

POLICY BRIEF

STRENGTHENING JOINT ACTION OF THE GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SECTOR

in the EU pre-accession process of BiH



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context and challenges

Bosnia and Herzegovina is at a crucial juncture in the European integration process, having received candidate status and the green light to open negotiations (2024). However, numerous challenges remain: low public trust in institutions, weak mechanisms for involving civil society (CSOs) in policymaking, a fragmented and insufficiently professionalized civil sector, and bureaucratic obstacles and limited access to processes.

Purpose and objective of the Policy Brief

It should be emphasized that a Policy Brief is a short, clear and informative document that explains a specific social or political problem, proposes concrete solutions or recommendations and targets decision-makers, public administration, civil society and/or the general public. Its implementation contributes to the adoption or change of policies, laws or procedures.

This Policy Brief (BP) document **aims to** encourage authorities and CSOs to establish a functional, inclusive and sustainable model of cooperation, based on partnership, transparency and professionalization, which is prerequisite for successful EU integration.

Key strategic recommendations for achieving the objective of this Policy Brief:

1. Institutionalization of CSOs in EU processes – formal mechanisms of inclusion in negotiations and legislation.
2. Coordination and communication – forming a new (or creating preconditions for a more efficient and systematically organized work of the existing joint coordination body and regular consultations.
3. Mapping and professionalization – database of active CSOs and system of thematic self-delegation.
4. Financial sustainability – establishing a fund for CSOs, grants and technical support.
5. Inclusiveness and deregulation – revision of registration procedures, inclusion of diaspora and marginalized groups.
6. Transparency – public nominations and criteria for selecting representatives.
7. Monitoring and evaluation – a monitoring system and annual evaluation of the effects of cooperation.

In addition to key strategic recommendations, **models of good practice examples from the region and beyond are also listed**, which can be a good guiding idea for application in BiH, with adequate adaptation to the country's context.

The development of CSOs for the efficient implementation of the objective - the path from chaos to an orderly system - the proposed model for the development of the CSO sector - includes six phases: mapping, digitalization, education, networking, monitoring and evaluation, and requires political will, the engagement of all stakeholders and stable support. **A framework Action Plan 2025-2027 is provided**, which contains specific measures, stakeholders, deadlines and indicators - from establishing funds, through education, to developing a legislative framework.

Conclusion

A democratic, partnership-based and transparent relationship between institutions and CSOs is crucial for progress towards EU membership. Professionalization, trust and institutional involvement of the civil sector contribute to better public administration and reforms in the interest of improving the quality of life of all citizens of BiH. Unfortunately, the relations between the governmental and civil sectors are not at partnership level and it must be improved to adequately support democratic and EU integration processes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been trying to meet the requirements for membership in the European Union for more than two decades. It received candidate status at the end of 2022, and in March 2024, the opening of negotiations was approved, subject to the fulfilment of reform obligations. The process during the pre-accession period took place with varying intensity, from euphoria to lethargy, and is currently very slow and difficult due to various internal and external factors. Due to the long-standing complex situation in the country, citizens' trust in political institutions is low, and mechanisms for participation and dialogue between citizens, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the authorities, although they exist formally, almost do not function in practice. Despite this, the EU remains a strong partner and emphasizes the importance of an inclusive political environment, in which ***civil society should play a partner role in policymaking***. In BiH, CSOs are mainly organized as associations and foundations. However, the space for their action is increasingly limited by a number of challenges, and even repressive laws and institutional procedures.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SECTORS IN BIH IN THE EU PRE-ACCESSION PROCESS (ANALYSIS)

2.1 Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has a developed but fragmented civil sector with more than 27,000 registered civil society organizations (CSOs), that faces a number of challenges. In the EU integration process, the role of CSOs remains marginalized, despite the formally existing normative framework. This analysis is based on key findings and recommendations from various sources, as well as on data on challenges and recommendations for action reported by CSOs from BiH and the region, who participated in interviews for the preparation of this document, focused on improving the joint participation of the government and civil society sectors in the EU pre-accession process. We considered this approach necessary to base this *Policy Brief on current facts about the situation in BiH*.

2.2 Normative framework and CSO participation

BiH has ratified international documents on civil society participation (e.g., the Aarhus Convention) and adopted formal rules of consultation. However, in practice, cooperation with CSOs is often reduced to formalities, and the lack of institutional support and capacity development further hinders equal participation.

Analysis recommendations for improvement in this area:

- Establish permanent advisory bodies with CSO representatives;
- Create a unified platform for information on legislative processes;
- Combine consultation methods (public sessions, expert seminars);
- Ensure systemic financing and strengthen partnership relationships.

2.3. Citizen participation in decision-making

Participatory mechanisms exist, but they differ by entity and are generally underutilized. The Federation of BiH and Sarajevo Canton use multiple models (councils, forums, referendums), while in the Republika Srpska the mechanisms are more centralized. The Brčko District has a less developed normative framework.

2.3.1 Participation at the local level:

Citizen participation at the local level is most pronounced, but also limited to spatial planning and often comes too late.

Analysis recommendations for improvement in the area:

- Early involvement of citizens in decision-making processes;
- Develop a participatory culture through education and local media;
- Strengthen the capacities of local communities and inclusion of marginalized groups.

2.4. Citizen initiatives and referendum

This area is defined differently in different parts of BiH. RS has a law that allows for initiatives and referendums at all levels. FBiH does not, and legal mechanisms exist only at the municipal level. **The Aarhus Center** has proposed a law that regulates procedures and protects activists.

2.5. E-consultations

The E-consultations platform (2017) has not been sufficiently promoted and used. RS uses *eSrpska*, and FBiH is developing *E-Government and JavnaRasprava.ba*, which is a good example of open online participation.

Problems:

- Weak technical support and low visibility;
- Out of 174 proposals – only 9 accepted;

Analysis recommendations for improvement in this area:

- Promote digital platform(s);
- Automate and organize communication with CSOs;
- Strengthen the technical capacities of local authorities.

2.6. Deliberative models

Models of deliberative democracy (e.g. citizens' assemblies) can enhance trust in institutions and contribute to inclusive decision-making. These models are particularly important for EU integration.

Analysis recommendations for improvement in this area:

- Introduce civic forums at the local level;
- Use digital tools for wider inclusion;
- Link conclusions to formal government decisions;
- Introduce deliberative methods into the educational system.

2.7 Key challenges facing the civil sector in BiH

Challenges identified in the Analysis include:

- Weak coordination within the CSO sector;
- Limited implementation of the 2017 Cooperation Agreement;
- Lack of trust and effective communication with institutions;
- Independent, stable and transparent financing of CSOs;
- Low level of knowledge about EU integration and thematic participation.

2.8. The role of the international community and donors in the development of civil society in BiH

After the end of the war in 1995, the international community played a key role in the reconstruction and stabilization of Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of the most important aspects of this engagement was supporting the development of civil society as a foundation for democratization, peacebuilding, the promotion of human rights, and strengthening institutional transparency and accountability.

Financial and technical support

International donors - including EU, USAID, UN agencies, OSCE, SIDA, GIZ and others bilateral and multilateral actors – have invested significant resources in strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) through:

- Direct financing of projects and initiatives;
- Building CSO institutional capacities;
- Connecting CSOs with regional and European networks;
- Encouraging dialogue and partnerships between civil society and public institutions.

Advocacy and normative framework

Donors often also play an advocacy role, encouraging the BiH authorities to develop a legislative and strategic framework for the free and sustainable operation of the civil sector. Through dialogue with the authorities, they participated in the formulation of: the Law on Associations and Foundations, the Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society, and Mechanisms for transparent financing of CSOs from public funds.

Transformation of the role of donors over time

Over the past decade, the role of the international community has gradually changed. The focus has increasingly shifted from direct implementation to empowering local actors to take the lead in developing democratic processes. There has also been increasing pressure on the sustainability of civil society, including the need to diversify funding sources, engage the private sector, and create a more enabling domestic environment.

Challenges and needs

- Dependence on foreign donations and insufficient support from domestic sources;
- Limited space for civic activism, especially in smaller communities;
- Weak institutional cooperation between authorities and CSOs;
- Occasional campaigns to discredit the civil sector in public discourse.

a strategic partnership for creating a sustainable, autonomous and influential civil sector, which can be an equal partner to government institutions in the process of European integration and the overall development of the country.

2.9. Strategic recommendations of the Analysis for strengthening the position of the civil sector in joint participation

a. Strengthening coordination in the civil sector

- Formation of thematic networks and digital platforms;
- Knowledge exchange through a mentoring approach.

b. Development of partnerships with institutions

- Implementation of the 2017 Agreement;
- Implementation of relevant strategic documents;
- Establishing advisory bodies and communication channels;
- Implementation of innovative methods of joint participation or improvement of existing ones.

c. Independent and stable financing

- Introduction of combined financing models;
- Transparent and stable budget lines.

d. Education and capacity building

- Ongoing education on EU integration;
- Strengthening internal capacities and project management.

e. Joint strategic planning

- Developing and ensuring conditions for the implementation of sector strategies;
- Mapping needs and resources;
- Follow examples from the region, especially Montenegro.

f. Establishing an efficient monitoring and evaluation model

2.9.1. Watchdog role of civil society

In part 2.9. Strategic recommendations of the Analysis for strengthening the joint participation position of the civil sector, under b. Development of partnerships with institutions - the point is stated as follows: Implementation of innovative methods of joint participation or improvement of existing ones. In addition to a number of other methods and roles, it is necessary to specifically mention the Watchdog approach, which is not new, but is not discussed enough or effectively implemented in practice. In the context of CSOs, watchdog role means monitoring the work of institutions in order to point out abuses, corruption and irregularities. In this role, CSOs promote transparency, accountability and protect citizens' rights, acting as a form of civic oversight. The most common areas of activity

and methods of **Watchdog** civil society organizations, which are effectively applied in practice, are listed in the table below:

Table 1: Examples of Watchdog methods in the Western Balkan countries¹ for different thematic areas

Country	Organization / Initiative	Watchdog method type	Description/Activities
Bosnia and Herzegovina	CIN (Center for Investigative Reporting)	Investigative journalism	Research into corruption, organized crime, databases, media releases
Bosnia and Herzegovina	BIRN BiH	Trial monitoring and media reporting	Follows war crimes trials, TV and radio programs, public education
Croatia	GONG	Election supervision and monitoring of public policies	Election observation, voter education, transparency advocacy
Kosovo	The Cohu Movement	Anti-corruption watchdog and legal analysis	Monitors government work, tenders, legislative processes, publishes reports
Serbia	CRTA/Open Parliament	Monitoring the work of parliament and legislation	Open data on MPs' work, amendments, voting
Serbia	Kontrolor.rs/Network for political responsibility	Monitoring public spending and government accountability	Visualization of data on public spending
Serbia	Perun	Alarm mechanism	Platform for reporting irregularities and publishing them
Montenegro	MANS	Monitoring politicians' assets and corruption	Publishes analyses of public officials' assets, reports of corruption
North Macedonia	Report Corruption (civic-tech)	Digital tool for reporting corruption	Online platform (Ushahidi) for reporting cases
Regional	BVMN (Border Violence Monitoring Network)	Documenting police violence against migrants	Photo and video evidence, reports, advocacy before the EU
Regional	Integrity Watch – TI Network	Monitoring political transparency	Monitoring of political party financing, conflicts of interest
Regional	Gender Budget Watchdog Network (GBWN)	Gender-responsive budgeting and crisis monitoring	Gender analysis of public expenditures, reports, public campaigns

Conclusion

Watchdogs can play a key role in the complex BiH structure, as it ensures oversight of the work of the government, increasing transparency and accountability in a society burdened by corruption and ethnic divisions. Its role is especially important for strengthening

¹ “Regional ” includes several Western Balkan countries (e.g. GBWN includes BiH, Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia).

democracy and protecting citizens' rights in an environment with weak institutions and citizens who do not actively participate in the control of the government. Knowledge, courage, public support and perseverance are needed for this role to be effective.

2.10. Conclusion of the Analysis and recommendations for strengthening the position of the civil sector in joint participation with the public sector in the EU accession process

Although a formal framework for participation exists, substantive cooperation between the government and the civil society is still limited. It is necessary to work on building mutual trust, strengthen institutional mechanisms, raise the capacities of stakeholders and develop a participatory culture as the basis for a successful EU integration process in BiH.² This policy brief, based on the Analysis, provides concrete and actionable recommendations that can help the government better understand the needs and attitudes of civil society and vice versa. This strengthens dialogue and cooperation between institutions and citizens, which increases mutual trust. Such an approach directly contributes to the fulfilment of EU standards on good governance and participation, speeding up the accession process.

3. PURPOSE, OBJECTIVE AND VISION OF THIS POLICY BRIEF

This Policy Brief seeks to encourage the BiH authorities to consistently apply existing mechanisms and legal frameworks for consultations with the civil sector, but also to motivate CSOs to greater expertise, thematic specialization and coordination, within and outside civil society, in order to contribute to progress towards EU membership.

Purpose: To provide concrete recommendations for strengthening the partnership between the civil and government sectors in the EU integration process through encouraging the creation of a functional model of cooperation that will increase democratic legitimacy, the quality of public policies and citizens' trust in institutions.

Vision: BiH functions as a democratic and participatory society in which the civil sector plays an active, equal and constructive role in creating public policies and reforms in line with European values and standards, contributing to a transparent, inclusive and efficient process of accession to the European Union.

The aim of this Policy Brief is to offer concrete recommendations for establishing a functional, inclusive and sustainable partnership between civil society organizations and government institutions in BiH, in the context of the EU accession process, with a focus on:

- strengthening mutual trust and institutional cooperation;
- improving participatory mechanisms in public policy making;

² Detailed information on the findings is provided in the document *Analysis of the Current Situation and Joint Participation of the Government and Civil Society Sectors in Bi and the Region in the EU Integration Process*, Dr. Anita Šimundža, 2025.

- professionalization and empowerment of the civil sector for proactive participation in EU integration;
- improving the normative and operational framework that enables efficient and transparent participation of civil society in reform and decision-making processes.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MEASURES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY BRIEF

The draft version of Analysis and a public discussion on it were used to prepare this Policy Brief. Unified **recommendations and measures** for action to be implemented in order to realize **the goal and purpose** of the Policy Brief were defined based on all the elements above. The objective, purpose, and vision can be achieved by implementing the defined process, over time and step by step. Recommendations and measures are grouped by key areas of intervention:

Recommendation 1. Institutionalize CSO participation in EU integration

Measure 1.1: Establish a formal mechanism for including CSOs in negotiating structures

- Include CSO representatives as equal members in thematic working groups, economic and social forums, as well as other relevant bodies in a designated time period.
- Introduce the obligation of consultations with CSOs in all phases of the negotiation process (screening, defining positions in a particular process, monitoring), as well as the obligation of integration.

Recommendation 2. Strengthen coordination and cross-sectoral communication

Measure 2.1: Establish an efficient Coordination Body for cooperation between institutions and CSOs

- This body would serve as a contact point, logistical support and source of information on EU integration processes;
- It can be organized within the Directorate for European Integration or as an independent unit with the participation of both CSOs and authorities.

Measure 2.2: Develop mechanisms for exchange and feedback between institutions and CSOs

- Introduce regular consultations and publication of reports on CSO participation;
- Ensure two-way communication, as well as documented consideration of CSO recommendations.

Recommendation 3. Mapping and professionalization of the civil sector

Measure 3.1: Develop a functional and interactive database of active CSOs.

- The database should contain:
 - Area of operation;
 - Thematic expertise;
 - Regions of operation;
 - Contact person responsible;

- References.
- The database should be public, interactive and updated, with the possibility of registration and verification.

Measure 3.2: Establish a system of self-delegation of CSO representatives by thematic areas

- Provide conditions for the civil sector to form thematic coalitions or networks that themselves elect representatives through a public call and nomination from within the sector;
- Delegated representatives must meet defined criteria of expertise, experience and receive support from the thematic sector that delegates the representatives.

Recommendation 4. Improving the capacity of civil society

Measure 4.1: Ensure support for competent participation of CSOs in EU processes

- Award dedicated grants for participation in working groups, research, public information, etc.;
- Provide technical assistance (training, legal and professional support, translation of documentation).

Measure 4.2: Establish a fund for support and co-financing of CSOs for participation in the pre-accession process

- The Fund may be supported by funds from various sources (IPA funds, international donors, the BiH budget and other sources);
- Priority should be given equally to smaller and local organizations, as well as organizations operating in sensitive areas (human rights, minorities, judiciary).

Recommendation 5. Reducing bureaucratic barriers to inclusiveness

Measure 5.1: Revise procedures for CSO registration and access to information

- Map and remove unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles to registration and application for public calls;
- Provide easier access to information and documents relevant to EU processes.

Measure 5.2: Inclusively involve diaspora, marginalized and local CSOs

- Create special channels for diaspora and CSOs from smaller communities;
- Ensure linguistic (use simple and universally understandable terminology) and technical accessibility for all (e.g. people with disabilities, national minorities).

Recommendation 6. Transparency and legitimacy

Measure 6.1: Develop transparent criteria for the selection of CSOs for participation in the completed processes

- Criteria include:
 - Thematic expertise;
 - Activities in the last 3–5 years;
 - Geographical representation;
 - Sectoral support and recommendations.

Measure 6.2: Public nominations and publication of results of representative elections

- All nominations and elections of representatives must be public and documented, with the possibility of appeal.

Recommendation 7. Monitoring and evaluation

Measure 7.1: Establish a mechanism for monitoring the participation of CSOs in EU integration

- Regular reports and evaluations on:
 - Participation of CSOs;
 - Implementation of recommendations;
 - Participant satisfaction.
- They can be made by independent evaluators or joint teams of CSOs and authorities.

4.1 From recommendations to changes: models, plan and practice

Examples are given in the section of the document that follows **efficient models** from the region and **recommendations** on how to prepare for the successful implementation of selected models for improving relations between the government and civil society in practice. In addition, in point 6 of this document, entitled **Framework Action Plan for the Implementation of the Policy Brief** (from 2025–2027), defines a detailed strategic approach for the implementation of the above recommendations, which defines: results and activities, responsible parties, partners, deadlines for the implementation of the results, as well as indicators of success. In point **6.1 Linking the achieved results defined in the Action Plan with the defined Recommendations and measures for the implementation of the Policy Brief**, defines which results have the greatest impact on the implementation of which Recommendations, and point **6.2 Implementation in practice of the Framework Action Plan for the implementation of the Policy Brief**, provides inputs for successful action in practice during the implementation of the Action Plan. This defines: (1) what needs to be done, (2) which successful models from regional practice need to be implemented, (3) a strategic plan for implementation, (4) linking recommendations and results, and (5) how to implement all of this in practice. This completes the process that, if successfully implemented, can result in the successful implementation of *the Policy Brief*, significant changes in relations, and acceleration of the EU accession process.

5. INNOVATIVE MODELS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DEFINED RECOMMENDATIONS AND MEASURES

Table 2: Examples from countries in the region and beyond of innovative models that can improve the cooperation process in BiH, with adequate adaptation to the BiH context

Subject area	Measure	Model	Country/example	Key features	Applicable in BiH
1. Institutionalization of CSOs in the EU integration process	1.1 and 1.2	Civil Society consultative convention	Serbia	Thematic groups by chapter, CSOs elect representatives, regular communication with the state	Yes – with adaptation to the entity structure
	1.1	Joint working bodies	Slovenia	Joint <i>policy design groups</i> , not just consultations	Yes – for priority reforms
2. Coordination and communication	2.1	Digital Coordination Center	Estonia	Online platform for information, applications and communication between CSOs and the government	Yes – as a DEI e-platform
	2.2	Civilian portal for EU integration	Montenegro	Portal with all information, documents and minutes	Yes – integrated into web DEI
3. Mapping and professionalization	3.1	Interactive CSO database	Mostar, B&H(local)	Database with CSO profiles, topics, regions and contacts	Yes – expand to the state level
	3.2	Thematic networks with accreditation	Croatia	CSO networks by topic, accredited sector representatives	Yes – for chapters and sectors
4. Capacity building	4.1	Participation grants	Albania (TACSO)	Small grant schemes for participation in dialogue, research and campaigns	Yes - financed from IPA funds
	4.2	"Sector-plus" fund	North Macedonia	Special fund for CSOs in EU integration, managed jointly	Yes – in partnership with donors
5. Bureaucracy and inclusivity	5.1	One-stop-shop registration	Lithuania	Digital registration of CSOs in 48 hours	Yes – through eGovernment
	5.2	Mobile CSO support units	Kosovo	Field teams to support local CSOs	Yes – through CSO networks and support from the DEI
6. Transparency and legitimacy	6.1	Public nomination platform	Slovakia	Online nominations and candidate biographies available to the public	Yes - for all public calls
	6.2	Independent verification body	Romania	Verification of candidates through a non-political body	Yes – in collaboration with the academic community
7. Monitoring and evaluation	7.1	Scorecard evaluation	TACSO (region)	CSOs and institutions jointly assess the quality of cooperation	Yes – by process stages
	7.1	Open reporting system	Greece	Public database of recommendations and responses from the authorities	Yes – via the DEI portal

5.1 How to prepare for the successful implementation of selected models for improving relations between the government and civil society in practice - the path from disorder to order

To establish substantive, not just formal, cooperation, it is necessary to build a reliable and legitimate model that strengthens democratic processes and improves the efficiency of both sectors. When it comes to the civil sector, much more needs to be done to ensure that this sector is properly organized and can operate efficiently and competently in certain thematic areas related to EU accession. Given the large number of CSOs in BiH (more than 27,000 registered), which differ significantly in capacity, thematic areas and locations of operation, the recommended model for improving the situation in practice could be **the Hybrid Model of Institutional Development of Civil Society and Coordination**, through the following phases:

Phase 1: Audit of the registry and mapping of active CSOs with the aim of obtaining a clear picture of who is actually operating, where and in what areas.

Phase 2: Functional segmentation of the sector with the aim of categorizing CSOs according to capacities, areas of activity and geographical location.

Phase 3: Establishment of a digital platform "OCD HUB BiH" with the aim of creating a centralized online platform for the exchange of information and resources.

Phase 4: Training and standardization aimed at building civil society capacity for transparency, governance and public accountability.

Phase 5: Introduction of a civic index and sectoral evaluations³ with the aim of developing benchmarks for assessing the impact and quality of CSO work.

Phase 6: Networking and mentoring with the aim of strengthening mutual cooperation and building a system of mutual support within the sector.

This model is called **Hybrid**, because it combines **institutional approaches, different actors and mechanisms of management and coordination for the purpose of civil society development**. This model does not belong exclusively to either the state or the civil sector, but functions as a partnership model between these sectors, relying on different sources of power, knowledge and resources. **Its successful implementation requires:** political will; involvement of key actors; partnership within the civil sector; a clear, phased vision of development and **ensures:** an essential, rather than formal, role of the civil sector in European integration; creation of a reliable and legitimate system of cooperation; strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the process; better information, coordination and efficiency of both sectors; possibility of implementing any selected innovative model; realization of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Policy brief.

³The Civil Index is a tool used to assess the state of civil society in a country. It was developed by the organization CIVICUS (an international network for strengthening civil society). Its purpose is to show the strengths and weaknesses of the civil sector and to help in its further development.

**6. FRAMEWORK ACTION PLAN FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY BRIEF
(from 2025–2027)**

ACTIVITY	CARRIER	PARTNERS	DEADLINE	SUCCESS INDICATOR
Result 1: Formal and functional mechanism for involving CSOs in the EU integration process established				
1.1. Develop a proposal for an institutional model for including CSOs in negotiating structures	Directorate for EU Integration	CSO networks, GIZ, EU Delegation (EUD)	Q4 2025	Model proposal prepared
1.2. Adopt a regulation on the inclusion of CSOs in the EU integration process	Council of Ministers	Directorate for EU Integration	Q2 2026	Act published in the Official Gazette
Result 2: Civil society capacities for participation in EU processes strengthened and functional				
2.1. Establish a special fund to support CSOs in EU integration	Ministry of Finance and Treasury	EUD, donors	Q1 2026	Fund operational
2.2. Organize training cycles for CSOs on the topic of EU negotiations and public policies	Directorate for EU Integration	CSO platforms, academic community	Q4 2026	A minimum of 200 participants in education
Result 3: Transparent and legitimate system of delegation of civil sector representatives ensured				
3.1. Develop criteria for selecting CSO representatives in working groups	CSO coalitions	DEI	Q1 2026	Published criteria
3.2. Launch public calls for nominations of CSO representatives	CSO networks	DEI	Q2 2026	Conducted invitations and election of representatives
Result 4: Functional database on CSOs in BiH established				
4.1. Develop an online platform with a base of active CSOs	Directorate for e-Government/CSO partners	CSOs, municipalities, donors	Q3 2026	Database available online
4.2. Regularly update the database through data ve	Coordination body for cooperation with CSOs	CSO networks	Every 6 months	Minimum 1000 entries per year
Result 5: Inter-sectoral coordination and feedback ensured				
5.1. Establish a Coordination Body for Cooperation between Governments and CSOs or transform the existing Advisory Body of the CoM BiH for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations into a Coordination Body	Council of Ministers	CSO, DEI	Q2 2026	Body functional, meetings quarterly

ACTIVITY	CARRIER	PARTNERS	DEADLINE	SUCCESS INDICATOR
5.2. Introduce annual reporting on the participation of CSOs in EU processes	Directorate for EU Integration	CSO networks, EUD	From 2027	Report published
Result 6: Bureaucratic obstacles for the CSO sector mapped and reduced				
6.1. Revise the CSO registration procedure	Ministry of Justice of BiH	CSO	Q4 2026	New procedure simpler
6.2. Establish a guide for CSOs to access public funds	Ministry of Justice of BiH	CSO networks	Q1 2027	Guide available online
Result 7: Monitoring and evaluation system established				
7.1. Develop a methodology for monitoring the performance of CSOs in EU processes	Directorate for EU Integration	CSO networks, academic community	Q3 2026.	Methodology adopted and available
7.2. Establish an annual mechanism for evaluating results and recommendations	Coordination body for cooperation with CSOs	DEI, donors, CSOs	From 2027	First annual report published

6.1 Linking the results defined in the Action Plan with recommendations and measures for Policy Brief implementation

The implementation of the Action Plan defined above, which is **based on the recommendations and measures for the implementation of the Policy Brief** in this area, is a very demanding task, especially in country as BiH that has a complex structure and is burdened with numerous challenges. Given that one achieved result from the AP affects the implementation of one or more recommendations, the following table links the recommendations for implementation from the PB with the achieved results.

Table 3 Linking recommendations and measures with results from the AP

Result	Related recommendations
Result 1 – Formal CSOs participation mechanisms established	Recommendation 1
Result 2 – CSOs capacities strengthened	Recommendation 4
Result 3 – Transparent system of delegation	Recommendation 3 and Recommendation 6
Result 4 – CSOs database	Recommendation 3
Result 5 – Coordination and feedback	Recommendation 2
Result 6 – Bureaucratic obstacles reduced	Recommendation 5 and Recommendation 4
Result 7 – Monitoring and Evaluation System	Recommendation 7 and Recommendation 6

For the implementation of the AP and the realization of the recommendations, it is necessary to ensure **the following**:

1. Activity holders: institution(s) responsible for implementing the measure.
2. Required resources divided into:
 - Human (experts, officials, CSO representatives, citizens),
 - Financial (budget funds or donations),
 - Technical/infrastructural (equipment, software, premises),
 - Communication (campaigns, public relations tools),
 - Normative (legal acts, procedures)

In addition, it is necessary:

3. Respecting the defined timeframe;
4. Indicators for measuring success are key to monitoring progress;
5. Reporting and transparent exchange of opinions.

6.2 Implementation the Framework Action Plan for the Implementation of the Policy

Brief in practice

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a very complex and specific system of government with four basic levels of government: **state level** - BiH, **entity level** - BiH consists of two entities (Federation of BiH (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS) + one Brčko District (DB), **cantonal level** (only in FBiH, 10 cantons) and **municipal/city level**. All these levels participate in the creation and implementation of strategic documents.

The hierarchical order of adopting strategic documents is from top to bottom):

1. **State strategies (BiH)** - framework, umbrella, long-term;
2. **Entity strategies (FBiH/RS)** – operational, adapted to the entity context;
3. **Local strategies** – concrete, field-oriented, aligned with higher levels.

Documents must be harmonized, so e.g. the entity's strategic documents should be prepared on the basis of the framework strategic document at the BiH level. Two types of **alignment of strategic documents are common**

- **Vertical harmonization:** based on state documents, entity documents are created, which are the basis for cantonal documents in the FBiH or for local documents in the RS. In the FBiH, cantonal documents are the basis for local documents.
- **Horizontal coordination:** between sectors within one level (e.g. education and labour market within an entity or between entities on common issues (e.g. environment, energy, etc.)

The implementation of strategic documents such as this Policy Brief is complex not only because of the country's complex organizational structure, but also because BiH does not have a classic hierarchy of power (the state level does not *command* the entities), policies must be harmonized, not simply ordered, and because implementation is often the task of the entities and cantons, while the state provides the framework.

In order to ensure effective implementation of the Action Plan at all levels of government in BiH, it is necessary to establish or improve the existing **intergovernmental coordination**

and partnership mechanism that enables joint planning, monitoring and reporting. The state level sets a common framework and objectives, while the entity, cantonal and local levels develop operational plans in accordance with that framework. In addition, it is necessary to provide technical and financial support to lower levels of government, with clearly defined reporting and accountability mechanisms.

Planning and implementation structures at different levels of government:

Level	Description/Function
State level ↓	Framework Action Plan (AP)
Intergovernmental coordination ↓ ↙ ↘ ↓	Communication mechanism between levels of government
Entity/cantonal plans	Contribution to implementation through lower administrative levels
Local Action Plans (LAP) ↓	Specific implementation plans at the local level
Field implementation ↓	Putting plans into practice
Monitoring and reporting	Feedback by state level for evaluation

7. CONCLUSION

Successful integration of BiH into the EU requires broad and inclusive participation of all stakeholders in society, with the civil sector playing a particularly important role. CSOs represent a bridge between citizens and institutions and are key to shaping policies that respond to the real needs of society. Therefore, it is necessary to systematically strengthen cooperation between government institutions and CSOs, with clearly defined mechanisms of dialogue, consultation and joint action. Such cooperation should be based on mutual trust, transparency and long-term institutional support.

Strengthening the role of civil society contributes not only to better policy-making, but also to greater citizen trust in democratic processes and institutions of the System. By actively participating in the European integration processes, CSOs can become an important corrective factor and partner in implementing necessary reforms.

However, in order for the civil sector to take on this responsibility effectively, it is necessary to work on its professionalization and capacity building. This includes continuous education and training in the field of European integration, the EU legislative framework, the development and monitoring of public policies, as well as the management of EU funds and project cycles. It is also important to build expert teams within organizations that can analyse and actively monitor reform and legislative processes, and engage in informed public debates and dialogue with decision-makers.

In addition, the introduction of a civic index that focuses on internal work standards, legal and ethical norms, structure and mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability will contribute to greater credibility and influence of CSOs in the public space. Networking and coordination among civil society organizations, as well as with relevant institutions, further strengthen their position and enable a more efficient joint approach to the key challenges of the integration process.

It can almost be said that the readiness of the public and civil sectors to cooperate on a partnership basis is a measure of the maturity and readiness of a society for membership in the European Union. In this sense, building a functional and sustainable partnership between these two sectors must be a priority in the coming years. We appreciate that the Analysis and Policy Brief has been prepared, with an assessment of the situation, recommendations, measures, proposals for innovative models that should be adapted to the conditions and needs of BiH, as well as a plan of action framework for achieving the goals of the Policy Brief - a good and high-quality basis for achieving the defined results that need to be achieved in this area.

ANNEX : CONCLUSIONS of the WORKSHOP “FROM RECOMMENDATIONS TO CHANGE – Implementation of the Policy Brief on Strengthening Cooperation between Government and Civil Society in the EU Accession Process”

On September 16, 2025, IREI organized a final workshop at which the Policy Brief document was presented and an open discussion on its quality and the possibilities for implementation followed. The participants at the workshop included representatives of government, civil society, and the international community. They fully endorsed the document, assessed it as highly valuable, and emphasized the need for such a strategic document that clearly defines what needs to be done, who should do it, how, and within which timeframe aiming to improve relations between government and civil society and raise them to a partnership level. The participants also pointed out decline in available funds, the “mega-grant” models that bypass local CSOs, overburdened administration, and unpaid work in public policy processes. The need for financing genuine CSO participation and introducing simpler, faster support mechanisms was emphasized.

Discussion Conclusions:

1. Current experiences

- The civil sector is disorganized, with only a small number of CSOs able to competently respond to the requirements of the EU accession process; this must change.
- Funding for civil society is limited; mega-grant models, mostly implemented through intermediaries, are primarily core grants; unpaid work is expected.
- E-consultations in policy-making exist but are formalistic and with short deadlines.
- Institutions are understaffed and lack resources for expert work with CSOs.

2. Main problems

- Unpaid participation → demotivation of the sector.
- Lack of rapid, flexible funds.
- Political “outvoting” of CSOs and formal consultations.
- Complex administration and demanding co-financing requirements.

3. Expectations from donors

- Multi-year core grants (2–3 years).
- Participation fund: paid presence in working groups.
- Rapid advocacy funds (€5k–€25k).
- Vouchers for expertise (legal, economic, thematic).
- Grants for networks/coalitions.
- Simpler rules (shorter forms, e-signatures, fast disbursement).
- Support for regional networks.

4. Expectations from institutions

- A functional coordination body with feedback mechanisms.
- Public consultation calendar and mandatory responses.

- Paid CSO participation in working groups.
- Active e-platforms and clear result-oriented contracts.

5. Proposed models

- Fixed percentage of the budget (0.5%) for a CSO fund.
- Framework grants (24–36 months, milestone-based disbursement).
- “One-page” decisions and rapid payments.
- Matching models (donors + institutions).
- Citizen panels (mini-publics).
- Vouchers for watchdog monitoring.

6. Risks

- Political blockage and “outvoting.”
- Volunteer burnout.
- Donor withdrawal from BiH.
- Administrative sluggishness.

7. Figures and timeframe

- Plan 2025–2027 with a medium-/long-term framework.
- Approximate estimate: ~€128,000 required for year one of action plan implementation.

8. Concrete steps for implementation

- List of topics and coalitions 2025–2027.
- “Light” version of the Participation Fund.
- Consultation calendar and minimum deadlines.
- Rapid grants (evaluation within 15 days).
- Pilot vouchers for expertise.
- Quarterly public reports (“one-page”).

GENERAL WORKSHOP CONCLUSIONS

The civil sector in BiH needs to be systematically reorganized and strengthened internally by:

- Mapping capacities,
- Standardizing roles and areas of activity,
- Developing digital platforms and common education standards,
- Using examples of good practices from the region,
- Continuously increasing knowledge and skills through education.

Institutionalization of cooperation between government and CSOs is necessary.

- Secure funding for the long-term work of the civil sector.
- The trend of mega-grants, implemented by others while local CSOs are only subcontractors, is unfavorable for civil society in BiH, as it loses its role as a critical and equal actor, leaving the sector dependent on small, short-term calls.
- Transform advisory bodies into coordination bodies to ensure equal participation of civil society.

There is consensus on recommendations and the Action Plan—now is the time for implementation.

- Donors should combine operational support, rapid advocacy funds, and paid participation in policy-making. Without this, government–CSO cooperation remains formal and ineffective.
- Who will implement all this and put it into practice? This is the responsibility of domestic institutions: BiH itself must build functional models of cooperation between government and civil society, as this process cannot be imposed from outside.

Final Message

For successful EU integration of BiH, it is essential to strengthen trust and partnership between the civil and government sectors, accompanied by concrete and sustainable financial support.

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