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## TRIALOG Central Training “Financial Sustainability of National Platforms” Vienna - Austria, 24-26 February 2009

### Financial strategies of national platforms Minutes of the country presentations\*

*Please note that the Central Training participants were not giving official platforms positions, but personal perspectives of the situation in their countries.*

#### Hungary

The Hungarian platform (HAND) does not have an official financial sustainability strategy but there is a strategic planning period. The previous one was 2005-2008 but a new one will be elaborated this year for a financial sustainability strategy and a fundraising strategy. For now fundraising is ad hoc. The platform is applying for Calls for Proposals as a platform and its core activities are financed through projects. This year was not so successful, but previous successes have come from the Presidency Fund<sup>1</sup> and the Regional Partnership Programme<sup>2</sup>, which have both ended so it is not clear how this year will be for the platform. There is a lot of activity and quite a lot of stability until August/September but for the period after the platform is not secure. The platform would like to apply for core funding from the MFA, but this has not yet been done.

#### Latvia

The Latvian platform's (LAPAS) strategy was to have a long three-year EC project for activities and core funding from the government for other things. It has not been possible to get any governmental grant for core activities because there was only a little amount of money available and a lot of competition, plus the platform did not want to be in competition with its members. The EC money was applied for but not granted. It is also a challenge to get money for co-financing.

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\* Please note that these minutes are part of the Central Training documentation and do not include any TRIALOG analysis or opinion. For substantial analysis of the Central Training outcomes, please refer to the following TRIALOG report: The financial sustainability of national platforms in New Member States. Analysis & future perspectives. TRIALOG Central Training 2009 Vienna. April 2009, <http://www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/sustainability-NMS-NPs.pdf>. For further Central Training documents, please visit <http://www.trialog.or.at/start.asp?ID=195>

<sup>1</sup> The Presidency Fund has been established with financial support from the Irish and Dutch Governments, both of which held the Presidency of the European Union in 2004. Later, the German Government has contributed to the Fund as well. The fund began operating in 2005, for a 3 year period. It has been set up with the principal aim of building capacity of NMS NGOs to engage in the EU Development Policy Debate. <http://www.presidencyfund.org>

<sup>2</sup> The Regional Partnership Programme (RPP) was a cooperation project between the NGDO platforms from Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Slovenia and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of these five states. It was operational between 2005 and 2008. The overall goal of the RPP was to strengthen the capacities and the visibility of development cooperation in the states of Central Europe. It was a project of the Austrian EU-Platform, funded by Austrian Development Cooperation, the MFAs of the participating NMS and by NGO contribution. <http://www.regionalpartnership.at>

## Bulgaria

The platform (BPID) is currently considering possible sources of financing such as the MFA, the platform's membership fees, the EC and others. Members' projects related to ODA could contribute to the platform's funding. One project being applied for by a member is for the platform and so they should be able to assure funds through this, but there is a risk that different institutions will not work together and there will be no legal framework for financial support from ministries. The platform is trying to use the coordination between different ministries. They mostly rely on the MFA but also have links to companies in Bulgaria and Greece which could support joint development projects.

## Greece

The Greek platform is revitalising itself. A precondition is that a new constitution (which was just drafted) be applied and commitment be ensured by the members. A code of conduct should be in place. The members will share resources and the platform will be accountable to its members. The platform receives membership fees and in kind contributions from the members. The Greek MFA should support the platform within CONCORD. Regional cooperation like the FEST project<sup>3</sup> could be applied as part of the Euro-Mediterranean network and as well as conventional training and inviting specialists from abroad, they could produce manuals on development education with terms and basic information. The platform wants to make the most out of private donors, sponsors and Corporate Social Responsibility. There could be conventions, training, manuals, and awareness raising activities. The platform hosts students with internships. Another idea is mailing lists for small donations – as long as the platform is able to show what it contributes, this could work. The platform could also try to improve its visibility through the websites of its members. The main challenges for the platform are commitment from the members and support from the MFA.

## Poland

There will be a new financial strategy soon as the platform (Grupa Zagranica) is in the process of reassessment and planning. The platform wants to rely on its expanding number of activities to attract stronger involvement of its members and get additional funding that could cover administration costs. There is a lot of competition from private companies in the training market but the platform has something to offer. They are also thinking about increasing the number of members to increase financial and in kind support.

## Lithuania

MFA support is possible for a few projects and some has been promised for the platform for coordination and office costs and supplies. More money is available for activities but each organisation has to go through the application process. The platform's membership fee is less than 100 EUR and the only possibility for project funding is to participate in different calls and compete with member organisations.

## Romania

In Romania, the platform (FOND) recognises the current crisis and wants to use it as an opportunity. They must use the experience of the last 18 years when the government treated the NGO sector as enemies. Internal capacity building is focusing on trying to find strength in numbers (more members) and flexible membership rules are used to get fees and in kind contributions. Fees should not be an obstacle to becoming a member. The platform is also using what is available from private foundations as support. Soros is still in Romania and has just launched a Call for Proposals in the foreign policy field. FOND is putting pressure on the government to support the platform in its budget. They are also researching funding sources and possible partnerships and trying to create projects that fit with more than one donor's specifications in order not to depend on one donor. Personal relations could be used to

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<sup>3</sup> The FEST-Project "Together for Development" was an EC funded regional development education programme between NGOs from Finland, Estonia and Sweden. It was a 3-year project, from 2006-2009. <http://www.fest-project.org>

approach companies. The particular challenges the platform faces are that they have no financial buffer, and they are starting from scratch. There is a lack of initiative for all these efforts and they are forced to rely on immediate support.

### Cyprus

Since the island-wide Cypriot platform (CYINDEP) only started recently, they have not started thinking about a financial strategy, but flexible fees for the members seems to be a reasonable basis. Potential members are poor so the platform will take in-kind contributions. Setting up a donation scheme online is a possibility, and approaching private donors is a very interesting challenge. Lawyers might donate to lobby for changes to the law. CONCORD information will feed back into the platform. The platform could give in-kind contributions to CONCORD. Other sources also will be researched and replicating something like the FEST project<sup>3</sup> is a great idea – the southern Mediterranean region would be possible for this kind of project. Government support is lacking but the platform will be approaching the government for direct funding and will ask the Irish platform Dochas for a support letter.

### Malta

The platform (SKOP) has not had a financial strategy until now, but the proposal will be put forward following the Central Training meeting. A multiannual strategy seems appropriate as one of the challenges is the financial crisis. The platform will have to ask for substantial financial contributions from the MFA and make sure it is unconditional support. A fundraising model with major private donors can be investigated, although there are problems in Malta with private donors since traditionally they rather donate to the church than to development organisations. The platform expects a gradual increase in membership fees but some members will have problems with that. It is an interesting proposal to accept in kind contributions and to introduce a proportional fee system where members who can contribute more, pay more. Employing more staff would be great because it would improve the work of the platform, which would then attract more funds. Once the platform is stronger, it could sell products and events – selling seminars for example to generate some income. There is a focus on the Mediterranean (like Cyprus and Greece, but also Spain, Portugal, Italy). It would be a fruitful thing to have something like the Regional Partnership Programme for these countries. There is also interest in the Italian system of donating a proportion of income tax to charity or the church (1% in Poland, Romania and Hungary, 2% in Lithuania).

### Estonia

The Estonian platform (AKÜ) has a five-year strategy and a one-year action plan, and is currently searching for funds for this action plan. The financial strategy includes trying to maintain direct grants from the MFA and support from inter/national foundations. The main challenge is that the platform does not charge membership fees but will introduce them as soon as they feel they have something to offer their members. The platform is in the process of putting together a service package for companies and members. They need to move from annual funding to three year or longer grants (e.g. from EC). With the service package, the platform is trying to create a buffer as they currently have no savings.

### Slovenia

The Slovenian platform's (SLOGA) strategy is to strengthen membership so that members really feel part of the NGDO sector. This will go through the development of services the platform will be able to offer to the members, the supporters and other stakeholders. This is to make more organisations feel committed to SLOGA. If members are committed the platform can reach more people and show different governmental bodies that they need to support CSOs. The platform has submitted applications in different areas, with SLOGA as associated applicant. The MFA is already nearly convinced to provide core funding, but there is a lot of space where work is needed (ODA goes through 13 ministries) and the Minister of Development is not the only one with whom the platform has to communicate. The board and staff are opposed to making funding conditional on success of consortium projects and it should be shown that the platform is worthy of this funding in itself. The platform is also

speaking to the European Social Fund for actions within Slovenia. Other potential ways of strengthening the platform could be investigated, for example unemployed fundraising experts from other sectors could be employed for reasonable fees.

### Slovakia

The Slovakian platform (MVRO) has been lobbying for core-funding from the MFA for 4 years, but the MFA considers only project competition as transparent, not other grants. Despite this, the platform received money from the MFA to cover the CONCORD membership fee. The platform has an EC project application and will look for other donors to ensure core funding, the focus will be on a new regional partnership programme and other governments. They hope to convince governments to put money into projects. The platform will start having symbolic fees for seminars and events as people value things they have to pay for more than those that are free. In kind contributions will be taken into consideration (e.g. for office space), membership fees will increase as they have not for 3 years, but they depend on the financial turnover of the NGOs and so are considered quite fair. The platform has to show the members what it does for them (in advocacy and other areas), so they better understand the platform's role. For example, members do see the competition for development education projects, but they do not see that it was the platform that lobbied for this budget line in the first place.