

The background of the page is a light blue field filled with a pattern of small, semi-transparent circles. Overlaid on this are several larger, thin, light blue concentric circles of varying radii. Three solid orange circles are scattered across the design: one in the upper right, one in the middle left, and one in the lower left.

Strategic Partnership for Building a Democratic Society in Europe

**The Role of Non-governmental
Non-profit Organizations
in Policy Making**

Impulses from
the International Conference



Imprint

The international conference Strategic Partnerships for Building a Democratic Society in Europe was organized by Glopolis on behalf of the NeoN informal network together with the Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation in cooperation with the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic – Department of the Secretariat of the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations – and Spiralis. The conference was held on 17th – 18th October 2022 in Prague under the auspices of the Minister for European Affairs Mikuláš Bek.

This publication summarizes the information and opinions presented by the conference guests.

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Acknowledgments: colleagues of all co-organizing organizations for adjustments and comments



Intentions of the conference organizers

Our aim is to expand awareness about how the involvement of non-governmental non-profit organizations, in cooperation with the state administration, contributes to effective governance.

We want to be part of the creation of strategic support for civil society organizations in Europe we share.



Participants of the first day of the conference, balcony of the Hrzánský Palace in Prague

Summary

The organizing non-governmental non-profit organizations (CSOs¹), in cooperation with the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, decided to contribute to the Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union, by organizing a conference dedicated to the activities of non-governmental non-profit organizations that go beyond their primary operation. Today, the non-profit sector is united under many umbrella organizations, networks and cooperation platforms. In addition to responding effectively to current

¹ We replace the abbreviation “NGOs” which is used in the Czech version of the document, with “CSOs” (civil society organizations) established in the English-speaking environment.

4 Introduction

social challenges, CSOs also contribute to public administration in many areas with their expertise, which is irreplaceable. Some of them, therefore, naturally devote themselves to actively influencing the conditions of the work of CSOs and want to be partners with the state in caring for a strong society and a resilient democracy. Representatives of such CSOs were guests and speakers at this conference.

A considerable number of people, who work in public administration, declare a need and interest in cooperating with CSOs. Among them are quite a few who have experience of long-term cooperation with specific CSOs or their networks. With this conference, we wanted to offer support to those who reflect on their experiences of such cooperation and who want to participate in improving the framework conditions in order to maintain a certain level of partnership and improve the overall culture of participation in the Czech public administration.

In this summary report, we deliberately focus on positive cases and questions that will help us move forward. At the same time, we want to present examples of the usefulness and meaning of cooperation to those who are afraid of it, often for practical reasons. The participants of the conference assessed the role of CSOs as irreplaceable, for example in the preparation of the reform in the area of social housing, the regulation of gambling, the formulation of measures against climate change and the solution to domestic violence. Examples of good participatory practice include the preparation of the Strategic Framework of the Czech Republic 2030, the preparation of the Strategy for the cooperation of public administration with non-state non-profit organizations for the years 2021 to 2030, the participation of CSOs in the preparation of subsidy calls and the evaluation of projects from EU funds aimed at the social inclusion of foreigners.

Important support tools, resulting from our membership in the European Union, were presented at the conference, as well as very diverse experiences from the national level of individual European countries for inspiration. Data from the international initiative Open Government Partnership over the last 10 years demonstrate the real positive influence of the involvement of civil society in the government agenda. Participation has had a positive impact on the quality of the solution as well as on the effectiveness of the implementation.

We can now present the results of the research report, analysing the cooperation of the state administration with umbrella organisations and networks of non-governmental non-profit organizations. According to the results of this survey, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, and the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic are the most active in cooperation. Cooperation is usually long-term, although being mostly informal in nature.



What we took away from the conference

- We can confirm that there is a good will for cooperation on both sides, in the non-profit sector and in the state administration.
- We need to cultivate not only the willingness, but also the quality of cooperation from people working in different contexts.
- Cooperation is not only about institutional mechanisms, but also about personal commitment and care of human resources.
- The environment for collaboration must be supportive, and this applies to infrastructure as well as financial and human resources.
- Cooperation is not possible without fostering a culture of openness, trust and participation among everybody involved.



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Why Do We Want Partnership?

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“I consider non-profit organisations as an essential part of the functioning of democracy in our country, caring for society as a whole, but also for its vulnerable parts.”

Klára Šimáčková Laurenčíková,
Government Commissioner for
Human Rights

The Dual Irreplaceable Role of Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations (from the Speech of the Government Commissioner for Human Rights, Klára Šimáčková Laurenčíková)

At a time of unprecedented global crises, such as covid-19 and the war in Ukraine, which disrupt our usual sense of security, there is a need to strengthen mutual trust between citizens and the state, as well as the cohesion of society as a whole, that is growing more than ever. Civil society organisations can play a dual, irreplaceable role in this. First of all, they intensively help resolve the consequences of shocks for individual groups of population where they are sometimes the first tool at our disposal for solving crisis situations. Secondly, at a time when frustration is growing in society and there is a threat of a larger part of citizens turning to populist and extremist solutions, we need a close partnership with civil society organisations in order to maintain the necessary level of social cohesion, building trust in public institutions and trust in democracy in general.



Left to right: Petr Lebeda,
Klára Šimáčková Laurenčíková,
Jana Miléřová

Cooperation Is the Key (from the Speech of the Director of Glopolis, o.p.s., Petr Lebeda)

Cooperation is becoming the key word of our time. It is not surprising, because an increasing number of people cannot imagine a shift in resolving the main challenges of today without it. Neither the most enlightened governments, nor the most efficient market, nor the most active civil society will ensure energy transformation, nor a more considerate restraint system or a fairer position of women and vulnerable groups in society. That is why we have woven cooperation, especially the strategic one, between whole groups of different actors into the heart of Glopolis and we are trying to develop its “know-how”. Such a philosophy is also the driving force behind the NeoN platform – a network of 18 sectoral CSO networks, which have a total of over 450 member institutions. Each works on some important social issue and they all share the principles of democracy and sustainability. They share information and resources, coordinate joint actions to defend and develop these principles in the decision-making processes of the state, and work together to create a healthy environment for the non-profit sector.

What Tools Do We Have?

The Czech Republic Fulfills the Principles of Partnership in the Implementation of EU Structural Policies

Lukáš Pachta →

The Principle of Partnership

The principle of partnership includes, in accordance with the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), **close cooperation between public administration bodies at national, regional and local level, the economic and social partners and civil society organisations concerned**. Partners should be actively involved throughout the entire cycle of the programme – in programme preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

To ensure compliance of the implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programs with the partnership principle, the Council for ESIF was established by government resolution for the 2014–2020 programming period. According to the international evaluation of the ending programming period, the Czech Republic performed above average in applying the principle of partnership.

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“I have one concrete example, the field of social housing, where people from non-profit organisations started the reform and are currently pushing it further, now within state administration.”

Pavλίna Žáková, Head of the Department of Advisors to the Minister for European Affairs

The most visible indicator of the fulfilment of the partnership is the **composition of the monitoring committees** of individual programmes, also it is because this is publicly accessible information.

Funding Civil Society Capacity for Partnership

In the upcoming programming period, 0.25% of financial resources within the framework of the European Social Fund plus is intended for **capacity building of civil society and social partners**. It corresponds to the regulation of the European Parliament, by which the fund was established in 2021. According to this regulation, the Member States shall, within the framework of shared management, allocate an appropriate part of their resources of the ESF+ component in each program to capacity building of the social partners and civil society organisations, including in the form of professional training, measures for creating networks and strengthening social dialogue, and to activities carried out together by the social partners.

European Monitoring

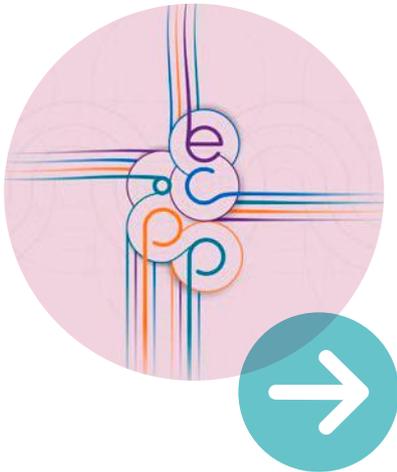
Not only does the European Commission declare that it listens to civil society when setting political goals, but it also takes the civil society into account when monitoring the administration of European funds.

Roxana Bedrule →

As part of the so-called European Semester – a six-month cycle of coordination of economic, fiscal, social and employment policies

8 What Tools Do We Have?

within the EU – the European Commission formulated four recommendations for the Czech Republic in the spring of 2022. One of them was to strengthen the provision of social and affordable housing, adopt a special legislative framework for social housing and improve coordination between public authorities. At the same time, **the Act on Social Housing is an agenda that was clearly introduced into the Czech political discussion at the initiative of CSOs.**



Community of Practice

Both the Czech state administration and the non-profit sector have representatives within the so-called **European Community for Practice on Partnership** (ECoPP) established by the European Commission. The task of this platform is to strengthen partnership as a key principle of the European Union's cohesion policy by offering space for the creation of structured and long-term relationships between all actors involved in the policy-making process at European level.

The main objectives are:

- facilitate the exchange of experiences related to the partnership,
- stimulate capacity building of partnerships,
- spread awareness of best and innovative practices,
- review the application of the European Code of Conduct and prepare proposals for its updates.

The format of the work is **annual plenary sessions**. The inaugural plenary session took place in April 2022 and addressed the importance of partnerships in the implementation of EU funds (the next one is planned for February 2023). The community establishes **subgroups** on the following topics:

1. Complementarity of funds: Synergies in partnership approaches between different EU funds, programmes and projects, European regions and levels of governance.
2. Co-creating a meaningful partnership: Partners as co-creators of strategies and documents, exchanges and feedback mechanisms.
3. Selecting partners: Ensuring a transparent, balanced and representative process.
4. Capacity building of the parties involved.
5. Different forms of cooperation: Experiences and insights from other forms of cooperation, including social and civic dialogues, public-private partnerships, networks, consortia, etc.
6. Mediation of partners: Facilitating better involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of programmes and projects.

The Czech Republic Ordered an Evaluation of Public Administration Performance and Recommendations for Future Strategic Development from the Organization for European Cooperation and Development (OECD)

Daniel Trnka →

The identification of the weak points of the Czech public administration is the first step towards drawing up a programme to support the implementation of the recommendations, which should also include professional training workshops for the state administration. The preliminary results of the OECD survey show that the Czech Republic lacks a culture of participation. Individual **excellent examples can be documented, such as the participatory preparation of the Czech Republic 2030 Strategic Framework** (prepared in 2015–2017). However, there is a lack of **horizontal vision about the necessity of involvement across departments**, despite the fact that the Czech Republic has documents that officials can rely on. Obstacles to enabling CSO participation are **fear on the part of officials of sharing not-yet-public information and uncertainty about where the space for participation ends and lobbying begins**. Also, for these reasons, there is a lack of **advisory groups with representation of civic organisations at lower levels of state administration**, where they would influence the process of formulating measures from the very beginning. One of the OECD’s recommendations will likely be to **strengthen the position of the RIA Commission** (for regulatory impact assessment) at the Legislative Council of the Government, and the establishment of another **expert body for the participation of citizens and other stakeholders**, which would serve to increase the level of implementation. According to the results of the OECD survey, the Czech Republic is also one of the few countries that lacks an **internet portal for consultations with the public**. Due to its technical prerequisites, it could be eKLEP – an electronic library of legislation in preparation – if access rights were extended. What prevents it?

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„A culture of participation is a completely new type of thinking when, actually from the very beginning when a person creates some public policy, they invite individual actors to think together and together they create, based on the needs of individual groups of society, what needs to be done in public policy.“

Filip Vagač, Slovak Government Commissioner for Civil Society Development



From left to right: Paul Braithwait, Filip Vagač, Zdislava Odstrčilová

Panel discussion: The Benefits of the Participation of Non-Profit Organizations in Public Policies – International and European Principles and the Link to the Quality of Governance

Participants: Paul Braithwaite, Open Government Partnership (OGP), Senior Regional Coordinator, Europe, OGP Support Unit, Lukáš Pachta (online), European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Roxana Bedrule (online), European Commission, Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Community of Practice on Partnership 2021-2027, Daniel Trnka (online), Deputy Head of the OECD Regulatory Policy Division, Zdislava Odstrčilová, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, deputy for the management of the family policy and social services section, Filip Vagač, Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, government representative for the development of civil society.

Moderator: Silvie Pýchová, director of SCEA – Standing Conference of Educational Associations, Chairwoman of the Committee for EU of the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations, member of the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations

The Czech Republic is a Part of the Open Government Partnership

Paul Braithwaite →

Open Government Partnership – OGP was created on the initiative of the US government with the aim of supporting the openness and transparency of governance, as well as the fight against corruption at the international level. A state joins this initiative by accepting a concrete commitment of the government to support budget transparency, increase citizen engagement, fight corruption and transform into more open, efficient and accountable institutions. The Czech Republic made such a commitment in 2011.

The OGP considers the fulfilment of the two-year action plan concluded between the government and civil society organisations in Ukraine for the years 2014-15, i.e. immediately after the mass pro-European protests on the Maidan, as its success. The result of the cooperation was a large-scale reduction of corruption and the saving of a significant amount of the Ukrainian state budget.

The overall OGP data from the last 10 years demonstrate the real positive influence of the involvement of civil society in the government agenda. 1. The greater the influence of the public on formulating the goals of governance, the more ambitious these goals are. 2. The greater the involvement of civil society in the implementation of the joint action plan, the greater the chance of its implementation. 3. The greater involvement of civil society is also a guarantee of faster results. Do we take these general findings as a challenge to us?

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“Don’t tell people that you will decide together when you or the government will have the final say. It’s okay to say: look, it’s mostly been decided, but we still want to go through it with you.”

Paul Braithwaite, Open Government Partnership

The Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations (RVNNO) Operates at the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic

Alexandra McGehee →

RVNNO is one of six councils under the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic under the responsibility of the Government Commissioner for Human Rights, Klára Šimáčková Laurenčíková. It was established in 1998 with the aim of creating suitable conditions for the existence and operation of CSOs. It currently has 36 members, 16 of whom are deputy ministers, and 16 are experts from the non-profit sector, and 2 members represent regions, cities and municipalities.

The key document produced by RVNNO is the **Strategy for the Cooperation Between Public Administration and Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations** for the next 10 years, a national strategic document approved by the government in 2021. It was developed by one of the working groups of RVNNO. The challenge was, and is, the cooperation and involvement of all ministries in the preparation and, subsequently, in its implementation. Regarding the non-profit sector, the preparation of the document was a positive example of an open participatory process. The strategy addresses three main areas:

- improvement of cooperation between state institutions and non-governmental non-profit organisations;
- improving the social image of CSOs;
- improvement of the conditions for the existence and activity of CSOs.

Examples and Limits of Functional Cooperation

It Is Not Possible without Public Administration Education – Slovakia

Filip Vagač →

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“The regulation of gambling in our country is a good example. It was a relatively large event even for our state administration, which was preceded by a great upbringing of civil society, in which many non-profit organisations participated.”

Deputy Minister for Legislation
Karel Blaha

In 2017–2020, the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Development of Civil Society implemented a pilot project on the topic of participation, which was financed by EU funds in the amount of 2 million euros. The project brought a basic analysis of the state of the Slovak public administration with regard to the adoption of the principles of participation. As part of its practical part, 12 pilot projects took place that tested various participatory scenarios and tools for involving the public in the creation of public policies at the national, regional, micro-regional and local levels. The result of the theoretical part of the project was an analysis of the state and possibilities of participation in Slovakia, including proposals for legislative changes to increase public participation in public administration. **The Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic emphasises the importance of the part of the project devoted to increasing the know-how of public administration for the successful implementation of participation in practice.**

Within the framework of the follow-up project (National Project Participation II), a **so-called participatory unit**, consisting of more than 10 employees of the Office, is to be created. They will provide advice in a situation where there are no standardised procedures for processes in the public administration for managing participation and where no professional staff have yet worked for the execution of such an agenda.

With Whom and How to Consult in the Social Field?

Zdislava Odstrčilová →

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic (MoLSA), together with the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, are the two highest state authorities that have the most experience in involving CSOs, their umbrella organisations and networks in their activities. In the field of family policy and social services, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs cooperates with 2,500 partner CSOs that are service providers. This is also why **the call of the current Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Marian Jurečka, for the ministry’s employees to consult with the target groups on all issues** makes sense. This is actively happening, for example, in the creation of a family policy concept, amendments to the Social Services Act, the Act on the provision of childcare in the children group and the Act on the social and legal protection of children.

13 Examples and Limits

From the point of view of a civil servant, it is the very practical questions that play an important role:

- From the point of view of a civil servant, it is the very practical questions that play an important role:
- Who to consult?
- What should the consultation look like?
- How to set the rules so that consultations are efficient – in terms of content and time?
- How to transparently involve CSOs in setting the rules for subsidy calls, without one of the parties having a conflict of interests?



Left to right: Richard Nikischer, Markéta Pěchoučková, Martin Polášek, Anna Kárníková, Marta Smolíková, Tomáš Habart

Panel discussion: Experiences and Benefits of Participation from Practice and Current Topics of the Czech Presidency

Participants: **Richard Nikischer**, Ministry of Regional Development, Head of the Department of Rural Development, Department of Strategies and Analysis of Regional Policy and Housing Policy, **Markéta Pěchoučková**, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, Head of the Department of Social Innovation Projects, **Martin Polášek**, Ministry of the Environment, Department of Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development, **Anna Kárníková**, Hnutí Duha – Friends of the Earth Czech Republic, director, **Marta Smolíková**, Open Society, director, **Tomáš Habart**, People in Need, Head of Varianty Educational Services.

Moderator: **David Ondráčka**, Glopolis

Questions arising from the discussion that various guests feel are important to further clarify and discuss

- Is cooperation dependent on the value setting of the public office (working ethos supporting participation), or is the aspect of usefulness sufficient (minimum time, finances and energy allocated to participation in exchange for the greatest possible benefit in the form of expertise obtained from the CSO)?
- Should the state administration expect detailed technical solutions to an issue in addition to an understanding of the area being addressed and reflection from CSOs?
- Does the state administration understand the nature of participatory deliberation and its role as a negotiator between interests represented by various entities, including CSOs?
- How to get in public administration from step 1: a better understanding of the given area thanks to the expertise of CSOs, to step 2: cooperation on drafting solutions and early involvement of CSOs in the process of preparing strategic documents?
- Why are some ministries able to hold a dialogue with CSOs and some not?
- How to deal with the authorities' habit of not going out with drafts, which also prevents the piloting of proposed solutions?
- How to support the competence of cooperation, not only with CSOs, but also between ministries and authorities at different levels?
- How to practically achieve the creation of permanent tools for dialogue, when the methodology for involving the public in the preparation of strategies has been around since 2009?

The Long-Term Activity of the Umbrella Organisation Pays Off, but...

Andrea Krchová →

Are umbrella organisations walking on thin ice in negotiations because they do not directly provide services in the field themselves?

The Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations uniting CSOs working with migrants has built up the position of, for example, a partner in the evaluation of projects focused on the integration and social inclusion of foreigners, prepared for on behalf of the Ministry for Regional Development and paid for by European funds. This was preceded by convincing work about the need to monitor how integration projects are progressing. Another barrier, that was successfully removed, was the question of whether umbrella organisations can participate in the formulation of subsidy calls if their member organisations are among the applicants. Based on good practice, this has also been established.

In 2022, the state used the Consortium to communicate about accommodation for Ukrainian refugees. During the preparation of legal regulations of help provided to the Ukrainian refugees, however, cooperation encountered its limits. The Consortium would have appreciated being invited to proper consultations about government measures, however quickly they were prepared. Although, for example, the partners had only mere hours to comment on the latest Lex Ukrajina 4.



The audience



Left to right: Hana Volná, Michal Barbořík, Andrea Krchová, Lukáš Kraus

Panel discussion: Experiences and Benefits of Participation from Practice and Current Topics of the Czech Presidency

Participants: **František Kučera**, Ministry of Justice, Department of Conflict of Interests and the Fight Against Corruption, National Contact Person of the Czech Republic within the for Open Government Partnership, **Hana Volná**, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Director of the Department for Development Cooperation, **Michal Barbořík**, Ministry of the Interior, Director of the Crime Prevention Department, **Andrea Krchová**, Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations, Director, Lukáš Kraus, Reconstruction of the State, **Martina Břeňová**, Open Society Fund Prague, Director, member of the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations

Moderator: **David Ondráčka**, Glopolis

Cooperation between the Civil Sector, the State and Business as a Challenge

Martina Břeňová →

Open Society Fund Prague has valuable experience in building personal trust between representatives of these three groups. According to the experience of its director, at the beginning there are mutual prejudices on all sides – they are caused by, for example, different work dynamics, the use of different language, etc. She, therefore, recommended being perceptive of the role language has in the relationship between the state and the civil sector. For example, instead of the designation "beneficiary", the word "partner" would surely be better suited for organisations which the state depends on in certain areas to fulfil its role.

Hana Volná →

The Department for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs normally deals with public, non-profit and private sector cooperation abroad. The **Council for Development Cooperation**, which was created through a government decision in 2007, is also supposed to be a platform for the involvement of non-profit organisations. It can be such a platform if it is really used.

17 Examples and Limits

Lukáš Kraus →

The **Government Anti-Corruption Coordination Council** brings together representatives from all sectors. Unfortunately, even this council is among the structures that have been weakened recently. The Council's last meeting was in July 2021.

František Kučera →

Question: Would it help to set up a better collaboration if all parties openly communicate their constraints, which are often mainly time and capacity, right from the start?



Left to right: Jitka Seitlová, Olga Richterová, Barbora Urbanová, Séamus Boland, Eva Decroix

Panel discussion: Cooperation with Civil Society as a Ground for Building a Democratic Space in the Czech Republic and in Europe

Participants: **Jitka Seitlová**, vice president of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, **Olga Richterová**, Deputy President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, **Barbora Urbanová**, Deputy Chairwoman of the Foreign Committee of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, **Eva Decroix**, 1st Vice-President of the Parliamentary Club of the Civic Democratic Party of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic.

Reflections from a European perspective: **Séamus Boland**, President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, European Economic and Social Committee

Moderator: **David Ondráčka**, Glopolis

Selected ideas from the presentations

Overall, I see a big role for CSOs in preparing measures mitigating climate change. Currently, for me, it is the topic of domestic violence, in which something started to happen in the years 2000–2002 thanks to the activities of CSOs. Without it, it wouldn't have started at all. We also have the topic of community energy, which seems to be entirely in the hands of non-governmental organisations. Only today is the Ministry of Industry and Trade learning to cooperate in this matter. **(Senator Jitka Seitlová)**

I lead my permanent expert group, which organised several round tables on the topic of participation and support of civil society. **(Senator Jitka Seitlová)**

I often experience in my work that non-profit organisations offer expertise for free and strive to be heard. It is my experience that it is the expertise combined with persistence and relevance of the topic that non-profit organisations come up with that ultimately bear fruit. **(Olga Richterová, MP)**

The representatives of the former top political establishment tarnished the image of civil society and I seek to change the approach. A political decision in favour of civil society is needed. I see it as a political task, just as I see Europe. **(Barbora Urbanová, MP)**

The state would collapse without non-governmental non-profit organisations, for example in the social area, they also help people in a debt trap or victims of domestic violence. Aid during the Covid-19 pandemic also came from non-profits, as did aid for Ukrainian refugees. **(Barbora Urbanová, MP)**

In my opinion, the financial insecurity of non-governmental non-profit organisations is the biggest systemic problem. **(Eva Decroix, MP)**

When it comes to cooperation with advocacy CSOs, I envision an active approach also from elected members of parliament, for whom non-profit organisations are also indispensable when gathering information and support. **(Eva Decroix, MP)**

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“Even a minor problem that civil society points out and that is solved early can prevent a number of larger social problems later.”

Séamus Boland, President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, European Economic and Social Committee

New topics arising from the discussion

- CSOs and their umbrella organisations and networks must be trustworthy for politicians – in terms of funding, structure and representation, then nothing stands in the way of cooperation. How to achieve this and how to prove it?
- In what form can CSOs better communicate with politicians – individually at meetings, or through broader platforms, round tables, councils, working groups? Which is more efficient?
- Is advocacy work of CSOs towards politicians lobbying? Can CSOs and their networks be seen in the same way as, for example, corporate lobbyists?
- Are CSOs with many years of experience and expertise able to accept the opinions of other parties and do they understand the need to seek a broader political consensus?

Research Report

Doc. Tereza Pospíšilová, PhD. (FHS UK) and Mgr. Jiří Navrátil, PhD. (FSS MU) developed an **analysis of the cooperation of the state administration with CSO umbrella organisations and CSO networks** on the basis of a questionnaire survey and an analysis of the rules determining the composition of advisory and working bodies of the state administration.



According to the results of the survey, more than half of the unions in the ministries declared a **great or considerable interest in cooperation with CSOs**. The main reason is the expertise and information that non-profit and umbrella organisations have. The **Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Office of the Government, and the Ministry of Regional Development** have the most cases of cooperation. In real terms, it means 2–3 collaborations per department. The most frequently mentioned partners are the **Green Circle, the Association of Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations (ANNO), the Czech Council for Children and Youth, the Association of Social Service Providers (APSSCR), Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations and the Czech National Disability Council**. Cooperation usually has a long-term nature, with around a third of them lasting **6–10 years**. They mostly have an **informal character**, i.e. they are not governed by formal rules.

A greater **awareness of the barriers to cooperation**, which the report provides detailed information on, can lead us forward.

On the part of the **state administration, the biggest obstacles** are:

- lack of information about potential partners,
- insufficient personal and financial capacity of CSOs,
- and value disagreements or political disagreements.



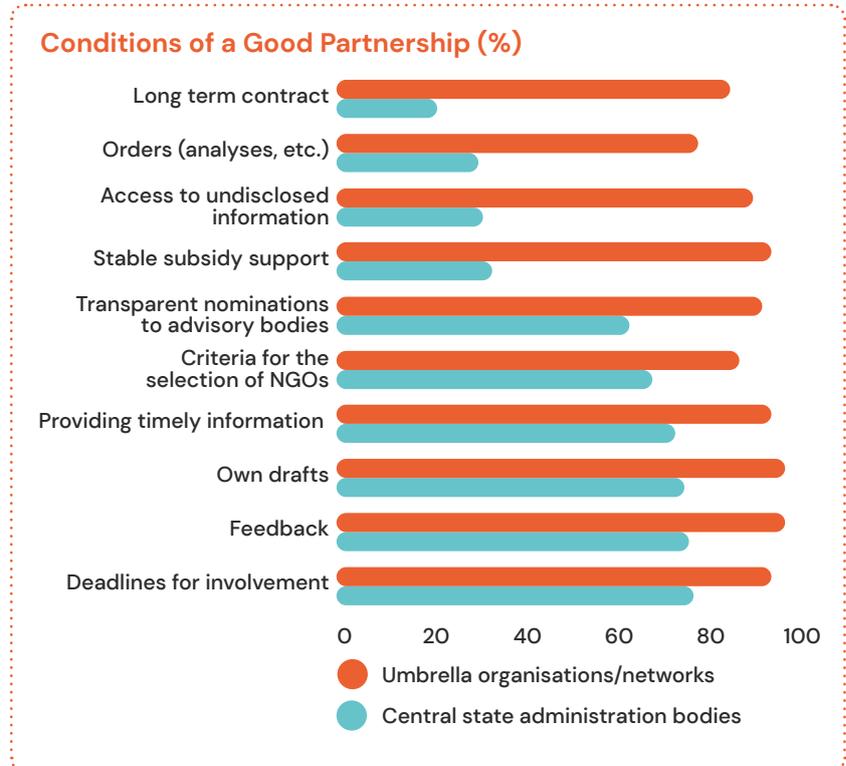
Tereza Pospíšilová

From the point of view of non-governmental non-profit organisations, the main problem is **1) insufficient personal and financial capacity**, followed by **2) lack of knowledge** on the part of state administration workers about how to organise cooperation, **3) reluctance of state administration** to cooperate and **4) lack of information** about non-profit and umbrella organisations.

The following factors play a major role in **choosing an umbrella CSO or network for cooperation**:

- a. It is an expert, transparent and active partner that focuses on the topics of the given field.
- b. It is already known as a stable and proven partner. The legal form, previous cooperation and overall duration of operation are important. On the other hand, whether it has stable staff is of little importance.
- c. From the point of view of the state administration, it is not decisive what the umbrella non-profit organisation’s reach is, either in terms of the number of members or territorial coverage.

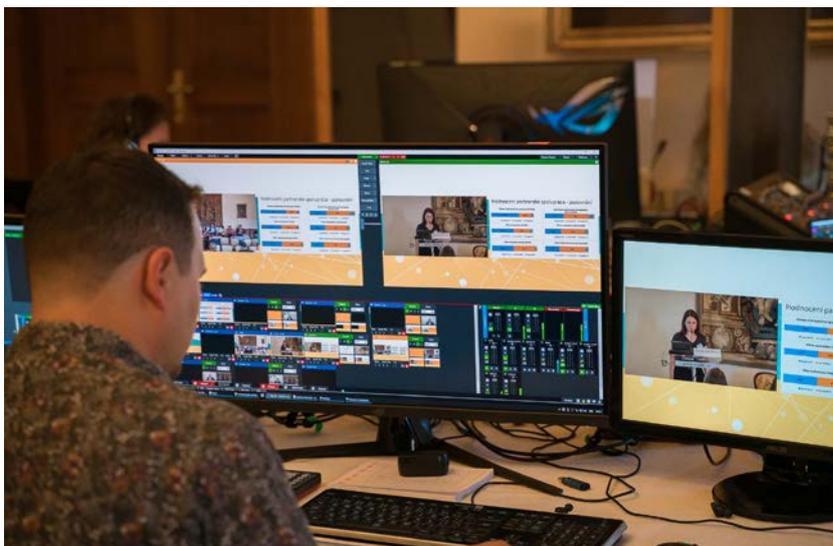
As the graph shows, the weight that each of the parties assigns to the **conditions necessary for functional cooperation** differs very significantly for half of them. There is agreement on the need to improve procedural conditions. There is also a very different level of understanding with regard to the solid framework of cooperation, its funding and the fulfilment of prerequisites for cooperation in the form of information sharing.



As for the **costs of CSOs invested in cooperation with the state administration**, in 78% of the investigated cases, the state administration does not contribute towards them. In cases where it does contribute, it is most often a contribution covering a maximum of 10% of the expenses.

Final recommendations of the report

- Increase the availability of information for the state administration about CSOs and their networks (e.g. database of umbrella organisation/networks at the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations) and expand examples of good practice.
- When choosing partners for cooperation, in addition to the emphasis on CSO expertise and thematic agreement, ensure public transparency of the selection.
- Create a stable framework for partnership cooperation with umbrella organisations and CSO networks, including a tool for partially compensating the participation costs of the partners.



Štěpán Kravák working in the technical facilities of the conference



This is why we have long been calling for a permanent structure for European civil dialogue: “if national governments turn to dialogue with the citizens as such, it can easily slide into populism, while dialogue with formulated opinions represented by civil organisations is just what democracy needs”

European Civic Forum,
Alexandrina Najmowicz



Left to right: Ionuț Sibian, Vera Móra, Alexandrina Najmowicz

Panel discussion: Strategies to Support Civil Society at the EU Level – on the Way to a Prosperous Civil Space

Participants: **Vera Móra**, Director, Ökotárs – Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation, **Alexandrina Najmowicz**, Director, European Civic Forum, **Sergey Lagodinsky** (online), Member of the European Parliament, The Greens/European Free Alliance, **Ingrid Bellander Todino** (online), Head of Unit, Fundamental rights and rule of law – Fundamental rights policy, European Commission, The Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers.

Moderator: **Ionuț Sibian**, Director, CSDF – Civil Society Development Foundation, Romania, member of the European Social and Economic Committee

The European Parliament is Praising the Initiative for the Cross-Border Functioning of Civic Associations

Sergey Lagodinsky →

Since the European Parliament cannot submit its own proposals to the European Commission, it welcomes its own initiative, which should bring civil society to the main agenda of the Commission. It should be aimed at **creating rules that will enable the cross-border functioning of civic associations and ensure their greater independence**. This measure should also include **the definition of minimum standards for the functioning of associations across the EU**. These are long-term goals and require a long-term strategy. The current EC seems to be open to these topics. The struggle for space for civil society should also be seen in the wider context of events in Russia, Turkey, Belarus, and we should not forget the problems of this sector in Serbia either.

In 2022, We Will See the First Ever EC Report Dedicated to Civic Organisations

Ingrid Bellander Todino →

At the end of 2020, the European Commission declared that, as part of its new strategy for the more effective application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU (prepared for the next ten years), it wants to focus on strengthening the position of civil society organisations, rights defenders and justice workers as one of the four main pillars. This year's **Report on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU**, scheduled for publication on 9 December 2022, will be the **first report at EU level to fully address the topic of civil society**. In this sense, it is an important milestone. The report will explain the role of civil society, summarise how the European Union can protect human rights non-profit organisations, present examples of good practice and the challenges that the civil sector faces in the shrinking space for its activities. In the next chapter, it will present the forms of financial support and other support instruments available to the EU. **The Commission expects the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU to actively promote the Annual report on the application of the Charter.**

Since basic human rights can only be protected if an independent judiciary, media and an active civil society are ensured, the connection with regular **EC Reports on the rule of law** is also important. This is also why civil society organisations participated in the formulation of important points and recommendations in the 2021 report.

Connecting Donors to Support European Civil Society

Roy Virah-Sawmy →

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“Civil society will only be stronger when they join their forces, create alliances and networks, collaborate across sectors and across borders.”

European Civic Forum,
Alexandrina Najmowicz

Civitates was created as a joint initiative of 20 foundations from countries across Europe that decided to contribute to strengthening European democracy by supporting civil society. It focuses on the support of the civil sector and the creation of coalitions between CSOs, as well as on the digital public space and the availability of information, and finally on the support of independent journalism in public interest. It considers the media to be a part of civil society and a condition for the good functioning of democracy.

Hungarian Non-Profit Organizations Are Looking for European Alliances

Vera Móra →

It is not surprising that Hungarian CSOs felt the need to create something like a **safety net for the non-profit sector at the EU level**. Europe, rather than the national government, is an ally for them. They hope that a systemic proposal in the form of a European strategy or an action plan to support civil society organisations will be created, which would bring it stronger recognition. They have gained allies for this plan among European CSOs and in the European Parliament in the last 5 years that they have been working on it.

The drafted **European Strategy for Civil Society** is structured according to these criteria:

1. The right to entry: Civil society organisations should be able to carry out their work under equal and uncomplicated conditions throughout Europe, and their cross-border activities and international initiatives should be facilitated.
2. The right to the freedom of peaceful assembly: The EU should monitor member states that restrict civil activities.
3. The right to operate free from unwarranted state interference: Civil entities should be able to signal attacks against themselves to the European Commission, and the EU should have tools to take action against the stigmatisation and harassment of civil society organisations by member states.
4. The right to free expression: EU institutions should promote a functioning media environment and civic education to counter fake news, disinformation and distorted reporting.
5. The right to cooperation and communication: The EU institutions should start an open and structured dialogue with civil society.
6. The right to seek and secure resources: Civil society organisations should have easy access to transparent, flexible and user-friendly grant programmes designed to improve the quality of coexistence across Europe.

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“I would say it was a shock at the beginning. Organisations which work for the public good, with vulnerable groups and to improve democracy get attacked by the government which considers them the enemy. But after some time we have learned that it is important for civil society to come together, stand up for each other and express solidarity, and actively defend ourselves together.”

Vera Móra, Director of Ökotárs

Issues Related to the Adoption of the Civil Society Strategy

- Why do we need such a document? We assume that non-profit organisations do not exercise sufficient influence on decision-making today and their positions are not sufficiently represented. We also respond to the need to protect the sector as such and the people who work in it.
- Who is this strategy intended for and who should participate in its preparation at the European level?
- How to convince national governments of the sense of the strategy?
- How will we define and call the sector in question? (non-governmental organisations, non-profit organisations, civil society organisations, i.e. a sector that is different from unions and private foundations)
- How do we describe the role that civil society organisations should play?
- How to finance the preparation process of the strategy so that it can be participatory?
- Do we need a change in the legislative environment?
- What can the incentives for cooperation look like both towards the non-profit sector and towards public institutions?
- What can support for the non-profit sector look like? (tax, forms of institutional financing, general political support for democracy, including civil society organisations)
- How long can we expect the preparation process to be? The preparation of the European strategy for work with youth, for example, took about 20 years (a white paper forming the plan, discussions in the Council of the EU, organisation of consultation processes and structured dialogue and finally agreement on the document and the method of its implementation).

Inspiration from Individual Countries



Left to right: Pavel Trantina, Frank Heuberger, Alexandra McGehee, Liv Hernæs Kvanvig, Roy Virah-Sawmy

Panel discussion: Experiences in Strategic Cooperation with Civil Society

Participants: **Frank Heuberger**, BBE – National Network for Civil Society, Germany, **Anna Grudzinska** (online), OFOP – Ogólnopolska Federacja Organizacji Pozarządowych – National Federation of Polish CSOs, Poland, **Liv Hernæs Kvanvig**, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Head of Freedom of Religion or Belief Section, **Roy Virah-Sawmy**, Civitates / NEF – Network of European Foundations, Programme Manager, **Alexandra McGehee**, The Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, Head of the Secretariat Department of the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations.

Moderator: **Pavel Trantina**, vice-chairman of the EU Committee of the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations, former member of the European Economic and Social Committee

Irish Example

Séamus Boland →

Possible inspiration:

- In addition to expertise, non-profit organisations in Ireland have learned to plan solutions and propose ways of financing them. The selected organisations thus became official consultation points for government proposals.
- In advocacy work, non-profit organisations use this argument against politicians: You need to listen to us, otherwise it will harm you, the politicians, in the first place.
- For advocacy, it is necessary to master the art of dialogue, not patronising, but genuine.

The question remains, how to responsibly become a third partner in politics alongside business and trade unions?



“Having non-profit status is very important and even in Germany now there are organisations that appear to be too political from the government’s point of view and therefore this status is taken away from them.”

Frank Heuberger, National Network for Civil Society

Frank Heuberger →

Milestones in the Development of the Largest Network of Civic Organizations in Germany

BBE (National Network for Civil Society – Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement) aims at the cooperation of three sectors – state institutions, companies and civic organisations. Today, the network has seven working groups, one of which focuses, among other things, on supporting the civic engagement of migrants. The official media partner is ZDF, the second channel of German television.

The Network’s successes came with the first permanent ministerial working group, and then mainly with **the establishment of the parliamentary subcommittee for the non-profit sector**. Today, it has the tools to continuously work with the government. **Every five years it conducts a major survey on how volunteering works. It collects data on structural changes of CSOs.** At the moment, it is actively monitoring the implementation of the government’s plans to adopt the **Law on the Support of Democracy** and the **National Strategy for Civic Engagement**.

The National Federation of Polish NGOs (OFOP) Focuses on Monitoring the Use of European Funds

Since the right-wing government took office in 2015, Polish non-profit organisations have faced many challenges associated with the weakening of the democratic environment. In addition to the political influence on the functioning of the judiciary, for example, the legalization of discriminatory attitudes towards LGBT+ persons or the criminalization of organizations helping refugees at the border in 2021 have a negative influence on the functioning of CSOs. This stands in sharp contrast to the state’s dependence on civil assistance when coping with the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

In the situation of only selective financing of activities of the non-profit sector by the government, OFOP focuses mainly on the following activities:

1. supporting the dialogue between CSOs and regional governments;
2. supporting CSOs in securing financial support from the EU;
3. an effort to influence the conditions for the distribution of funding from European funds in the upcoming financial period, primarily ensuring the representation of CSOs in the monitoring committees of individual programmes. They organised, for example, public hearings on the National Recovery Plan. Thanks to support in European rules, they have a foothold in securing the same monitoring status as business and trade unions. The problem arises when the government does not accept the jointly negotiated results and changes the managers in the subsidy programmes.

Anna Grudzinska →

Liv Harnæs Kvanvig →

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“The conference showed that we have definitely transformed from organisations that react to the world, into organisations that actively influence the world.”

Pavel Trantina, vice-chairman of the EU Committee of the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations

Ideal Norway?

In Norway, civil society organisations are a natural part of important processes and enjoy a prominent role in society. And it has never been different, at least as far as Liv Harnæs Kvanvig, Head of Freedom of Religion or Belief Section at the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, can remember. Her organisation **creates a safe environment for the debate of the government, academics and the non-profit sector, participates in the education of members of parliament and supports civil society organisations.** It takes care of national minorities, supports the inclusion and participation of minorities in political life. It is primarily supported by good relations with members of parliament.



Participants of the second day of the conference, balcony of the Hrzánský Palace in Prague

Links to Documents

- [European strategy for civil society](#)
- [European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds \(2014\)](#)
- [Documentation for the 1st Plenary meeting of the European community of practise on partnership](#)
- [Contribution of Non-governmental Non-state Organizations to the Implementation of the Programme of the Presidency of the Czech Republic in the Council of the EU 2022](#)
- [Strategy of public administration cooperation with non-state non-profit organizations for the years 2021 to 2030](#)
- [2021 Rule of law report \(2021\)](#)

Organizers' Profiles

Glopolis on behalf of the informal network of networks NeoN – is a Czech analytical and networking centre with 18 years of experience in research, education, monitoring and negotiation of public policies and coordination in the non-profit sector in the Czech Republic and the EU. Its mission is to connect people and organizations from the non-profit, public and private sectors in order for them to work better together for sustainable democracy and to create an enabling environment for such collaboration. <https://glopolis.org/odolna-obcanska-spolecnost/>

Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation is the largest Czech environmental foundation with 30 years of experience. It offers grants for people and CSOs caring for the environment, offers consultancy in the field of green building, adaptation measures and sustainable agriculture, organizes the Tree of the Year campaign, Bike to Work campaign or Adapterra Awards and runs the Open Gardens educational centre. <https://www.nadacepartnerstvi.cz/>

Office of the Government of the Czech Republic – Department of the Secretariat of the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit is a permanent active, coordinating and advisory body of the government of the Czech Republic in the field of non-governmental non-profit organizations. <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/rnno/zakladni-informace-767/>

Spiralis has been cultivating civil society for almost 25 years through education and consulting, contributes to the professionalization of non-profit organizations, advocates for favourable conditions for their activities and supports the development of active citizens. It creates opportunities for people to connect and cooperate across the entire society with the aim of building a free and democratic Czech Republic. <https://www.spiralis-os.cz/>



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Organizers and partners



The conference was held thanks to the financial support provided by Civitates – A Philanthropic Initiative for Democracy and Solidarity in Europe.



Iceland  Liechtenstein  Norway 
Norway grants grants

The conference is part of the “Reclaim Our Civil Space” project, which benefits from a 1,8 million € grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation.

Implemented by



The content of the conference was solely the responsibility of the organizers and can in no way be considered as an expression of the views of the funders.