

# NGO Cooperation: Bulgaria and Romania in the spotlight

*A year after EU accession, the Bulgarian and Romanian networks of development NGOs (NGDOs) report on their past and future challenges and activities.*

## THE BULGARIAN NGDO

### PLATFORM: CHALLENGES AND LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

The process of establishing the Bulgarian NGDO platform started in fall 2005. The first appearance of the platform as a visible group of NGOs working for development was in March 2006 when TRIALOG organized a seminar and a conference in Sofia. More than 30 organizations attended as well as governmental representatives responsible for the Bulgarian Official Development Assistance (ODA) policy. Since then, the platform has been active in two main directions: work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the development of an ODA policy and strategy, and work on strengthening the platform itself.

### STRUCTURE AND MISSION

The Bulgarian platform is an informal network of NGDOs. It currently has two coordinators, one from the CEGA Foundation and one from the ECIP Foundation. Two major documents were adopted by the platform members: the Mission and the Code of Conduct.

The mission of the Bulgarian platform is to support sustainable development abroad through civil society engagement and through cooperation with the institutions involved in promoting solidarity and effective development aid policies.

### MEMBERS AND ACTIVITIES

The platform represents 33 NGOs which are involved in training, capacity building and exchange of experience on development issues; which participate in events, study visits and working groups in the framework of TRIALOG and the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD). The Bulgarian platform has also received capacity building support from experienced platforms in other EU countries, especially from the Polish platform "Zagranica Group". In the last two years it has made important steps towards becoming a reliable partner of state institutions. This appears to be proven by the fact that a platform representative was invited to give a speech during a national debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Bulgarian Parliament.

### CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

The main priority for the future is to move further in the direction of influencing policy making and of advocating for both transparency and appropriate allocation of Bulgarian development aid. A big challenge facing the platform is that many donors left the country after the EU accession and smaller NGOs experience difficulties in accessing the new EU funds. The state is not ready to support the platform, and the members themselves lack the financial capacity to secure its stability. However, the NGDOs see their role as achieving increased awareness within Bulgarian society of ODA issues and of the needs of developing countries. The platform will remain open to partnerships with other NGDO platforms and to exchanges of experience in order to enhance its ability to transform accumulated knowledge into working practices.

*Yvonne Kojuharova, cega@cega.bg  
Ognyan Drumev, o.drumev@ecip-bg.org  
Coordinators Bulgarian NGDO platform*

### CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE: ROMANIA AS A DONOR COUNTRY

*After almost one year of being part of the EU, Romania is struggling to come out of the transition period from a beneficiary to a donor country. For the time being, it continues to be both.*

The process of forming FOND, the Romanian NGDO platform, started in 2005. It was not an easy task, but with sustained efforts from TRIALOG, a favourable context was created for the Romanian NGOs interested in working in the development cooperation field. The results of these efforts were the creation of a coherent and stable structure, FOND, which was legally registered in March 2007, and closer relations with European NGDO networks and platforms.

FOND's main objective is the responsible and effective involvement of Romanian civil society and government in international development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

### MEMBERS AND ACTIVITIES

Most of the 34 member NGOs are interested in the following sectors: develop-

ment education, education and professional training, health, democracy and good governance (including human rights and child protection) with a focus on neighbouring countries (Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine).

In 2007, with support from its members and TRIALOG, FOND co-organized a series of events including: two seminars on the opportunities and challenges for civil society in Romanian development cooperation with the priority countries Moldova and Georgia, a seminar on EU Funding and Partnership Opportunities for NGOs, and a debate on Romania's Contribution to the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). FOND took part in the European Development Days in Lisbon and hosted the EPAN WG meeting (see page 2). An important activity the platform is working on now is a future nationwide awareness raising campaign for the general public.

### COOPERATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT

The relationship with the government is extremely cooperative; FOND is affirmed as a major partner and consultant for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in the national development cooperation strategy. One of the FOND working groups is the Roundtable with the MFA, and regular meetings are held between FOND and state representatives.

### LESSONS LEARNT

The Romanian NGOs have learnt that the transition to their new role will be possible only if they can capitalize their expertise and transfer what they have experienced as aid beneficiaries to the status of fully capable development cooperation actors that are fighting to achieve the responsibilities Romania has assumed as a new EU country.



*Claudia Iatan  
Coordinator*

*Romanian NGDO platform FOND  
claudia.itan@fond-romania.ro  
www.fondromania.wordpress.com*