visions. In our desire to change present we have forgotten the future. The role of civil society is to be always unsatisfied with presence in order to conceive better and different society.

Mr. Gligorov, special guest in the conference, expressed his hope that CIVIS will follow those values that are characteristic for democratic and parliamentary western societies and that we will open ourselves for democracy and equality. CIVIS should strengthen the efforts of associated NGOs in fulfilling their programs. Also, Mr. Gligorov hopes that CIVIS association will lead to cooperation between nations in SEE and discontinuity with all that was unpleasant and bad in our past. It is very important for us to understand each other, hoping that borders will not stop us to cooperate, to talk and to act together.

THE COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS HAD 5 DAY HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIAL VISIT TO MACEDONIA (25 -29 FEBRUARY 2008)

Mr. Hammarberg's agenda has covered a broader range of human rights issues including the functioning of the police and the judiciary, treatment and conditions in places of detention, women's rights and the situation of the Roma minority in the country. Commissioner Hammarberg has held meetings with the President and Prime Minister, as well as relevant ministers including the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Justice and Interior. Further talks has been held with the Speaker of Parliament, as well as with the Ombudsman and representatives of civil society.

Mr. Hammarberg had a meeting with Mr. Kiro Gligorov, member of Executive board of CIVIS association.

CIVIS association is open for all interested NGOs, foundations and citizens having the seat in following countries: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary and who support peaceful and democratic integration of countries of SEE region into European Union.

If you are interested in becoming a member of CIVIS, please visit our website www.civis-see.org in order to fill out the Membership form and look for more information concerning the activities of association.

EVENTS of CIVIS and CIVIS Associates

MARCH

- Center for Regionalism (Novi Sad) starts campaign for new Law on local self government.
- PHILIA - Association of Multiethnic Cities of SEE will publish a book-Collection of case studies, on the topic - Programs for minorities in the field of local policies in multiethnic environments.
- Civic Initiatives Newsletter «Mreza», No.73, dedicated to the Fifth Annual FENS Assembly, will be published in March. You can read more about it on the website www.gradjanske.org.

APRIL

- The next session of the Conference INGOs, Council of Europe, will be held during 14-17 2008 April.
- EMINS will publish the first issue of Newsletter "Evropske sveske".
- Civic Initiatives, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, will organize in April and May a public presentation of achievements made by students attending Civic Education classes for 6th grade of primary school. This is part of the program Youth in Action - step by step

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