

BALTIC SEA REGION NGO FORUM 2019

MAY 9-11, 2019 | RIGA, LATVIA



REPORT

AUTHOR OF THE REPORT

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SUMMARY

The Baltic Sea Region NGO forum 2019 took place on May 9–11, 2019 in Riga, Latvia. It gathered 160 participants from 20 countries.

The purpose of the Forum is to showcase the dynamics, integration and new ways of looking at traditional perspective of the NGO sector.

Two central debates, at the beginning and end of the Forum, got things rolling and wrapped it up, providing outstanding examples of how civil society and its environment are changing. Heated debates showed that although these issues raised are the priority now, we still have more questions than answers.

Ten workshops were hosted by diverse organisations and partners from Latvia and abroad. Each participant could select workshops according to their own preferences--individual and practical trainings, or theoretical debates. Sessions were hosted not only by NGOs but also social movement, media, private sector, academia and government organisations--only in close partnership we can bring about the necessary changes.

The Final Statement reflects the very essence of the event and the strong commitment of the civil society in the region to work further to implement sustainable development principles, build regional identity and promote trust among different stakeholders.

This Report will guide you through the program--debates, short summaries and main conclusions of the workshops, the main takeaways and questions to be answered in the next events.

Video about Baltic Sea region NGO forum: https://ej.uz/BalticNGOforum_video

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OPENING CEREMONY SPEECH

THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ZANDA KALNINA-LUKASEVICA



On 9 May 2019, the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zanda Kalnina-Lukasevica, greeted the participants and guests at the opening ceremony of the Baltic Sea Region Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) Forum on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Latvian Presidency in the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

“The Baltic Sea Region is unique as it encompasses both EU members and non-members, and even countries without physical access to the Baltic coastline. The Baltic Sea Region is our common responsibility, opportunity and advantage. Together we can achieve security, contribute to sustainability, and strengthen our identity”, said the Parliamentary Secretary in her speech.

Zanda Kalnina-Lukasevica pointed out that celebrating together the opening of the Baltic Sea Region NGO Forum and Europe Day was a great opportunity that symbolically demonstrated the strength, role and needs of civil society and the European Union. “Let’s appreciate the opportunity of freedoms we enjoy in the EU, especially, the freedom to develop a strong civil society based on common values,” noted the Parliamentary Secretary.

Zanda Kalnina-Lukasevica underlined in her speech that “NGOs and activists are the backbone of any democratic society. Active people can bring about significant changes. Decisive action by NGOs increase the resilience of civil society against the appeal and temptations coming from politicians and social media with a populist approach. NGOs are significant contributors to the stability and favorable social climate in the region, diminishing the risk of conflicts and decreasing tensions”. The Baltic Sea Region remains a region of peaceful cooperation where mutual trust and tolerance is expected to bring benefits to our countries and citizens. For this purpose, both civil society organizations and governments should work together to support and strengthen regional cooperation.

Zanda Kalnina-Lukasevica underscored the relevant role of the European Union in the Baltic Sea region, which contributes to cooperation both among EU Member States and with non-EU countries. “For Latvia being a member of the EU means ability to contribute more effectively to the sustainability of the region, and non-EU states can also benefit from the opportunities and support given by the EU,” stressed the Parliamentary Secretary.



OPENING CEREMONY SPEECH

THE DIRECTOR OF CIVIC ALLIANCE LATVIA, KRISTINE ZONBERGA

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

Bells have a deep symbolic meaning.

As you know, the sounding of a bell is a signal that informs us of something; bell is also sounding of alarm that tell us to wake up.

Moreover, in history, sounds of bells had even more important meaning because bell towers can be heard over long distance.

Likewise, Baltic Sea Region NGO forum's aim is to exchange information and raise public awareness and understanding for the work of civil society, citizens' activities and initiatives.

Also this year's forum bells alarm about shrinking democratic space in the countries of Baltic Sea Region that requires serious actions to be taken by international bodies such as CBSS as well as national governments.

Throughout different societies, cultures and religions around the world, bells have a multitude of meanings. But what is common in all of them – bells gather people by calling them.

Baltic Sea Region NGO forum in Riga brings together 160 representatives of civil society organizations, government institutions, media, the private sector and international bodies from 11 Baltic Sea Region countries and 9 other countries who support civil society in region.

And just a few weeks ago bells were a symbol of solidarity when churches around Europe rang their bells to express solidarity with the people of Paris after a catastrophic fire that damaged the cathedral of Notre Dame.

This years' forum is very common with the symbols of bell through the prism of it priorities: Security, sustainability and identity.

We believe that we can develop the security, sustainability and identity of the Baltic Sea Region:

- by safeguarding democratic freedoms and justice;
- by building cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder partnerships and mutual value based trust at all levels,
- by changing external and internal environment that requires civil society to re-examine its role in the sustainable development, shape new forms of activism and root back to the human development beyond the structures and formalism.

But a bell also is a symbol of the start of something. So let's bells ring-in the 17th Baltic Sea Region NGO forum.

Have a nice evening and "ringing Forum" for a next two days!

Thank you!



Music: Riga handbell choir "Primus"

SECURITY BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY

WARM-UP DEBATE VALUE BASED CITIZEN MOBILIZATION FOR CHANGE



This debate kicked off the work of the Forum putting forward several questions for further debates:

- Is it possible to make governance more “easy”? Can we explain legislation in a more friendly way? Can service descriptions be simplified?
- Are there limits to government social responsibility? How far should governments go in being responsive to the needs of their citizens? Are there any risks?
- What are the new tools governments use to engage citizens more in the governance – for example, citizen generated data. Are there any limits to citizen engagement? Can we trust in representation of the citizen groups involved?
- Does representation through NGOs still work? Even when individual participation, petitions, and interest groups can make a significant impact?
- What are the values implemented by the good governance? Are principles of good governance used more often than values?
- Who are experts, citizens or government officials? Or both?

Peter Varga from Open Government Partnership presented the overall situation of the civil society in the Baltic Sea Region, along with data and indicators of good practices. Open Government Partnership [<https://www.opengovpartnership.org>] has many resources and commitments of citizen and government co-created change we all can learn from and adapt to our local contexts.

Presentation: https://ej.uz/Citizen_Engagement

SECURITY BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY

Alija Turlaja from Alliance of Riga Neighbourhood Communities

[<https://www.facebook.com/apkaimjualiense/>] explained the best practice case from Riga – how a small voluntary organisation can become a recognized expert of local development, achieve resource redistribution for local priorities and even initiate changes in the electoral system.

Presentation: https://ej.uz/Citizen_mobilization

Krzysztof Garski from the Mayor's Office of Gdansk provided an impressive example of how a city can change and become open and responsive to the citizens – through participatory budgeting, open data, and civic panels, as well as achieve considerable increase in turnout in its local elections. Even more importantly – how a city council can mobilize people for change on sensitive political issues.

Reactions from the audience included such questions as: what are the common values of the governance and citizens, what is the role of social movements in the civil society, what is the future of the NGO sector, how common is the use of signing the petitions, can NGO sector be critical to itself?

Presentation: <https://ej.uz/GdanskCitizenMobilization>

This debate was just a warm-up but it proved that governments, civil society and its space and individual behaviour – are all changing. We as an NGO sector cannot stay inflexible. We also need to change to stay relevant.

SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING TRUST AND PARTNERSHIPS



GLOCALISATION CSO ENGAGEMENT IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT LOCALLY

Hosted by: Inese Vaivare, Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation (LAPAS), Place of event: LAPAS premises: Pils street 21

Sustainable Development Goals or Global Goals seem distant if you look on them on paper. Since 2014 LAPAS has worked with on sustainable development issues, developed the methodology of glocalisation [<http://lapas.lv/en/our-works/presidency-project/glocalization-methodology/>], and drafted an evaluation of NGO involvement in the SDGs process [<http://lapas.lv/en/sdgs/report/>] that was recently presented in the UN HLPF in New York. LAPAS has also gathered 51 best practice cases how SDGs can be implemented locally [<http://lapas.lv/en/sdgs/cases/>] by different stakeholders. LAPAS [<http://lapas.lv>] is national development platform that unites 35 NGOs working toward development cooperation, global education and global sustainable development. It was established in 2004.

The workshop focused on national level advocacy, communication tools and introduced one of the success stories – Čiekurkalns neighbourhood community.

Čiekurkalns development group [<https://www.facebook.com/Shreienbusha/>] is one of the biggest and most active neighbourhoods in the Riga. They work with advocacy, infrastructure, cultural heritage, and environment protection using legal processes and sometimes – tactical urbanism. In four years, they have reached recognition and status.

The main conclusions of the workshop covered the diversity of means that can be used for sustainable development and advocacy, and the role of the each individual and interest groups.

Presentation: <https://ej.uz/Glocalisation>

SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING TRUST AND PARTNERSHIPS



HOW TO GET YOUR MESSAGE OUT

Hosted by: Inga Springe, The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism Re:Baltica,
Place of event: Swedish Ambassador's Residence, Jura Alunana street 7.

The workshop focused on the examples of how organisations can find and address their target audience and make more impact. The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism Re:Baltica [<https://en.rebaltica.lv>] is a non-profit itself and produces investigative journalism in the public interest. They focus on social equality and fighting corruption and lack of transparency. Re:Baltica uses also new, innovative and often cost-saving journalism practices, creating a network for exchanging information at the international level.

The main conclusions of the workshop cover are, that it is very important, especially in social media, to speak with the main target audience and don't waste time on those, who are not interested or are against your topic.

Presentation: <https://ej.uz/HowToGetYourMessageOut>

SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING TRUST AND PARTNERSHIPS

MULTISTAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS AT LOCAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL



Hosted by: Anita Selicka, Latvian Rural Forum (LLF), Place of event: NORDEN premises: Marijas street 13/3

Changing focus from sectoral, often short-term decision making towards long-term and multi-stakeholder cooperation has been proved to be success. When team of CSOs, public sector and decision makers work on the existing challenges to find the new solutions, it becomes a unique key driver to the development based on trust and innovative solutions. Latvian Rural Forum [<http://llf.partneribas.lv/lv/>] – an umbrella organisation uniting 69 rural NGOs, has worked more than 10 years building capacity and sustainability of CSOs. LRF has collected and experienced good practices at all levels of how to ensure access to information and decision making, and taking diversity of interests into account.

The main conclusions of the workshop are that long-term and sustainable partnership is based on good communication between the stakeholders. Because each sector has their own point of view there is big risk of getting “lost in translation”. To be sustainable a multistakeholder partnership requires clearly defined common goals. Complementary responsibilities, understanding and knowledge of other sectors and their value is a foundation for successful multi-stakeholder partnerships.

SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING TRUST AND PARTNERSHIPS

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR ENGAGING AND INCLUSIVE EVENTS



Hosted by: Ieva Morica and Egita Prama DOTS (Fonds atvērtai sabiedrībai DOTS),
Place of event: PROVIDUS premises: Alberta street 13.

In this interactive workshop organisers of Conversation Festival LAMPA [www.festivalslampa.lv] shared their experiences in organizing engaging and inclusive democratic conversations – creative, interactive, meaningful. There isn't one magic formula for a successful event with audience engagement, but with serious planning and thoughtful considerations, and utilizing diverse tips and tricks, it is possible to open – up and engage very diverse audiences. Audience engagement in public events is not only respectful towards the audience, but also an opportunity to tap into the vast knowledge present among them.

The participants discussed formats for events, where people are empowered to take an active part, can freely express their views, take an active interest in hearing opposing views and are better at communicating face to face with others. At the end of the workshop the participants trained their ability for deep or active listening following a concept Democracy Fitness test developed by Danish activists.

Main take-aways:

- Democracy requires active engagement of all citizens. They need to train their skills as active and engaged citizens and their ability to communicate with each other, voice their opinions, to be empathic, listen, etc.
- There is great interest and potential for cooperation among civil society groups and wider stakeholders (including, business community) in the Baltic sea countries.
- Deep or active listening is an essential part of democratic culture. If we listen carefully, we can learn new things, jointly find better solutions and strengthen social cohesion in our societies.

Presentation: <https://ej.uz/TipsAnTricks>

SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING TRUST AND PARTNERSHIPS



CITIZENS MOBILIZATION

Hosted by: Marta Lempart, Strajk Kobiet Poland (Polish Women's Strike), Place of event: Embassy of Finland premises: Kalpaka boulevard 1

Mobilization is not about leading, it's about providing tools and support to people in changing their roles from those who attend and watch to those who organise and speak out. Why is social media a blessing and a nightmare? What is a minimum mobilization package? What is the role of innovation? Why is it important to read books about war?

Polish Women's Strike [<http://strajkkobiet.eu>] is the grassroots coalition of women that started in 2016 to fight against the abortion ban in Poland by organizing protests in over 150 cities in Poland in October. Since then, PSW acts as a major player of citizen's opposition in Poland, fighting for women's rights, judiciary independence and a Poland truly for everyone.

The workshops conclusions echoed the approach that mobilizing people is not leading but supporting - with tools and proposals. Professionals and professional NGOs should be helpdesks, not management boards. Language and saying true to emotions are the key. Any goal can be set in 4 words, the rest is noise. Expressing real emotions on the subject is critical. Decentralization will only provide diversity, but with 100% responsibility - comes 100% of power to decide.

SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING TRUST AND PARTNERSHIPS



CONNECTING CITIZENS AND DECISION MAKERS BEST PRACTICES

Hosted by: Iveta Kazoka, Domnīca Providus / Centre for Public Policy Providus, Place of event: PROVIDUS premises: Alberta street 13

In this workshop participants experienced the democracy fitness exercise and discussed the presentation of the best practices connecting citizens and decision makers, sharing their own experiences of reaching compromises and successful engagements with public officials.

PROVIDUS [<http://providus.lv>] is the leading public policy think-tank in Latvia, established in 2002. Its main mission is to promote evidence-based policy and the development of open society values. PROVIDUS main areas of work are good governance, anti-corruption and migration. Citizen participation and the EU dimension acts a horizontal component through all activities.

The main take-aways are:

- Citizen engagement events should be focused on quality rather than quantity: a few highly meaningful citizens engagement events are preferable to many low-impact events.
- There is no magic cure for low citizen engagement, therefore, there should be a diversity of engagement methods. Well-run institutions should be receptive to e-petitions, engage citizens in participatory budgeting, deliberate citizens' consultations (citizens' juries and citizens' panels). Citizens should also have access to referenda.
- It is very easy to fake true citizen engagement via organisation of meaningless consultations, not providing citizens with a capacity to engage in an effective manner, creating GONGOS or astroturfing organizations. Fake citizen engagement leads to distrust and public apathy. In order to encourage meaningful citizen engagement and to consolidate the democracy, such methods should be exposed and discouraged.
- There is a need for a deeper reflection on the relations between the civic activism and activism in context of political parties. Civic activism should not be seen as an opposite (antonym) to engagement in political parties.

Presentation: https://ej.uz/Connecting_citizens

SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING TRUST AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Hearings from the City of Copenhagen: meetings, dialogue with interested parties, schools, mentors etc.
- Neighbourhood planning: A lot of citizen involvement. Citizens identify challenges, participate in meetings and conferences, suggest solutions. Work with schools regarding safe school roads
- Involvement in environmental work.
- District planning

PUBLIC AND CIVIC DIALOGUE

Hosted by: Jens William Grav and Ole Meldgaard, Baltic Sea NGO Network, Denmark,
Place of event: Goethe-Institut Riga premises: Torna street 1

Many of the Baltic States are currently working on various new ways of involving citizens in the political decision-making process at all levels. Traditionally, the involvement has been funnelled – especially in the Nordic countries, through the political parties.

However, fewer citizens today are members of political parties. There is therefore a great need to develop new methods to ensure that citizens are widely involved in the political decision-making process at all levels.

At the workshop, Ole Meldgaard from Baltic Sea NGO Network, Denmark [http://www.bs-ngo.dk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=57&Itemid=73], spoke about the crisis for democracy and lack of trust in governments. Governments are failing to convince citizens that their voice matters and that institutions are acting in their best interest. The question is: How can we revive democracy and give new life to the democratic institutions? The problems and challenges for democracies do not mean citizens are not interested in democracy and political issues. They are just disappointed by their governments. More people associate democracy with equal rights, participation and the power to decide. Citizens' ambition have grown as more and more people take the initiative to make their local neighbourhood more liveable and improve their quality of local life. Civil society organisations can play an important role in bringing the plurality of interest to the attention of decision makers. The Baltic Sea Region should be a Citizens Region. Reclaiming civic space is crucial to allow all voices to be heard and thereby building trust.

Jens William Grav, Baltic Sea NGO Network, Denmark, presented the Danish model of local committees in Copenhagen as well as experiences from working with this model. Local committees consist of a mixture of NGO representatives and politically appointed persons. The local committees are advisory bodies to the municipality in all local matters. In light of this experience he also presented similar models of involving citizen in the decision-making process from Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Germany.

The workshop had participants from several of the different Baltic Sea countries and the discussion showed the need for all countries to continue the work developing new forms of involving citizens in the decision-making process. Presentation: <https://ej.uz/NGONetworkDenmark>

SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING TRUST AND PARTNERSHIPS



SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE PRACTICE CASES BY CSOS

Hosted by: Zane Gailite and Dace Akule Green Liberty (Zaļā brīvība), Place of event: World Wildlife Fund, Elizabetes street 8-4

This workshop was divided in two parts:

–**Food waste reduction: Global aspects and household practices;**

–**Localizing practices for sustainable fashion: consumption and textile waste.**

In the session on sustainable lifestyles, the participants discussed practices to reduce food waste as well as make more sustainable consumption choices of clothes. Among the practices for food waste production, participants focused on better planning, using leftovers, as well as freezing of food. Among the practices for more sustainable fashion choices, participants focused on analysing information provided by the producers, including where clothes are made, what sources the fabric is made from, how the garment was acquired (bought new or used, made home, etc), as well as how long the garment was used.

The stories focus on the interdependence between different parts of the world highlighting that when food waste is generated in one country, it causes social, economic and environmental impacts in other countries of the world. Increased understanding on global impact of food waste will lead to reduced food waste which will directly contribute to reduction of environmental burden during production, consumption and utilization phases as well as reduced costs for households and will increase, indirectly, food security for needy. Everyone agreed that more sustainable consumption in that food and fashion sectors is needed, and both individuals, as well as governments and the private sector have important roles to play in increasing sustainability.

Green Liberty [<http://www.zalabriviba.lv>] was founded in 1991 as the Green Library of Environmental Protection Club. Its mission is to develop a society where people live in harmony with each other and their environment.

SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING TRUST AND PARTNERSHIPS



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NGOS AND PRIVATE SECTOR - PARTNERS OR ENEMIES?

Hosted by: Linda Sedlere and Krista Griķe, CSR Latvia and SCHWENK Latvija, Place of event: LAPAS premises: Pils street 21

The workshop focused on the role of the private sector in the sustainable development.

CSR Latvia presented how the private sector implements sustainability measures at the national and European level as well as basic statistics, approaches and tools that can be used. The best practice case - program "Ambassadors of Responsible Business" was explained. The Program brings together the representatives of responsible business who along with company growth also take into consideration environmental, social and economic challenges at national, regional and global level. Lecturers from NGOs provide their knowledge and expertise for the private sector. An impressive case was presented by SCHWENK Latvija, a company that follows the sustainability approach in various aspects. The core business activities of the company are cement and ready-mix production, aggregates extraction and concrete pavement technologies. SCHWENK Latvija believes that future opportunities and challenges are in the hands of everyone, and they care for the change of personal attitude.

In the discussion part of the workshop some of these diverse issues were addressed:

- how we can influence the system change in the company;
- are we aware of the impact of our business;
- what is the role of the social enterprises;
- how can we build a community of engaged people;
- who can be the role model for change;
- how can companies engage their staff and consumers in building change;
- how can we connect company values with personal values.

We cannot disregard the changes that have happened in the business community. The question remains how can we cooperate for mutual benefit.

SUSTAINABILITY BUILDING TRUST AND PARTNERSHIPS

**SOCIAL TRUST -
DIVERSITY -
COURAGE -
EDUCATION**



Hosted by: Agnese Cimdina, The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Riga, Place of event: Norwegian Ambassador's Residence at K.Barona street 7/9-6

Social trust is one of the most important resources in society and the Nordic region is regarded as a world leader when it comes to establishing social trust. Mutual trust benefits everyone and research shows that there is a clear link between trust and happiness, welfare, economic growth, and social innovations. However, trust is not a natural resource, rather it must be grown over a long period of time through sociocultural, political and economic processes.

The session aimed to discuss how social trust relates to diversity management and civil society in Latvian and Nordic contexts and what role courage and education can play in rising social trust.

Diverse experiences were shared by the Social Integration Foundation [www.sif.gov.lv], Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, **Humusa komanda**

[<https://www.facebook.com/humusakomanda/>] – a small entrepreneur employing people with refugee or alternative status in Latvia to promote their social integration, **lespejama Misija** [<http://www.iespejamamisija.lv>] – Mission Possible – NGO which recruits, selects, trains and supports successful young people in becoming teachers in public schools in order to provide high-quality education to all children in Latvia.

In conclusion, social trust is one of the most important resources in society in economic, social and political terms. NGOs, social enterprises and local governments have an important role and potential in generating social trust. Well-functioning and fair state institutions, equality, welfare state, absence of corruption and high-quality education are key factors for a high level of social trust. Unwillingness and inability to see the value of diversity persists as a challenge in large parts of private and public sector. The traditional way of thinking of “others” as not the “main” people should be challenged. It is necessary to raise awareness about the value of and interrelation between social trust- diversity management – education.

Presentations: <https://ej.uz/HumusaKomanda>; <https://ej.uz/MissionPossible>; <https://ej.uz/SIFDiversityPromotion>; https://ej.uz/TRUST_KS; <https://ej.uz/TrustDiversityEducation>

IDENTITY BUILDING DEVELOPMENT



CHALLENGES FACING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Hosted by: Jennifer Croft, Deputy Head of Human Rights Department, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR)

The 57 OSCE participating States have affirmed the important role of human rights defenders and the need for their protection. We define a human rights defender as anyone who works for the promotion and protection of human rights, alone or together with others. The 2014 OSCE/ODIHR Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders [<https://www.osce.org/odihr/guidelines-on-the-protection-of-human-rights-defenders>] aim to support OSCE participating States in the implementation of their commitments related to human rights defenders.

To follow up on these Guidelines, in 2017 ODIHR published “The Responsibility of States”: Protection of Human Rights Defenders in the OSCE region, 2014–2016.” [<https://www.osce.org/odihr/341366>] This comprehensive report examines the challenges human rights defenders face throughout the OSCE region, including in the Baltic Sea region, and good practices for their protection. Challenges include politically motivated arrests, physical attacks, surveillance, stigmatization and smear campaigns. Women human rights defenders and those who defend the rights of marginalized groups such as LGBTI and migrants are particular targets. Threats to human rights defenders can come not only from the state but also from non-state actors such as private businesses.

It is the responsibility of the state to protect human rights defenders. Our report includes promising practices in this regard. Human rights defenders can also be proactive in their own protection, for example by keeping their safety and security skills up to date. Technology can pose a threat to human rights defenders but can also help them to do their work more effectively; this is a focus of some of our training programs [<https://www.osce.org/odihr/406772>] for human rights defenders.

IDENTITY BUILDING DEVELOPMENT



CLOSING DEBATE CHANGING IDENTITY OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY FROM MEMBERSHIP TO SAFE AND OPEN SPACE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Hosted by: Inese Vaivare, LAPAS director, CAL board member, Forus International board member, Place of event: Small Guild, Amatu street 5

The closing panel discussion of the event was an open-ended discussion challenging the status quo of civil society. There were various presentations on the following topics:

–**Shrinking Civic Space in Europe: Bringing Challenges or Change** by Vladimir Sestovic, European Civic Forum;

–**International Non-Governmental Organisations - Space for Europe-wide Innovations** by Rares Craiut, Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe;

–**Open Governance - Citizens as Leaders Not End Users** by Nadja Nickel, Democratic Society, Germany; Presentation: <https://ej.uz/OpenGovernanceCitizens>

–**Civic Participation in Digital Environments - New Opportunities and Challenges** by Agnese Dāvidsone, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences; Presentation: <https://ej.uz/InDigitalEnvironments>

–**How to Unlock the Social Innovation Potential of NGOs** by Madara Ūlande, civil society and social entrepreneurship eco-system expert; Presentation: <https://ej.uz/SocialInnovation>

–**On Superheroes and Superpowers - Redefining Magic in the 21st century** by Sergejus Muravjovas, Transparency International Lithuania.

Before the panel discussion, there were presentations from the panellists about their topics and fields of interest, for example, Nadja Nickel, Democratic Society, pointed out – that over the last couple of years, European citizens feel that their needs and feelings are not being heard, especially those of under-represented groups. There is a rise of political movements that claim to challenge liberal elites and speak for the 'ordinary person' – movements that can be loosely categorised as 'populist'. Many of these movements have undesirable tendencies and are spreading across different European countries, limiting civic spaces and challenging democratic institutions.

IDENTITY BUILDING DEVELOPMENT

In addition, we see international challenges, such as digital transformation or climate change, that cannot be addressed by a single actor. These international challenges impact citizen's lives and create fears about people's future.

Civil society can play a crucial role in bridging the gap between decision-makers and the people by involving citizens in decision processes they are affected by. Citizens, especially under-represented groups, can drive innovation and lead to new forms of addressing the challenges at hand. We as the Democratic Society are collaborating with civil society and policymakers to develop methods that include citizens in decision-making processes for more robust democracies. We believe that quality participation of citizens is key to address the challenges of our time.

The heated discussion picked up several important issues:

- involvement of young people in civil participation – are we just consumers of the processes and opportunities;
- what lessons can be learned from older generations in other countries – what failures did they face in their NGOs;
- we should not ignore the “elephant in the room” – authoritarianism, low trust in NGO sector, attacks on NGO sector by NGO sector;
- big question – what unites us in the region? Why we need this cooperation? What gaps it fills?
- we must define achievable goals;
- terrorism is used as an excuse to attack NGOs;
- NGOs are losing public support, lower engagement through “traditional” means;
- role of technologies in mobilization and also its failure;
- how to reduce fake citizen involvement;
- should NGOs be anonymous – is this an age of personalities;
- NGOs should be political – does neutrality really exists, there are more and more people on streets;
- what would push NGO sector to think different, to acquire new skills;
- who are “others” in NGO sector;
- how to deal with extremist violent groups;
- space of civil society is changing – do we notice and react, are we proactive;
- solidarity as a keyword;
- civic space is not a guarantee, we must safeguard it.

At the end, the debate put forward more questions than answers. We see that the external and internal environment of civil society is changing, generations and ways of working are changing. Sectors interrelate in new ways. There are supporters who were “enemies” before – in private sector and in government, but there are new “enemies” in the NGO sector itself. Do we react to the change or are we ahead of the curve? This is an answer that requires further investigation.

The participants agreed that much remains to be done at a regional level, sitting around the table and looking for answers that fit us – countries in Baltic Sea Region.

FINAL STATEMENT

XVII BALTIC SEA NGO FORUM "SECURITY, SUSTAINABILITY, IDENTITY THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN BUILDING TRUST, PARTNERSHIPS AND DEVELOPMENT" MAY 9-11, 2019, RIGA, LATVIA

The XVII Baltic Sea NGO Network Forum in Riga held under the auspices of the Latvian presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States brought together 160 representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), government institutions, media, the private sector and international bodies from 11 Baltic Sea Region countries and 9 other countries.

The Riga Forum served as an enabling transnational instrument to emphasize the strong role of civil society in the process of developing security, sustainability and identity of the Baltic Sea Region. It offered a unique learning space to build trust and partnerships in ten workshops hosted by eleven organizations from diverse sectors, provoked debate on the impact of value based citizen mobilization in governance processes, and opened a tense discussion on the changing identity of civil society itself.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States has commissioned a so-called Vision Group to develop proposals for the future of Baltic Sea Region cooperation beyond 2020. [<https://www.cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Vision-Group-Report.pdf>] The report delivered by the Vision Group sketches a vision for Baltic Sea cooperation and makes valuable recommendations but it considerably lacks a fundamental paradigm shift for ensuring successful implementation of the three long term priorities – Regional Identity, Sustainable & Prosperous Region and a Safe and Secure Region. [Decision by the Council of the Baltic Sea States on a review of the CBSS long term priorities adopted on 20 June 2014]

In order to support the vision of the Baltic Sea Region as a prominent player for promoting sustainable development at the global scale, civil society needs to be recognized as a back-bone for innovation, creativity and flourishing humanity instead of limiting its role to function as an information provider or to remain a mere object of political decisions made without citizen involvement.

By now most of the Baltic Sea countries have been widely known for their innovative practices, open governance and diligent work for promoting sustainable development on national, regional and global levels. Recent developments in several European national states with governments narrowing the democratic space and shrinking external environment have been alarming also for civil society in the region.

Considering the above-mentioned issues, the **joint outcomes and recommendations** from the Riga Forum emphasize the growing role of civil society as a change agent for social, economic and environmental sustainability, and the need to ensure a safe and enabling environment for its development:

FINAL STATEMENT

Security

Shrinking democratic space in the countries of Baltic Sea Region requires serious actions to be taken by international bodies such as CBSS as well as national governments:

- to create an enabling environment for civil society to have free and equal access to the decision-making processes at all levels;
- to ensure transparency and accountability of the governance processes;
- to safeguard democratic freedoms and justice;
- to separate sufficient resources for the capacity building of civil society;
- to respect and protect the independence of CSOs; and
- to implement specific measures that promote participation of youth, elderly people, women and girls, socially as well as economically vulnerable groups.

Sustainability

Only by building cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder partnerships and mutual value based trust at all levels, we can reach our goal of sustainable growth of the Baltic Sea Region.

We urge all partners for increased connectivity and

- to invest in building mutual support for a common vision of the region;
- to promote cross-border solidarity;
- to facilitate people-to-people contacts;
- to involve civil society in their actions as no development can be achieved without people-centred participation;
- to share their strategies and practices with civil society; and
- to increase the access to their services for youth, elderly people, women and girls as well as socially vulnerable groups.

Identity

Changing external and internal environment requires civil society to re-examine its role in the sustainable development, shape new forms of activism and root back to human development beyond the structures and formalism.

We encourage CSOs to be part of the defining new narrative of development by being open for change and

- to respect individual participation initiatives and mass mobilization actions in advocacy processes;
- to open space for social innovations and scale them;
- to mobilize public opinion instead of following a narrow professional agenda;
- to serve as a channel to articulate people needs from grassroots to international level;
- to assist self-organized groups in their advocacy efforts;
- to increase political influence for systemic change; and
- to become more transparent, accountable and inclusive for all groups of society.

Regional cooperation

We are convinced that the founding principles for the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) are still relevant and not less important under the current circumstances of tension in the region.

FINAL STATEMENT

Therefore, we wish CBSS:

- to play a stronger and more visible role in the global arena as well as in the region;
- to serve as a driving force behind political and economic stabilization and cooperation;
- to provide basic funding for the regional civil society and people-to-people cooperation;
- to focus more on urgent regional strategic matters including environment and sustainability;
- to ensure that the peoples of the region play a stronger role in the design of cooperation.

We also urge our governments to attach much more importance to cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region and CBSS.

We, the participants of the Riga Forum, representing civil society organizations from all over the Baltic Sea Region, consider ourselves as essential partners for the successful implementation of the sustainable development Agenda 2030. The new narrative of global development can be achieved only by full respect of civil society, human rights and democratic values.

AGENDA

BALTIC SEA REGION NGO FORUM 2019

MAY 9-11, 2019 | RIGA, LATVIA

DAY 1, MAY 9

Arrival of participants (13:00 - 16:00)

13:00 - 16:00 Warm-up debate: Value Based Citizen Mobilization for Change

Speakers: **Peter Varga**, Open Government Partnership, **Alija Turlaja**, Alliance of Riga Neighbourhood Communities and **Krzysztof Garski**, Mayor's Office in Gdansk (**Place of event:** NORDEN premises: Marijas street 13/3)

19:00 Opening reception and welcome to participants (**Place of event:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, K.Valdemara street 3).

SECURITY: BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY

DAY 2, MAY 10

Session I: Civil society at a glance (10.00 - 13.00)

Glocalisation: CSO engagement in the sustainable development locally, Hosted by: **Inese Vaivare**, Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation LAPAS (**Place of event:** LAPAS premises: Pils street 21)

How to get your message out, Hosted by: **Inga Springe**, The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism Re:Baltica (**Place of event:** Embassy of Sweden premises: A. Pumpura street 8)

Multistakeholder partnerships at local, national and international level, Hosted by: **Anita Selicka**, Latvian Rural Forum, (**Place of event:** NORDEN premises: Marijas street 13/3)

Tips and tricks for engaging and inclusive events, Hosted by: **Ieva Morica** and **Egita Prama**, DOTS (**Place of event:** PROVIDUS premises: Alberta street 13)

Citizens Mobilization, Hosted by: **Marta Lempart**, Strajk Kobiet Poland (Polish women's strike) (**Place of event:** Embassy of Finland premises: Kalpaka boulevard 1)

SUSTAINABILITY: BUILDING TRUST AND PARTNERSHIPS

Session II: Trust and Values (15:00 - 18:00)

Connecting citizens and decision-makers: best practices, Hosted by: **Iveta Kazoka**, Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS (**Place of event:** PROVIDUS premises: Alberta street 13)

Public and civic dialogue, Hosted by: **Jens William Grav** and **Ole Meldgaard**, Baltic Sea NGO Network, Denmark (**Place of event:** Goethe-Institut Riga premises: Torna street 1)

Sustainable lifestyle: practice cases by CSOs, Part 1: Food waste reduction: Global aspects and household practices, Part 2: Localizing practices for sustainable fashion: consumption and textile waste, Hosted by: **Zane Gailite** and **Dace Akule**, Green Liberty (World Wildlife Fund, Elizabetes street 8-4))

Sustainable development: NGOs and private sector - partners or enemies? Hosted by: **Linda Sedlere** and **Krista Grike**, CSR Latvia and SCHWENK Latvija (**Place of event:** LAPAS premises: Pils street 21)

Social Trust - Diversity - Courage - Education, Hosted by: **Agnese Cimдина**, The Royal Norwegian Embassy, (**Place of event:** Norwegian Ambassador's Residence at K.Barona street 7/9-6)

19:00 Cultural event (**Place of event:** Arts centre NOASS, AB dam-2)

DAY 3, MAY 11

IDENTITY: BUILDING DEVELOPMENT

Place of event: Small Guild, Amatu street 5 (9:30-13:00)

9:30 - 10:00 Registration and morning coffee

10:00 - 10:15 Building the bridges: Report on results of forum workshops and Presentation of Final Statement

10:15 - 10:30 Human rights defenders and challenges of a shifting landscape, Speaker: **Jennifer Croft**, Deputy Head of Human Rights Department, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR)

10:30 - 12:30 Panel discussion: Changing identity of the civil society: from membership to safe and open space for social innovations, Moderator: **Inese Vaivare**, LAPAS director, LPA board member, Forus International board member.

Speakers: **Vladimir Sestovic**, European Civic Forum, **Rares Craiut**, Board member of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, EYCY Secretary General, **Nadja Nickel**, Country Lead Germany, Democratic Society, **Agnese Davidsons**, PhD, assistant professor, researcher and the head of communication, media and governance studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA), **Madara Ulande**, Civil society and social entrepreneurship eco-system expert, **Sergejus Muravjovas**, executive director, Transparency International Lithuania

12.30 - 13.00 Closing and passing the torch of the Presidency

From 13:30 **Networking lunch**, (**Place of event:** Central Market, Gastronomical Pavilion, Negu street 7)

PARTNERSHIP

BALTIC SEA REGION NGO FORUM 2019

MAY 9-11, 2019 | RIGA, LATVIA

ORGANIZER



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SUPPORTER BY



Ministry of
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SPEAKERS



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