Asociace pro podporu demokracie a lidských práv
/ Association for Democracy Assistance and Human Rights

Multiplication of advocacy know-how in the V4 – inputs for discussion

1. **Shrinking spaces across the V4 states: state politics, policies, and NGO advocacy practices**

Across the V4 countries, shrinking space for the CSO sector has been one of the challenges accompanying democratic backsliding or illiberal turn in Central and Eastern Europe. Facing this challenge, it is important to re-emphasize the importance of civil society in the democratic process, and it has been more needed than ever to increase the resilience of the "civil" (as opposed to "uncivil") CSO sector via sharing knowledge of possible ways of enhancing the capacities of the CSOs in their advocacy activities towards national bodies, stakeholders, and donors, and cooperation in finding new ways thereof – also via advocacy cooperation and experience sharing at platform level.

- Which recent patterns, traits, or particular steps of restraining CSOs worth sharing might be found across the V4 countries?
- Which good (or bad) advocacy practices might be found across the V4 countries?
- Which ways of operation have been established across the V4 in relation to state representatives, or political stakeholders in general? Which ways of cooperation are (not) working and worth mentioning?
- Which models of state-CSO cooperation and established partnership may be found in the region, and what are their strengths and weaknesses?
- What impact has had CSO cooperation on platform(s) level, if any?
- Are there examples worth studying in how to deal with "uncivil" NGOs and anti-democratic grassroots?

2. **Bottom-up mobilization, campaigns, local authorities, and public trust: partnerships in the making?**

A related issue has been posed by a need of enhancing public trust towards the CSO sector as well as organizing constituencies across the V4 societies. With the increased willingness of citizens to participate in the public space on the local level, cooperation with local authorities might be of high importance in the future – also with regard to the involvement of other non-state actors in the development of participatory trends.

With regard to civic engagement, we should mention public campaigns related to basic civil rights, liberties, and rule of law, which have mobilized a relatively large change-seeking segment of the V4 societies, yet brought no significant political and policy changes. Despite the possible disappointments and considerations, whether to invest resources into these campaigns, these still might bring longer-lasting changes on various levels.

- What role have played public attitudes in the V4 CSOs' daily work? How have public attitudes towards CSOs changed over the past years? Are there examples when CSO actively shaped (or missed a chance to do so) public attitudes towards themselves?

- How have the trends in public participation changed over the past years? Which recent issues related to constituency-building could we have witnessed?
- Which public trust-deepening and public participation-enhancing strategies and practices adopted can we mention? Which takeaways can be drawn from these constituency-organizing strategies and practices?
- Which developing cooperation(s) on the local level(s) are to be mentioned? What are their potentials and lessons to be learned? What role might play the involvement of (non-state) actors other than CSOs in developing the participatory trends?
- What are the pros and cons of public campaigns? Are they a waste of time or a challenge worth enduring? Which kind of changes were brought by public campaigns or protests, if not political/policy?

3. Advocacy at the EU level - an opportunity yet to be fully used?

Advocacy on the European level might play an important role in the promotion of CSO causes and issues, especially when the advocacy on the national level has failed or has not much space left. The active participation of pan-European civil society, including from the V4, in the recent advocacy campaign concerning the Rights and Values Programme, gives an interesting example of how the EU institutions might be responsive and reacting to the public pressure. Hereby, noteworthy initiatives were made by elected V4 citizens' representatives. The field for CSO actions has yet to be fully explored.

- How have developed relations of the CSOs towards both, elected and unelected EU stakeholders in the past years?
- What ways of cooperation at the EU level have been (not) working? Which examples of cooperation(s) might be mentioned?
- Are there any opportunities for further development of regional EU-focused cooperation?
- How should EU (or international) advocacy opportunities be utilized without exacerbating attacks against a lack of domestic embeddedness and legitimacy?
- How to better fine-tune the relationship between the EU and European civil society? What are the missing links, opportunities, and limitations for a striving model of cooperation?

4. Role of resources in advocacy: resource scarcity or abundance?
a. Resource scarcity, cooperation with the business sector, and new ways of engagement

Vis-a-vis the ongoing covid-19 pandemic and prospective cuts in the public budgets (especially on the local authorities level) as well as in the face of the reduced willingness of the business sector to engage in support of activities that might be viewed as political and thus negatively or even as hostile by those in power, CSOs might need to find new partners and ways of (co)operation, focus on innovative ways of fundraising and constituency building.

- What ways of cooperation of the non-governmental sphere with the business sector are working? Which strategies and techniques have CSOs adopted to influence the business actors' involvement? What potential can be seen in coalition-building with regard to business involvement?
- In which ways has been the business sphere supporting the non-profit sector and its resilience? What are the limitations of such support?

- How have the ways of business and private donors' involvement changed during the pandemics? How can these be developed further?
- Which strategies have CSOs adopted to reach out to other stakeholders or donors in the face of lowering willingness to cooperate on the side of the business sector? To what extent is it a sustainable strategy?

b. **Role of resources and knowledge in advocacy: resource scarcity or resource abundance?**

Apart from financial and personal resources, an important resource which the CSOs might need mobilizing for their support – especially in the context of the present age, in which information is often used against the CSOs and their activities –, is that of *knowledge*. On this background, cooperation with actors who are able to use this resource on an expert and – as far as possible – impartial basis, is that with academia, think-tanks, but also with the private sector, which might further mobilize new actors and societal structures.
- Where can lie the potentials and limits of CSO-academia/think-tanks cooperation?
- Where do lie the potentials and limits of CSO knowledge-centered cooperation with the private sector?
- Which channels, topics, or practices can we find in the use of knowledge as a resource? Which platforms or existing projects can be mentioned?
- What are the possible outputs and outcomes of knowledge-centered cooperation across the sectors?

The goal of the V4 advocacy workshop is to share knowledge and both, best and worst practices in the above-mentioned as well as any related issues. Our aim is to create a pool of experts who would be able to discuss ongoing and upcoming issues as well as to join their efforts in facing challenges of the CSO sector in the next months and years.