

STRATEGY WESTERN BALKANS 2012-2015

SIDA EUROPE PROGRAMMES

2011-04-15

INTRODUCTION

This strategy will guide the Olof Palme International Center (Palme Center) support to democratic development in the Western Balkans *Participation and Accountability Programme*. It covers the Western Balkan region with special focus on Albania, Serbia and Kosovo in the four year period from January 2012 to December 2015.

The strategy is based on experiences from the programme period 2008-2011, the Palme Center's operational policy and strategy covering the period 2010-2014, recommendations from recent evaluations of civil society support in the Balkans (Sept 2010), experience, strategies and recommendations of related stakeholders in civil society in each country in the region, the Palme Center's analysis of the situation in the region regarding democracy and human rights, and taking into account the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs/Sida's overall goals and respective country strategies, including the goal for Reform cooperation in Eastern Europe: *"Strengthened democracy, equitable and sustainable development, and closer ties with the EU and its fundamental values."*

This strategy includes a presentation of the Palme Center general approach and an analysis of the challenges for the development of democracy and human rights in the Western Balkan region. It also sets out vision mission, working methods, systems for monitoring and evaluation of results. Concrete measures and action plans are developed in the Country applications and Results Assessment Frameworks.

ABOUT THE PALME CENTER

The Palme Center works in the spirit of Olof Palme for democracy, human rights and peace. The Palme Center is an umbrella organisation and a cooperation agency for international issues on behalf of the Swedish labour movement. The mission of the Palme Center is to support member organisations' international activities, including advocacy and development cooperation. Within this mission the Palme Center directly supports relevant local organisations that share our basic values and goals and also ascertain the quality of projects that are a partnership between Swedish members and their sister organisations in the region. These roles involve capacity building and monitoring by the Palme Center. The head office staff in Stockholm share these responsibilities with the local offices in Tirana, Sarajevo, Prishtina and Belgrade. The Palme Center strives to make the projects supported by the different units at Sida reinforce and support each other.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEMOCRATISATION

Democracy requires a continuous, active participation in public affairs by citizens organised in a great variety of interest groups, rather than simply the periodic casting of votes by unorganised individuals. Democracy requires civically aware citizens who combine an understanding of and a confidence in the political system with a healthy skepticism about the performance of politicians.

The last phase in a process of democratisation, often called the consolidation phase, is where many researchers believe civil society can play its most important role. It is in this phase that it is seen as possible for civil society organisations to really influence the process by supporting democratic development, and assisting in the creation of a democratic political culture and what has been termed “civic culture”¹. The consolidation of this civic culture and of civil society itself can be seen as the part of a democratisation process that takes the longest time to complete. Since it concerns changing attitudes, not least citizens’ attitudes towards politics and the government, it may take generations to accomplish.²

Both in old and more newly developed democracies, civil society is seen as a resource to increase and deepen democracy beyond its formal structures³. The development of democracy can hardly ever be viewed as complete – there will always come new challenges to societies and their systems of government. Problems facing long-standing and apparently stable democracies include, for instance, greater alienation of citizens with increasing apathy, disinterest and feelings of helplessness as a consequence, declining trust in politicians and loss of familiarity with political parties.⁴ The reasons for lacking will and commitment on the part of citizens to participate include weak structures for participation and people know that no *real* inclusion is possible. In regions with ethnic tensions and risk for violent conflict, a more democratic system is the only sustainable way of mitigating conflict.

Civil society consists of voluntary associations that directly foster democracy and promote democratic consolidation. These are associations that specifically seek interaction with the state, whether to advocate interests of the citizens, to oppose the nondemocratic behavior of the state, or to hold states accountable to citizens for their actions. A broad range of civil society groups play important roles in democratic transitions; including media, trade unions, cultural organisations, community groups, tenants organisations and many more. Political parties also share a role with other parts of civil society to represent interests, build participation and monitor the state.

In the countries of the Western Balkans, as in other places where civil society has developed with strong support from international donors, professionalised NGOs dedicated to advocacy, civic education on public issues directly relating to democratisation, such as election monitoring, voter education, governmental transparency, political and civil rights generally are relatively strong. They are characterized by small membership⁵. Majority of organisations in civil society are quite different from traditional Swedish popular movements and associations but the small membership does not rule out that organisations have a democratic process and structure and are open for membership and inclusion of target groups and transparent towards the different stakeholders in the community. These organisations have undoubtedly played an important role especially in the monitoring of government on various levels but they have had less success in mobilising people and activating citizens. The improved outreach of civil society will help give a more nuanced picture to the public about this sector.

¹ Almond & Verba 1963

² Badersten 1995, Merkel 1998:40, Sztompka 1998:191

³ Diamond 1999:219

⁴ Pelle Åberg 2008

⁵ Ottaway & Carothers 2000

Civil society may have an important part to play, not least by providing an arena where citizens can “practice” active democratic citizenship. Well-functioning and internally democratic organisations serve as “democracy training” for their members. The potential influence of civil society on poverty alleviation is multi-faceted but particularly the ability for under-privileged to voice their concerns through their organisations gives the power to change. An *active, democratic civil society, based on the needs and aspirations of the people* is a basic precondition for stable democratic social development. In new democracies, civil society organisations can strengthen the legitimacy of democratic institutions by disseminating knowledge on how democratic processes work, about freedoms and rights, and about the obligations that apply to citizens and institutions in a democratic state.

Besides playing an important role as watchdog of local authorities, civil society is the arena for people to organise to push forward an agenda or protecting their interest in relation to authorities. Civil society organisations are a platform for non-formal (popular) education and if striving for internal democratic structures and accountability.

DEMOCRATISATION ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

The Palme Center support to the democratic development in the transitional societies of the Western Balkans is based on a bottom-up approach. The ongoing processes of decentralisation of power from central to local level, as well as the stress on the local level in terms of European Union accession process make this also strategically most interesting.

Civil society organisations operating on the local level are in many cases closer to the communities, have channels of communication open with citizens and local political representatives and can have more tangible results in the short term on the local level. This is important for the legitimacy of civil society in the eyes of the public and their willingness to become involved in the activities of civil society. In order for organisations that do hands-on work in a local community to have a greater leverage and for the support to have the opportunity to reach national level results, there is a need for networking and collaboration with like-minded actors.

Palme Center programmes work on the local level to increase linkages between citizens and elected representatives, and the number of people actively involved in influencing local policy. It is the basis of our theory of change that democratisation is a slow process that starts from the organising of citizens into interest based civil society groups and that the conditions for them to articulate these interests and influence decision making is crucial. In several of the countries, the political deadlocks on national level also made it less than strategic to spend our resources on trying to influence the agenda there. But local initiatives have the potential to influence the national agenda by giving good examples, developing mechanisms and models that can be taken over in other parts of the countries or even introduced by the central level government.

ANALYSIS OF UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS & PERSPECTIVE ON POVERTY

Palme Center's core values and work is based on the principle that human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent. This means that the political and civil rights are as important as the social, cultural and economic. Effective exchange of ideas and freedom of association is a prerequisite for people's right to work, education and food in a long-term, sustainable perspective. Fight against poverty is at the same time a struggle for democracy, human rights and peace. Principles of non-discrimination, participation, transparency and accountability are at the core of the programmes in Western Balkans.

Gender equality is an issue to be considered in all operations implemented with support or financing from the Palme Center. This means always ensuring that in all assessments,

planning, implementation and evaluation of projects, emphasis is placed on measures that lead to a more equal distribution of power and of resources between the genders, ensuring that activities and goals are designed according to the differing needs and preconditions of women and men. The programme is striving to make visible the power structures that prevent women and men from enjoying equal rights.

The Palme Center's programmes are based on a multidimensional definition of poverty, including lack of freedom and political power. This means that poverty is defined as a lack of material resources, but as much as the lack of power that restrict (or prevent) the ability to influence and change their situation. These conditions often correlate. Poverty leads to social exclusion, process by which individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from full participation in society because of their poverty or lack of basic knowledge and opportunities for lifelong learning, or as a result of discrimination. Such phenomena, are moving away individuals or groups of people from possibilities for employment, generating income and educational opportunities, as well as social networks and community activities. Such individuals have little access to institutions, public authorities and decision-making processes that affect their increased sense of powerlessness and inability to influence their own lives.

The Palme Center's focus on poverty reduction lies in breaking the power structures and create opportunities for people to organise, and thus contributes to the overall goal of Swedish development cooperation and goal of Sweden's support for civil society in developing countries. By supporting civil society, people who are living in poverty and who are being discriminated against can be given power and opportunity to improve their lives. Palme Center will support the organised citizens that want to challenge the current under-representation of certain groups, and the lacking inclusion of citizens in general in influencing the development of society and the respect for rights, the consequences of lacking accountability and transparency of political processes.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN WESTERN BALKANS REGION

The Palme Center has supported pro-democracy actors in the Western Balkans since the mid 1990s and it has been confirmed in evaluations that the support has contributed to the activism, inter-ethnic dialogue and civic education, with the broader purpose to support processes of democratisation.⁶ In the previous programme period the support has become increasingly narrow in scope, in order for partners to benefit more from cooperation and reflecting the developments in the respective countries and in line with the guidelines. The Palme Center works with organisations and activists that are focused on their (ongoing) hands on work in attracting more members, slowly trying to move the mindset and approach of local decision makers, including more stakeholders into their networks. The support has helped building new organisations and strengthened existing ones, improved communication between civil society and local authorities, created platforms for networking and connecting partners within countries and in the region. Over the years the Palme Center has also entered into cooperation with new and/or weak organisations with a creative approach, a relevant mandate and committed activists. In some cases this initial support allowed them to grow and lead to sustainable partnerships.

The outcomes of the projects, the changes in relations and interaction between citizens and politicians, show that these activities are having effects for people and increase their influence over their own lives in the communities where we support activities. This has also been confirmed by evaluations.

⁶ Serbia 10 years, Bender Oct 2008, Evaluation Sida Europe, InDevelop sept 2010, Bender-Peck 2005, "Mistakes that donors make", Ivana Howard, 2010

The in-country networks have enabled partners to share working methods and resources. The linking of organisations and initiatives between countries remains important for the regional integration and the accession processes. Elements of networking will be further strengthened in the coming period.

VISION & MISSION OF WESTERN BALKANS PROGRAMMES

VISION

Political processes in programme countries are characterised by transparency and accountability, reflecting interests of the informed and empowered citizens of the communities. Strong civil society organisations, representing citizens and working for inclusion and enhanced democracy, engage with and influence local decision makers to bring about concrete policy reflecting the interests of the local community. Elected local decision makers are held accountable.

MISSION

The programmes will strengthen civil society organisations and support activities that enforce the participatory nature and transparency of local political processes. In order to achieve this, the programmes build capacities of individual civil society organisations to strengthen their skills and the democratic nature of the organisations, with a special focus on accountability structures in organisations.

The programmes will also support activities of civil society organisations that work on the local level and work to inform, empower and mobilise citizens; engage with political decision makers to influence political decisions related to the interests of the part of society the organisation represents; hold the political decision makers accountable by engaging in advocacy, popular education and monitoring.

Separate initiatives on the local level impact the development on the national level towards putting in place procedures, mechanisms or guidelines for inclusion of citizens in decision making.

METHODS OF SUPPORT FROM PALME CENTER

Based on the operational policy and identity of the Palme Center, support to civil society ultimately aims at supporting democratic processes and especially civil society organisations in this process. This is the vehicle for citizens to voice their concerns and advocate for issues and interests besides the parliamentary democratic systems. Civil society is an arena of diverse interests and forms of organising but the Palme Center will focus support on improving accountability within civil society and thereby legitimacy, which will enhance their opportunity for influence. The programme will provide tools for attracting more members to make organisations more representative, involving organisations and citizens in local decision making by means of advocacy, opening up those structures for groups previously without representation, and slowly trying to move the mindset and approach of local decision makers and citizens. It has been shown, most recently by the Sida evaluation, that this work has had concrete results on the local level on linking citizens to decision makers, putting sustainable mechanisms in place and increasing the will to organise to influence local

decision making. This is the basis of a participatory democracy, and the local level is where democracy starts and also where the Palme Center programmes are most likely to show results.

The Palme Center programmes include different modalities of support to civil society organisations, including training, networking, and financial support. Agreements are based on a project with specific goals, activities and resources that contribute to the overall programme goals or core support to organisations whose mission and operations are in line with Palme Center values and strategies. Palme Center sign agreements for financial support for 6 months – 3 years.

NETWORKING AND LOBBYING OPPORTUNITIES NATIONALLY, REGIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

Associations and citizens groups have a need to link with other like-minded organisations to push forward their agenda and share methods and experiences. In the Western Balkans, the element of freedom of movement is also most relevant as the travel between the countries, especially for residents in Kosovo is highly problematic, and prejudice remains strong between communities. After many years of cooperation with civil society organisations, the Palme Center will continue to connect partners from all the countries in the region. The Palme Center wider network of like-minded organisations, starting with the Swedish member organisations and including partners in Europe and other parts of the world, has the potential of sharing experiences and joining forces in lobbying and advocacy. On the European level, Palme Center is working with Solidar and others to lobby towards European institutions as well as on the national level. The national networks are also important to strengthen the potential impact of the programmes and connecting the local level work with changes on national level.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PARTNERS

The Palme Center wants to see organisations in civil society more representative in terms of having members and supporters and also in terms of their internal accountability structures. The programmes also contribute to local civil society organisations with capacity for lobbying and advocacy becoming recognized actors by local authorities and by the community, subsequently affecting political decision making in their community. This means supporting the structural reform of organisations and internal systems as well as support in terms of content/thematic expertise.

EXPERT SUPPORT FOR THEMATIC FIELDS

The Palme Center programmes offer support in the fields of civil society's role in democratisation, particular skills regarding monitoring, advocacy and mobilisation making use of a large pool of experts from the region and from Sweden and other European countries. Trainings for civil society organisations to have sufficient knowledge, information and skills to integrate the principles of democratic organising in their work and be able to challenge social, economic and political injustices for the groups they represent. Concrete activities include organising study visits and trainings, supplying trainers and mentors for bilateral support and sharing handbooks and manuals.

PARTNERS - CRITERIA AND METHODS OF SELECTION

TYPE OF PARTNERS: The Palme Center will support organisations that are representing citizens' rights and demands defined by the organised citizens themselves and that links to the overall process of improved democratisation in the country and region.

DIALOGUE: Local organisations are invited to participate in the development of concrete goals and methods as well as follow up activities in the country programmes, based on the strategic priorities of the Palme Center.

SELECTION: Based on continuous contacts with relevant stakeholders and on analysis of the development in civil society in the region the Palme Center assess organisations and include partners in the programmes. Up to 20 per cent of project funds are kept unallocated each year to be able to adjust to changing conditions that may affect country programmes.

CRITERIA: non-governmental, non-profit, based on democratic values, sharing Palme Center theory of change, formal structure, registered and preferably existed for two years, have relevant competence in area of work, capacity for financial management.

Partners have to produce documentation about their strategy and working methods, and/or action plan as a basis for support from Palme Center, they are obliged to carry out activities agreed upon, report on them and the outcomes of activities.

COUNTRY ANALYSES:

CHALLENGES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN WESTERN BALKANS

Today, there are no formal restrictions on civil society organisations to function in the region. However, there are few membership-based civil society organisations that represent the interests of their members. In contrast to developed democracies, where a dense and complex net of civil society organisations takes care of the concerns of different and diverse interest groups, advocacy in the region tends to be exercised by a handful of advocacy organisations, mostly located in the capitals, and frequently not open for wider membership.

Overall, there is a high level of social apathy, reflected in low levels of civic engagement. Both the linkages between ordinary citizens and civil society (as advocates of citizens interests) and the level of interaction between civil society and government is underdeveloped, leaving the big majority of citizens unconnected to political processes.

At this point, citizens are not necessarily putting national issues top on their priority list, (before employment, freedom of movement, efficient and transparent public spending...) and civil society organisations and networks are instrumental in mobilising people to democratically influence political priorities towards issues of social and economic development. Therefore we need to support forces in (civil) society that counter large social and economic inequalities that are at the root of increased risk of ethnic conflict.

In all countries in the region basic democratic structures are in place. However, there are still considerable problems. Parliaments and governments will have to become more transparent, accountable and efficient. Most political parties are highly centralised and hierarchically organised. The judiciaries of all jurisdictions in question have to be further strengthened.

Despite the declared commitment by most governments in the region, the EU integration process has so far been slow and without enough involvement of relevant actors in civil society. This process brings many mandatory reforms that can be used by civil society to demand transparency and accountability. The need to protect social and economic rights in this process and making sure that available funds are used in accordance with needs and priorities of the citizens remains.

SUPPORT TO TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN ALBANIA

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Although Albania has made progress in recent years towards a fully developed democracy, the country still faces challenges in achieving good governance.

Decentralisation constitutes one of the most important political and institutional reforms necessary for fulfilling the implementation criteria of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union. The decentralisation process was intensified after the entry into force of the Law on Organisation and Functioning of Local Governments No. 8652 in 2000, and continues until today. In practice, the level of decentralisation has been low in Albania, as local governments have not been given the full authority in several policy areas and important legislation foreseen by the National plan for Implementation of SAA has been stalled. Nevertheless, Local Government is the level where decisions related to the rights of citizens to participate in governance are most relevant.

While the local government is taking over responsibilities from the central government, the aspect of citizens' and civil society participation remains a challenge. The Albanian Constitution incorporates the basic principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Governance ratified by Albania in 1999.⁷ One of the basic principles of the Charter is the right of citizens to participate in managing public affairs.⁸ Most of the local governments however, hardly ever take citizens' opinion into account. Local Governments consult civil society on ad hoc basis and in most cases this is done superficially and symbolically. The joint initiatives implemented by CSOs and public institutions are limited. Many elements of creating more accountable and transparent local government remain and the attitude of the elected representatives towards citizens and their role in representing the citizens is not in line with principles of transparency and accountability. Local Governments do not disclose details of how their decisions are made and implemented.

There is a deep politicisation of local bodies. The proportional representation voting system for members of the Local Councils further emphasise the important role of the political parties to nominate local representatives. Political disputes within many of the Councils of Municipalities have resulted in stagnated social development. On the other hand, most of political parties do not actively communicate with citizens and do not draft political programs in line with constituencies. Political parties do not have a clear ideological orientation, and this makes it difficult for citizens to vote according to their interest. Women's influence in political parties is limited. Despite existing gender structures many political parties do not meet their own criteria of women's participation in candidate lists for elections.

Representatives of local government continue also to be unaware about the way civil society operates, what role organisations should play in society and in relation to decision making, and this has created a lack of trust and scepticism towards civil society organisations and hindered their inclusion. This often resulted in development of policy which is not in accordance with community needs⁹ and demands from organised civil society.

⁷ European Commission (2010). Analytical Report.

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/al_rapport_2010_en.pdf

⁸ European Charter of Local Self-Government. <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/122.htm>

⁹ Civil Society Facility Fund (October, 2009) Albanian Needs Assessment Report

By the beginning of 2011, the Civil Society Chart was adopted by the Parliament. This document provides the framework, mechanism and policies contributing towards creating a sustainable and favourable environment in support of a fruitful cooperation between civil society and Government, both at central and local level. This document states and redefines the reciprocal commitments of both parties aiming at enhancing democracy by increasing the level of citizen participation. However, this is a political commitment recognising the civil society as a key social actor in the Albanian society. It does not constitute legal obligation that regulates the relationship between civil society and Government.

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEMOCRATISATION

The issues of civil society legitimacy and accountability have recently emerged as of particular importance. Participation of citizens in civil society is still low and there is minimal membership. While most of the organisations exert political and social pressure on behalf of marginalised groups, the legitimacy of who they represent and of the issues raised and advocated for is questioned.

Many organisations are less democratic than the public institutions they are criticising. While there is room in civil society for many forms of organising, the role played by an inclusive and democratically organised movement with clear accountability towards citizens in the community can potentially support the local democratisation in Albania. If perceived as a legitimate voice for voiceless people, this would put CSOs in a better position and the voice would become much stronger if behind an organisation would be a group of citizens who advocate for their own interest. The image of the organisations would be improved, public support mobilised and trust of local government towards civil society increased. Organisations representing under-represented groups play an especially important role due to the lack of power of these groups to further their interests and voice their concerns. CSOs in general should work to ensure full and equal involvement of people in activities and decisions that have an effect on their lives.

CAPACITIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

The recent civil society assessments estimate the total number of active CSOs to between 400 and 450. Most of the professional organisations are concentrated in Tirana and they are being assessed as having greater organisational strength and individual human capacities than CSOs in other areas.¹⁰

During the last ten years, CSOs have increasingly provided rights-based education, mobilised citizens to participate in decision-making and increased the number of advocacy activities, as well as the interest in engaging with the Government and local authorities in policy dialogue. There are well established CSOs and think tanks with good analytical capacities necessary for effective advocacy and policy dialogue in Tirana but in the rest of the country these capacities are largely lacking in civil society. Low levels of analytical capacity in CSOs, including skills for effective monitoring, for participatory needs assessment, policy research, stakeholder analysis are a major constraint on the wider engagement of CSOs in advocacy and policy dialogue¹¹. A well-organised advocacy and engagement in dialogue with local governments would hold local governments accountable and more responsive to citizens' demands.

Due to financial constraints, most CSOs, particularly those outside Tirana, face challenges in engaging permanent professional staff. Majority of CSOs have one to three staff, either working on short-term or yearly contracts. CSOs lack strong management structures, which mostly is due to the small size of the organisations and dependence on a single leader. Although these leaders are often well qualified and highly motivated individuals, they cannot

¹⁰ TASC0 (2010) Civil Society Organizations' Capacities in the Western Balkans and Turkey; HDPC (2009)

¹¹ TASC0 (2010) Civil Society Organizations' Capacities in the Western Balkans and Turkey

make up for the deficit in management and administration skills experienced by many CSOs and the overall lack of organisational capacity.

Strategic thinking in the civic sector remains poorly developed. HDPC (2009) found that 62% of respondents to its CSO mapping acknowledged they possess no strategic documents. Lack of long-term strategic plans is mainly due to financial constraints related to short-term funding opportunities by donors; and the practice of changing missions and visions in chase of funding opportunities as well as lack of skills to think strategically.

Public awareness of civil society's role and recognising it as representing public interests and advancing good governance is low. This is mainly due to failure of CSOs to successfully communicate their values and purpose.

The majority of CSOs are highly dependent on foreign donor funding. CSOs report that they do not have sufficient funds to cover activities, especially those related to advocacy and campaigning¹². The principal problem is that donors mostly provide project funding to support activities and only in few cases do they provide for administrative and institutional costs. Most Albanian CSOs participate in some form of informal network, but these networks rarely function effectively, with agreed-on objectives and a well administered agenda of work. In most cases, networks are donor driven. CSOs understand the benefit of partnership and networking with other organisations but competition for limited funds makes many CSOs work separately.¹³

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

The process of improving the democratic process in Albania is a priority for a large part of civil society and has been supported mainly by funding from international donors. At present, there is a reduced support from donors to the development of civil society, despite the large need to empower organisations to play a constructive role in democratisation in Albania. Programmes to support associations, trade unions, human rights activists, journalists and monitoring elections have all been cut down severely. USAID funds are mostly directed to support the Albanian Government for the implementation of anticorruption reforms¹⁴ and civil society in monitoring elections. Its local governance program in Albania ends in June 2011. The European Union IPA funds aims to promotion and protection of human rights; civil society development and inclusion. This support is currently designed in a way so that only a limited number of larger CSOs can access the funding due to the complicated and bureaucratic application procedure. The European Commission project TACSO's office in Albania is delivering mainly capacity building assistance on project cycle management and the facilitation of CSO access to EC grants.

Another important source of support to pro-democracy activities in Albania; Open Society Foundation for Albania (OSFA) decreased funds substantially as part of OSFA strategy for the region¹⁵ but remain one of the key donors in supporting civil society development and its role in democracy.

The established Government Agency for Support to Civil Society is providing financial assistance for the sustainable development of civil society and enabling favourable conditions for citizens' initiatives. For 2011 the Agency is supporting a number of projects in different fields. Palme Center continuously keeps in contact with international stakeholders as well as local forces to develop the most targeted and functioning programme in support of local democratisation. Palme Center has consulted several organisations, institutions and donors

¹² HDPC (2009), June Report

¹³ TACSO (2010) Civil Society Organizations' Capacities in the Western Balkans and Turkey

¹⁴ Civil Society Facility Fund (October, 2009) Albanian Needs Assessment Report

¹⁵ HPDC (June, 2009). Third Sector Development in Albania: challenges and opportunities

in Albania during the process of drafting the strategy and program for 2012-2015¹⁶, as for instance the Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination near Prime Minister's Office, Council of Europe, Soros Foundation, Unifem, TACSO office and several local partners of Palme Center. Palme Center will seek cooperation on issues of common interest to support the establishment of a good governance culture at the local level.

GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS IN ALBANIA

Principles of democratic development demand that the local governance is participative, democratic, effective, transparent and accountable. Palme Center recognizes the important role that civil society can play in holding the local government accountable and protecting the interest of the citizens they represent. The European Union integration process is also conditioned on these values.

VISION

Political processes in Albania are characterised by transparency and accountability, reflecting interests of the informed and empowered citizens. Strong civil society organisations, representing citizens and working for inclusion and enhanced democracy, engage with and influence decision makers to bring about concrete policy reflecting the interests of the local community. Elected local decision makers are held accountable for how their decisions are made and implemented.

MISSION

The programme will focus on strengthening civil society organisations and support activities that enforce the participatory nature and transparency of local political processes towards social justice. Civil society organisations will develop their role as mobilisers of citizens and monitors of local authorities, playing a role in bridging the gap between citizens and their political representatives. Organisations in different parts of Albania that are advocating for deepened democratisation and greater inclusion of citizens in decision-making will have the opportunity to improve their capacity for research and advocacy based on the rights of the groups of citizens they represent.

This concretely means forming a coalition of partners in Albania, reaching out to citizens with information about ongoing political processes and about their opportunities to participate, sharing methods used in the country and in the region for monitoring how decisions are made and implemented at local and national level, suggesting and lobbying for policy change on the inclusion of civil society in decision-making and concrete policies that reflect the interests of groups that organisations represent.

EXPECTED RESULTS

Expected results include an increased number civil society partners who represent citizens' concerns, deepen their popular base and legitimacy by the issues they promote; increasingly gain access and recognition by the local governments; have capacities to influence local policy agendas and create coalitions for joint actions.

The Palme Center programme in Albania intends to see citizens engage actively in civic actions through representation in CSOs and thereby make their voices heard in local decision-making. Local governments (local state administrations and local representative bodies) openly share information with the public; cooperate with relevant parts of civil society and include it in the decision-making processes and increasingly respond to citizens' demands.

¹⁶ Palme Center Strategy for Albania is included in the Strategy for Western Balkans 2012 -2015 (attached to the application documents)

SUGGESTED METHODS

Capacity building for local partners to improve their monitoring, research, analytical and advocacy skills. Palme Center will provide unified participatory tools and practices for partners to actively engage citizens in monitoring and assessing decision-making processes and their implementation.

Providing **networking opportunities** for Palme Center partners within Albania, region and with EU member countries, in order to share experiences. Palme Center will especially try to make better use of the experiences that exists within its Swedish member organisations and their networks and capacities so that it can benefit the program.

Providing **technical support and coaching** of partners in increasing legitimacy and accountability towards citizens in the community will improve the image of partners, mobilise public support and increase trust of local government. **Financial support** to local organisations that carry out activities that contribute to the programme goal. Palme Center supports long-term initiatives to create an enabling environment for CSOs to think and plan strategically in order to produce better results.

PARTNERS

Palme Center cooperates with organisations in civil society in Albania that are striving to strengthen democracy and work for social justice and inclusion, mobilise citizens to take action towards political representatives and in general create a space and an opportunity for citizens to question the current system of governance. Partners are using democratic methods and are accountable to the community by being transparent and providing information, as well as actively involving people in activities. The partners in this programme are involved in formulating more concretely what challenges are to be tackled and what the indicators of success are.

STAKEHOLDERS

The process of improving the democratic process in Albania is a priority for a large part of civil society and has been supported mainly by funding from international donors. At present, there is a reduced support from donors to the development of civil society, despite the large need to empower organisations to play a constructive role in democratisation in Albania. Programmes to support associations, trade unions, human rights activists, journalists and monitoring elections have all been cut down severely. USAID funds are mostly directed to support the Albanian Government for the implementation of anticorruption reforms¹⁷ and civil society in monitoring elections. Its local governance program in Albania ends in June 2011. The European Union IPA funds aims to promotion and protection of human rights; civil society development and inclusion. This support is currently designed in a way so that only a limited number of larger CSOs can access the funding due to the complicated and bureaucratic application procedure. The European Commission project TACSO's office in Albania has been delivering capacity building assistance on CSOs management, project cycle management and the facilitation of CSO access to EC grants and information in order to overcome this problem.

Another important source of support to pro-democracy activities in Albania, Open Society Foundation for Albania (OSFA), decreased funds substantially as part of OSFA strategy for the region¹⁸ but remain one of the key donors in supporting civil society development and its role in democracy. The established Government Agency for Support to Civil Society is providing financial assistance for the sustainable development of civil society and enabling favourable conditions for citizens' initiatives. For 2011 the Agency is supporting a number of projects in different fields. Palme Center continuously keeps in contact with international stakeholders as well as local forces to develop the most targeted and functioning programme

¹⁷ Civil Society Facility Fund (October, 2009) Albanian Needs Assessment Report

¹⁸ HPDC (June, 2009). Third Sector Development in Albania: challenges and opportunities

in support of local democratisation. Palme Center will seek cooperation on issues of common interest to support the establishment of a good governance culture at local level.

SUPPORT TO TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN KOSOVO

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN KOSOVO

The challenges to democratic development in Kosovo include the weak role of civil society in governance and the fact that citizens are largely unconnected to political decision making, especially already marginalised groups. The lacking interest from citizens to participate in civil society reflects limited functionality and legitimacy of civil society, lack of knowledge on the policy development process combined with limited political will for further promotion of democratic culture on local level. A crucial element to bridge the gap between citizens and local government are strong and functional democratic organisations, which legally and democratically facilitate cooperation processes and strengthen relations between social and political stakeholders.

There is a weak economic development in rural areas of Kosovo and around 60 percent of the population lives outside of urban areas. Many factors, such as legal, managerial, budgetary and infrastructural hinder rural development. Most importantly, citizens' active involvement, capability to organise and participate in decision making processes hinders any improvements at this stage. According to the Law on Local Administration/Government Nr. 03/L-040, municipal authorities are obliged to involve citizens in drafting strategy and action plans for economic development. However, neither organisations in civil society and citizens, nor municipal authorities are acquainted with their rights and responsibilities under this law. This is detrimental for the development of the communities and for the inclusion of minorities.

In Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the two countries most affected directly by violent conflict, today's civil societies have to a large extent emerged from, and because of, the conditions of war and post-conflict rehabilitation. International NGOs charged with the duty of implementing the massive international humanitarian and reconstruction efforts in these two countries actively promoted the emergence and development of civil societies based on a new kind of local western-style NGOs through which to disburse donor funds for humanitarian aid, followed by services and the promotion of democracy, rather than seeking to identify and strengthen already existing forms of citizens' action and organisation. Donor intentions to induce a de-politicised civil society in these countries is clear from the early presence of a number of high profile initiatives aimed specifically at encouraging the growth of a formal NGO sector in preference to other forms of civil organisation. However, the early concentration on service delivery worked against the development of NGOs with a social vision and the capacity to campaign and advocate.¹⁹

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN LOCAL DEMOCRATISATION IN KOSOVO

Kosovo is struggling with a number of democratic challenges in the consolidation of the state. Civil society is finding its role and the accountability structures of organisations are in question; as many grew as a response to available international support to development and

¹⁹ TASC0 p 5

democratisation, the relation to the priorities of the citizens in Kosovo is generally weak. In the towns and villages around in Kosovo there are however a number of community based organisations that are working closely with citizens in efforts to improve the local conditions. These organisations represent the potential for strengthening the legitimacy of civil society, by the inclusion of citizens in community development and local decision making, working as democratic schooling and have the potential of holding local political representatives accountable.

Citizens in rural areas of Kosovo are in general poorly organised and there are few or no democratic organisations on this level. Usually there is a village/community leader, usually favored by the political structures that are in majority in the municipality. When the political majorities change, so do the village leaders normally. In addition to village leaders, there are local representatives on neighborhood level (mainly in rural areas), usually representing a wider family which lives in the same place. These representatives have more legitimacy but still represent a smaller number of citizens, and are not part of “civil society”.

Citizens do go together to voice their concerns in different ad-hoc ways, and in the Peja/Peć region “focus groups” have been a successful method. Focus groups or citizens groups are small non-formal groups within communities which represent their interests, and maintain communication with government authorities. Previously, local village representatives were mainly in place to implement government authorities’ decisions and act as liaison between citizens and government authorities. Until 2008 these relations were regulated by Administrative decision drafted by UNMIK, which was limited and not clearly explaining duties and responsibilities, neither obviously supporting citizens involvement in decision making processes. With the new Law on Local Administration/Government Nr. 03/L-040, there is no clear division of roles and responsibilities between citizens and governmental authorities, which has resulted in different interpretations of this law on the local level. The law does, however, give support to the further inclusion of citizens if they are organised in civil society organisations. And the focus groups have been organised according to a democratic principle that the citizens should elect their representative rather than have one appointed from the authorities.

There are examples where focus groups in rural areas managed together with municipal authorities to improve their living conditions and ability to participate in decision making processes, and this has occurred only when stronger civil society organisations have supported the organising of citizens. The focus is usually on vital living conditions improvement and there is still far from real sustainable mechanisms for inclusion, still rather on ad-hoc emergency and humanitarian assistance.

RELATION BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Local governance transparency, effectiveness and democratic representation of citizens are just a few of the crucial conditions required for democratic development in Kosovo. The Law on Local Administration/Government, recommendations from The European Union, and other laws deriving from Ahtisaari’s package strongly stipulate need for strong, vibrant, legitimate and democratic civil society to represent and facilitate a process where the citizens’ voices are conveyed to government representatives/institutions as an element of strengthening the democratic processes. Citizens’ representation, their accountability and legitimacy has been limited due to the election system and the centralised system of governance. With the introduction of the Law on Local Administration/Government, and the process of decentralisation, the need for coordination between government and citizens is in place as a condition for democratisation and increase of citizen’s participation in local development.

The disproportional distribution of capital investment in rural areas is directly a reflection of lack of commitment and concrete engagement and real representation of citizens' needs. Through these formal focus groups, starting from addressing the needs, prioritization of the needs, there is a continuous communication with municipal authorities.

Mechanisms need to be implemented; civil society needs to find its role and social forces to be further supported in order to strengthen the relations between public officials and the citizens.

GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS IN KOSOVO

VISION

The vision the Palme Center programme is that political processes in Kosovo are increasingly characterised by transparency and accountability, reflecting interests of the informed and empowered citizens of the communities. Strong civil society organisations, representing citizens and working for inclusion and enhanced democracy, engage with and influence local decision makers to bring about concrete policy reflecting the interests of the local community. Elected local decision makers are held accountable.

MISSION

Palme Center's mission is that people have an increased opportunity to influence their living conditions in Kosovo by engaging in civil society activism, and there are credible organisations that will channel their commitment. Selected organisations are able to push for changes in the local communities, building democracy from the bottom up.

Palme Center program in Kosovo intends to strengthen the parts of civil society that have a will to take the role as representative of groups of citizens that are under-represented, that will hold decision makers responsible by monitoring the work of local authorities, and organisations that are working to put in place functioning mechanisms for communication between local authorities and civil society.

SUGGESTED METHODS

Support to existing and establishment of new non-formal groups in rural areas of Kosovo that will increase knowledge about procedures, cooperation and work towards common goal. Increase capacities of organisations to engage with local authorities and on their own internal structure in order to facilitate participation of greater numbers of citizens. Trainings and support through CSO towards strengthening citizens groups. The programme will form a network of non-formal groups of citizens and civil society organizations; within Kosovo, the Western Balkans region and potentially other countries that recently have gone through the transition phase of decentralisation.

EXPECTED RESULTS

Expected results include an increased number civil society partners who represent citizens' concerns, deepen their popular base and legitimacy by the issues they promote; increasingly gain access and recognition by the local governments; have capacities to influence local policy agendas and create coalitions for joint actions.

The Palme Center programme in Kosovo intends to see citizens engage actively in civic actions through representation in CSOs and thereby make their voices heard in local decision-making. Local governments (local state administrations and local representative bodies) openly share information with the public; cooperate with relevant parts of civil

society and include it in the decision-making processes and increasingly response to citizens' demands.

PARTNERS

Palme Center has been working since 1999 in Kosovo, supporting democratic CSO working towards increased citizen's participation, good governance, strengthening political processes by bringing civil society and decision makers together. A special focus has been on marginalised community groups, discriminated against based on their ethnic background or sexual orientation. The Palme Center will continue to work with our network of partners and bring in new organisations that can further strengthen the work on local level democratisation and organising of citizens. Partners that have capacities to facilitate cooperation between civil society and decision makers, that organise citizens on community level, that contribute to a debate on the role of civil society for social change, that represent and give voice to marginalised groups or work to mitigate ethnic tension, that can contribute with research and policy recommendations for sustainable mechanisms of inclusion. The programme will seek cooperation with all stakeholders that work in the field of democratic organising of civil society and linking with decision makers.

STAKEHOLDERS

Currently, neither international donors, nor local CSO are actively working towards strengthening citizens' initiatives and their engagement with local government. This is a reflection of political processes in Kosovo and state building phase. With establishment and functionality of institutions there is need for citizen's involvement and their participation. Support to CSO on local level is crucial for development of sustainable democracy, but this kind of support is generally lacking in Kosovo as the organizations with the capacity for handling foreign funding are mostly located in Prishtina. Only very few donor agencies and CSO has been working on the local level on community-based groups. NDI has a long experience in Kosovo working with citizens groups/focus groups, through training and providing them with adequate skills on organising and working together for raising/resolving various concrete issues. Based on selected topic/issues focus groups have identified their priorities and addressed them to the right institutions. On a few occasions municipal authorities, police units and donor agencies supported/cooperated with these focus groups in order to improve conditions which were raised by focus group members. However, these organisations remain ad-hoc and without formal structure that will create opportunity for sustainability.

SUPPORT TO TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN SERBIA

CONTEXT ANALYSIS²⁰

CURRENT LEVEL OF DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN SERBIA

Although elections are fair, most of the institutions are operational and most of the important laws are passed in Serbia, it still cannot be characterised as a fully democratic society. Implementation is unsatisfactory and many of the newly created institutions (like the Agency for Anti-Corruption, Ombudsman, State Audit Institution) are facing difficulties in their every-day work due to the fact that central authorities are not providing adequate space, human and financial resources or they are not reacting on reports from these independent bodies. Implementation of passed laws is not adequate whether due to lack of good will from those that should implement them or due to lack of necessary bylaws. These shortcomings lead to decreasing levels of trust in the authorities among citizens of Serbia. At the same time, citizens' trust in existing political parties, media, trade unions and other parts of civil society is very low which leaves them with few opportunities to influence the current situation or contribute to democratic or social change.

Serbia is in the process of EU integrations and a majority of citizens and political parties are supporting that process. The road to full membership is at least six to eight additional years long and a large number of systematic reforms are necessary before Serbia joins the EU. The fact that 78 percent of Serbian citizens would support reforms necessary for accession even if they were not requested by EU but because they are important for democratisation of Serbia²¹ is evidence that reforms are needed.

Corruption is systematic and wide spread on all levels and in many spheres. Citizens of Serbia think that corruption is the largest problem for the development of the society. According to latest opinion polls, some 39 percent of citizens think that fight against corruption is the most important issue that needs to be solved²². The fact that second priority (the need for improvement of protection of human rights) was seen as most important by 13 percent of interviewed people is further underlining the extent of corruption.

Another problem, closely connected with corruption is strong influence of political parties in society in general. Political affiliation is generally a condition for all kinds of positions, including the non-politically appointed officials, and also in the private sector. In addition, parties are centralised with weak or non-existent structures for internal democratic decision making. Parties tend to put their struggle for political power over the importance of making sustainable reforms. Examples are numerous in the current coalition government where parties behave similar to feudalists in the ministries that are under their control, giving out concessions to loyal members and without any multi-party compromise or discussions on especially long-term reforms that demand a wide consensus.

The law on Free access to information in Serbia is generally respected which creates preconditions for transparency of authorities. But many obstacles remain before any acceptable level of accountability and transparency of decision making is achieved. One of the major problems is lack of national integrity system;²³ meaning mutually reinforcing legislative standards, institutional structures and administrative procedures that ensure that

²⁰ Resources used for the analysis include: EU Progress Report 2010; State Audit Institution's audit report on 2009 budget of State of Serbia; Reports for Coalition for Citizens' Monitoring of Public Finances

²¹ Public poll on trends in European orientation of Serbian citizens, organised by the EU Integration Office of the Government of Serbia

²² Public poll on trends in European orientation of Serbian citizens, organised by the EU Integration Office of the Government of Serbia

²³ Jeremy Pope and Transparency International, *Source Book*, latest edition 2000

public servants will put the interest of the public above their own. This system of laws, mechanisms and attitudes is weak both on central and local level. In the law on Anti-Corruption Agency the adoption of integrity plans is mandatory for the state bodies and organisations, territorial (regional) autonomy bodies and local state bodies, public services and public companies.²⁴

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEMOCRATISATION

Civil society organisations in Serbia are still not sufficiently recognised by citizens as a tool that they can use to articulate their concerns and to communicate with authorities in the period between elections. Certainly, CSOs have a part of the responsibility for that. Citizens are often unaware of their rights or the methods to claim them but CSOs still did not manage to present themselves as the easiest path to authorities. Very related with this is the fact that CSOs are often having weak internal mechanisms of accountability and sometimes even transparency. Certain number of organisations has a very small number of employees that are making the decisions and usually they have no membership. All that leads to a situation where (local) authorities do not recognise the representativity of CSOs and citizens are not motivated to participate in their activities.

On the other hand, there are several reasons for current state of affairs in Serbian civil society. Civil society in Serbia is relatively young; almost all the organisations are formed within last two decades. There is no tradition of vast membership that exists in some other countries. During the nineties, civil society focused on a fight against authoritarian regime and many organisations did not manage to adapt to new conditions where it is no longer enough to be an activist but it is necessary to be competent in the area of the work, too. Project financing, dominant in the practice is also preventing CSOs from having long term planning and organisational development.

Civil society is often not recognised as separate entities. The general public tends to see it as a part of one group, together with international donors, sometimes even as very connected to the state. That is why it is important for CSOs to work on their increased visibility and promotion of changes in the society created by their work.

Although difficulties are numerous, civil society in Serbia has a potential to contribute to reforms and democratisation. A number of organisations and individuals are carriers of that potential with adequate support and coordination they can make a difference.

One of the most pressing issues for democratisation at this point in Serbia and an important role for organisations in civil society, is to take on the issues of accountability; both in terms of their own operations and in terms of pushing local authorities towards greater openness and transparency.

RELATION BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Organisations in civil society have different relations with the state and authorities on different levels. In order to support the creation of accountable and democratic governance, civil society can both cooperate with and support local authorities in the implementation of laws and reforms, while at the same time maintain their integrity and ability to criticise political representatives when this is needed. However, one of the consequences of the current condition in Serbia is that a certain number of the CSOs are not ready to criticise the authorities and instead choose to work on issues that are not strictly political or decide to cooperate with authorities without questioning even obviously corrupt practices. Lack of procedures and a clear system of selection criteria for deciding on which civil society projects and/or organisations will be supported by local authorities is a typical illustration of that problem.

²⁴ Law on Anti-Corruption Agency, article 59

It was already mentioned that state and political parties are centralised and that diminishes the space for manoeuvring in local authorities. In some cases, this is also used as an excuse for the local authorities not to implement reforms even when an issue is within their control.

Local and Parliamentary elections will be organised before May 2012. That gives a good opportunity for the Palme Center and partners to work with public officials during their whole term, including the beginning when they may be more open for reforms.

Civil society needs to engage with authorities both as advocates, experts and watchdogs. Promises made by political parties before the elections and their results after the elections should be compared. The political agenda set by the EU accession process is a tool that can be used as an additional pressure mechanism.

STAKEHOLDERS

A limited number of foreign donors and no domestic funding is available to operate in the field of (local) government transparency and accountability. EU Delegation in Serbia is supporting a few projects in this area but only Fund for Open Society has a strategy, programme and funding allocated to this field. Besides FOS, Institute for Sustainable Communities (USAID implementing partner) will support CSOs work on transparency and accountability but on a central level and only through advocacy. Palme Center has established contacts with both organisations and is planning to coordinate future activities in order to achieve higher impact.

UNDP and OCSE are also active in the fields of anti-corruption and accountability. Still, they are focusing on cooperation with the state and its institutions. USAID launched Sustainable Local Development Programme in Serbia and will try to create a better environment for investment and growth, where local authorities should work in close partnership with their local business communities and civil society organisations.

Local authorities and local political representatives will be the main target group of this programme. Their level of commitment and readiness for changes will determine the success of the programme. Although Serbia is not clearly divided into regions, more than a half of the population lives in areas that also have a regional level of authorities. Vojvodina and Belgrade have special status and an additional set of political instruments.

Independent state's institutions such as Ombudsman, Commissioner for free access to information, Agency for Anti-corruption or State Audit Institution are very relevant resource of information but also allies that are sharing similar vision. There is a lot of space for cooperation and they will certainly be a part of the future programme.

Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities is working on the development of the local self-rule based on European standards and it will be an important partner of the programme. Palme Center already has close contacts with Standing Conference.

Political parties are important stakeholders knowing how strong their influence is. Within this programme, Palme Center is interested primarily in the internal democracy and accountability of political parties. Due to political heritage from the past, larger political parties in Serbia are unable to clearly differentiate their party from the state. Parties are authoritarian, decisions are rarely made after democratic procedures and examples of democratic changes of party leaders are exception rather than common practice. Level of trust between political parties is low. Knowing that all Governments of Serbia from 2000 were coalitions of several parties such relations between parties decreases the speed and quality of reforms.

It is impossible to analyse the relations between civil society and authorities without inclusion of media. Investigative journalists are already playing a role in revealing corruption

and misuse of power. It is highly relevant to include them in activities and to help them develop their levels of knowledge and interest for the fields of transparency and accountability. In order to motivate citizens to join this process and to promote successful examples from one region to another, or to change practice on the central level, media is a very important stakeholder. Media in Serbia is weak, under strong influence of political parties and big businesses, constantly on the verge of financial collapse. Still, they are a very relevant and necessary stakeholder and that is why they need to be a part of the whole process.

Despite the fact that judiciary institutions in Serbia are not sufficiently independent, that they do not have enough capacities and that the judiciary reform was problematic, they are important stakeholder in any programme within the field of rule of law and good governance. The Prosecutors' Association of Serbia and Judges' Association of Serbia are professional associations within this area and can be seen as a bridge between civil society and the judiciary.

Issues that will be tackled in this programme are also very relevant for trade unions and business sector, especially those that are employed in public enterprises. Members and partners from the Sida CIVSAM frame (civil society cooperation between Sweden and Serbia) are a valuable asset that is already at disposal.

POSITION OF UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS

Gender equality in Serbia is improving but it is still not on a satisfactory level. During 2009, the Parliament of Serbia adopted the Law on gender equality and the Strategy for improvement of position of women and gender equality. These documents contain concrete measures and activities that should be taken in different areas like economic rights, education, political participation, media sector. Nevertheless, differences in the position of men and women still exist. Large number of women is not only unemployed, they are not even on the labour market. Only 20 percent managers in companies are women. Regarding political participation, only 21 percent of members of Serbian Parliament are women.

Poverty leads to social exclusion, a process by which individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from full participation in society because of their poverty or lack of basic knowledge and opportunities for lifelong learning, or as a result of discrimination. Such phenomena, are moving away individuals or groups of people from possibilities for employment, generating income and educational opportunities, as well as social networks and community activities. Such individuals have little access to institutions, public authorities and decision-making processes that affect their increased sense of powerlessness and inability to influence their own lives.

The Roma community in Serbia is in general in a difficult position. They are among the poorest in the society, due to lacking opportunities for education and discrimination. Only about 9 percent of the Roma community has a permanent job, only 30 percent have completed primary school, about 9 percent go to secondary schools, and only 0.01 percent from the Roma community has finished university studies²⁵. Discrimination and violation of human rights are common problems for the Roma community in Serbia. Regulations governing the exercise of the rights to health and social care, employment and education require registered residence and since a large number of Roma live in illegal settlements they are not able to achieve their basic human rights. Such practices largely obstruct the access to basic human rights for the Roma and therefore can be said that this is a systemic discrimination.

²⁵ Dragoljub Acković, Vice-President of World Roma Parliament in an interview to Radio Free Europe

GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS IN SERBIA

VISION

The vision of the Palme Center programme is that political processes in Serbia are characterised by transparency and accountability, reflecting interests of the informed and empowered citizens. Strong civil society organisations, representing citizens and working for inclusion and enhanced democracy, engage with and influence local decision makers to bring about concrete policy reflecting the interests of the local community. Elected local decision makers are held accountable.

MISSION

The programme strengthens civil society organisations and supports activities that enforce the participatory nature and transparency of local political processes. Palme Center facilitates participatory processes in which decision makers share information (transparency), make priorities according to proclaimed public policies and govern according to rules and procedure (accountability) and engage with relevant stakeholders in the community (participation and dialogue).

EXPECTED RESULTS

Palme Center would like to see systems for control of local authorities and that these are functioning in practice. We would like to see actors in civil society and local authorities creating models for cooperation and exchange of information, to enable civil society actors to find their role in democratic governance and appropriately be included/consulted in decision making. Partnership between local authorities and CSOs exist on both policy making and policy implementation level. Stakeholders in the program benefit from the experience from the region, and civil society organisations are given the opportunity to question their own structures for accountability as an important part of the democratic development in the country.

SUGGESTED METHODS

Awareness raising and advocacy on the need for accountability structures within governance structures and civil society.

Development of a *civil society open for citizens' participation* (trainings; support to fresh initiatives/organisations; awareness raising; advocacy; models; regional component)

Civil society as *monitors* of local authorities, using best practices and experiences from Serbia, the region and other European countries.

Networking between municipalities/regions and between civil society actors on local and national level.

PARTNERS

Palme Center will mostly focus on local/regional CSOs that already have established structures, knowledge and experience in the areas covered by this strategy. Some of them are already supported by Palme Center and some belong to a national network of CSOs engaged in the issue of governance transparency and accountability. In order to consolidate and promote the different initiatives, Palme Center will support at least one organisation with long experience, good reputation and wide network within the sphere of politics and local authorities. Taking into consideration that there are not many CSOs with adequate knowledge that operate in this field, Palme Center will support their capacity building. Significant space will also be dedicated to strengthening of mechanisms of transparency and accountability of not only partners but other CSOs too.

AID EFFECTIVENESS

At a High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Paris in 2005, a declaration known as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, or the Paris Agenda, was adopted. The Paris Agenda is formulated for support from government to government. The Paris Agenda is not entirely applicable to the conditions for support to and cooperation between civil society organisations. The Palme Center is currently active in the process of developing criteria for aid effectiveness for civil society support. Below follows a discussion on how the Palme Center relates to principles of aid effectiveness that are elaborated in the Paris Agenda; ownership, harmonisation, alignment and core funding.

One important element of the overall effectiveness of development programmes is the coordination with local and international donor organisations. The Palme Center is keeping up to date with other initiatives within our field of work in each of the programme countries, in order not to duplicate efforts. The Palme Center is also implementing projects in partnership with international organisations as well as local partners. In the coming programme period the Palme Center will explore the possibilities to coordinate funding to certain partners that have several donors to the same project or programme. In this phase it is important to engage partners in a discussion of what modality would be beneficial for their operations and to what extent it would strengthen their organisation.

Regarding the rules and procedures related to project funding, the Palme Center is following the general guidelines from Sida and in some cases European Commission. The formats for reporting and application required from partners are in line with common practice in the field of development cooperation.

The Palme Center stresses the importance of local ownership in setting the priorities and deciding on the most relevant way of solving identified problems. In the past, the partners of the Palme Center have found that we have respected their priorities and initiative and been careful not to impose an agenda or a way of working that is not applicable or relevant in the local context. The Palme Center will continue to support locally developed strategies and agendas, working closely with our partners in civil society, to contribute to the alignment of efforts in accordance with the Paris Agenda. In the cases where this is possible, the Palme Center will rely on the partner organisations' own systems and procedures, and make longer term commitments. The Palme Center will continue to be transparent, reliable and flexible.

The option of supporting civil society partners by means of "core funding" is a great opportunity to contribute to the ownership of strategic development and organisational sustainability of partners. Organisations that have consolidated financial reporting, annual audit, strategic plans and solid systems for financial management can be eligible for core funding. The Palme Center has yet to solve the issue of reporting on results when several other donors contributed to the same organisation.

PLANNING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The system for planning, monitoring and evaluation works to feed the lessons learned into the continuous development of programmes. Over the yearly cycle, processes of reporting and assessing results lead to questioning of the updated plans and budgets for the coming year, in concrete terms the selection process. The system for monitoring and evaluation is addressing the following questions:

1. Internal validity of the projects & programmes (**Are we doing what we said we would do?**)
2. Outcomes/impacts (**Are we making any difference?**)
3. Strategic relevance and learning (**Are we doing the right things?**)

On three levels:

- a. Operational (are activities done well in terms of quality & quantity?)
- b. Strategic (was it the appropriate activities to reach the goals?)
- c. Conceptual (coherent with our theory of change?)

As the programmes for 2012-2015 are planned in cooperation with partners and designed to measure boundary partners' criteria of success. Different methods applied for measuring or assessing results. Information is collected continuously by Palme Center staff and fed into the database First Lane II. The project group closest to a project generally has the most information about its results.

- For activities and outputs we collect midterm and annual reports from partners and Palme Center staff conduct monitoring and observation.
- To measure outcomes and impacts of projects and programmes, methods may include workshops or focus group discussions with partner organisations and/or target groups, collecting success stories describing most significant change (written accounts, interviews) and developing some change processes into case studies.
- In order for partners to assess their results and better communicate with their stakeholders in the communities, the Palme Center will facilitate capacity building on results assessment. When civil society organisations transparently communicate their results to their target groups it helps strengthen their accountability.
- The Palme Center and selected partners engage in "team self assessment" to continuously develop programmes.
- External evaluation can also be applied to get information about the merit or efficiency of a specific thematic field, country programme or working method.

ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY & GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The Palme Center has sufficient administrative capacity to handle the funds from Sida Europe and other funding. The head office in Stockholm and local offices are sharing responsibility for the administrative and programmatic elements of the programmes. The programme management, monitoring and follow up, reporting and financial controlling is included in budgets.

In the report from the Systems Audit carried out in 2009, consultants concluded in their assessment of the operational management that the Palme Center has developed a number of adequate systems throughout the project cycle. This includes handling of applications and reports, screening and assessment of partners, communication with collaboration partners, signing agreements in all projects, instalments, and structured and systematic support to local partners. The project management system First Lane is an important factor in efforts to reach systematic handling of projects and quality control throughout the project cycle. At the time for the systems audit there were also some systems that needed to be improved and the Palme Center addressed the noted weaknesses.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PALME CENTER

The by-laws clearly define the general assembly as the supreme authority of the organisation, and the procedures for its annual meeting. The by-laws also define the agenda of the assembly, including adoption of balance sheet, profit and loss statement, discharge of liability of the board, election of board members, and election of an auditor.

BOARD

The 13 members of the board are appointed by the general assembly annually. The average board member holds a seat for four years. The Board of Palme Center takes strategic decisions on future of the programme. All the main documents related to the program

(strategy of Palme Center Western Balkans, application to Sida) or other initiatives are discussed and should be approved by the board.

HEAD OFFICE

The Palme Center Head office is located in Stockholm. The secretary general has the mandate from the board to administer the operations of the Palme Center. He on his part delegates the internal administration to the administrative manager and the operations to the operational manager. The Western Balkans programmes are managed under the Europe Unit at the Palme Center. Coordination between the head office and local office aims also to improve internal policies and procedures of Palme Center affecting the program implementation. The programme is overseen directly by the regional program manager. The programme management, programme financial management, monitoring and follow up, reporting and financial controlling is included in the budget.

FIELD OFFICES

The Palme Center has field offices in Tirana, Sarajevo, Belgrade and Prishtina. These offices have been operated by the same local staff since they were opened and coordinated by one regional programme manager from Sweden. The Palme Center has a committed team with long experience and contextual understanding, language skills and the combination of Swedish and local staff in the programmes have all been beneficial factors for programme development. The Palme Center provides capacity building for programme staff, recently for example on European Union, local democracy or impact assessment. The local offices serve as resources to partners in programmes for thematic issues. The Palme Center continues to operate the Sarajevo office with funding from other sources.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The fact that the Palme Center has a strategic focus on organisations with a local outreach means that many partner organisations will have relatively weak administrative structures and in many cases depend on few committed individuals. This may risk the contribution towards programme goals if the leading people in the organisations leave and there is no institutional memory. In the absence of systems for financial management, there is also a risk for poor reporting and mismanagement of funds. In some of the countries where Palme Center operates, the legal framework for civil society is complicated or unclear and organisations may find it difficult to live up to all rules. The Palme Center manages these types of risks by organising trainings in financial management for partners, frequent contacts and visits, providing counselling (by local audit firms), having local staff easily available for partner organisations. Partners submit financial reports twice annually to Palme Center, reports are audited. The Palme Center has a checklist, or “early warning system” in order to be alert to signs of poor management and in cases where this happens a tailor made action plan is developed together with local partner and if necessary, financial expertise.