

# Table of Contents:

<b>Principal Concepts</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Brief Overview of the Civil Society Initial Status</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Brief Overview of the current Cooperation Between the State and NGOs</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Strategic objectives of civil society development .....	8
<b>1. Participation of NGOs in fulfilling the tasks of public administration and definition of cooperation areas</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1.1. Reasons for participation of NGOs in fulfilling the tasks of public administration and for cooperation.....	8
1.2. Prevailing forms of NGOs participation at fulfilling the public administration tasks or cooperation.....	9
1.3. Advantages and disadvantages of NGOs participation in fulfilling public administration tasks .....	10
1.4. Long-term objectives for NGOs in fulfilling the tasks of public administration and for cooperation.....	11
1.5. Priority measures for securing the participation of NGOs in fulfilling the tasks of public administration and for cooperation.....	12
<b>2. Promotion of active citizens and open governance</b> .....	<b>16</b>
2.1. Reasons for supporting active citizens and open governance.....	16
2.2. Long-term objectives for supporting active citizens and open governance.....	17
2.3. Priority measures in the area of supporting active citizens and open governance...	18
<b>3. Promotion of public discussion on important society matters</b> .....	<b>20</b>
3.1. Reasons to the public discussion support .....	20
3.2. Prevailing forms of public discussion .....	20
3.3. Long-term objectives to support public discussion on serious society issues .....	21
3.4. Priority themes in the area of supporting public discussion on serious society issues .....	21
<b>4. Implementation and control of the implementation of the Strategy measures</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Action Plan 2012 - 2013 .....	24
<b>1. Participation of NGOs in fulfilling the tasks of public administration and definition of the cooperation areas</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>2. Promotion of active citizens and open governance</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>3. Promotion of public discussion on important society matters</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>4. Control of the implementation of the Action Plan 2012-13</b> .....	<b>30</b>

# Introduction

This document contains fundamental principles on the status of civil society in Slovakia, vision of strategic areas of the civil society development, priority strategic measures and tasks for the near future. The document offers basic arguments promoting the support for civil society and cooperation between State and non-governmental, non-profit organisations (NGOs)<sup>1</sup>. It then proceeds with the focus on strategic goals of the civil society development until 2020 in three thematic subjects where we propose measures as follows:

1. NGOs' participation in fulfilment of public administration tasks and definition of the areas of cooperation;
2. Promotion of active citizens and open governance;
3. Promotion of public discussion on important matters of the society.

In the final part, we introduce the Action Plan for 2012-2013.

Preparation process of the *Strategy of Civil Society Development in Slovakia* (hereinafter as "Strategy") consisted of several parts. The first actions related to the preparation of the Strategy concerned organizing the conference: "*State-Civil Society Relations - Are We Ready To Cooperate?*" held in September 2011 in Stupava with the objective to collect the opinions of the NGOs representatives on the need of changes of the State-Civil Society relations. Report from this conference <sup>2</sup> represents the first foundation for the Strategy preparation. Furthermore, as part of the Strategy preparation, two studies were worked up by the consortium made up of the Institute for Public Affairs and the Centre for Philanthropy and the PDCS (Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia) as follows: *Study on Current Status of the Civil Society in Slovakia*<sup>i</sup> and *Study of the Civil Society Trends in Slovakia*<sup>ii</sup>. These two studies represent the analytical principles of the Strategy.

The draft Strategy was further consulted with a wide range of relevant actors at personal meetings and the draft Strategy was published on the website [www.tretisektor.gov.sk](http://www.tretisektor.gov.sk) available for written comments. Moreover, meetings on the draft Strategy of Civil Society Development in Slovakia were held in January 2012 in Bratislava, Banská Bystrica and Kosice where the draft Strategy was also available for comments. Finally, the draft Strategy was discussed by the Committee of NGOs on 2 February 2012. The Committee NGOs approved the Strategy of Civil Society Development in Slovakia: Long-term Strategy until 2020 and the Action Plan for 2012-2013 and recommended to the Government of the SR to adopt the Strategy of Civil Society Development in Slovakia.

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<sup>1</sup> Non-governmental non-profit organisations (NGOs) are organisations defined by six characteristic features: 1) formalised (registered); 2) organisationally separated from the state institutions; 3) not profit oriented; 4) with autonomous management structure; 5) substantially voluntary; and 6) with no political affiliations. (Lester M. Salamon and Helmut K. Anheier, 1994. *The Emerging Sector: The Non-Profit Sector in Comparative Perspective - An Overview*. Baltimore: Institute for Policy Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, page xiii).

<sup>2</sup> [http://tretisektor.gov.sk/data/files/1526\\_sprava-z-konferencie.pdf](http://tretisektor.gov.sk/data/files/1526_sprava-z-konferencie.pdf)

## Principal Concepts

According to Dahrendorf (2000),<sup>iii</sup> the civil society represents a "sealing power" in the society. According to other authors, it is a space for spontaneous activities of citizens, but also for organized activities of more or less professional non-profit NGOs, as well as an *"intermediary sphere between the private sphere and the State"* (Diamond, 1994)<sup>iv</sup>. The existence of civic initiatives and NGOs as such is not linked to positive values. There are initiatives within the civil society in Slovakia and abroad promoting liberal and democratic values, but also initiatives striving to promote solutions acting in conflict with human rights or principle of political equality of citizens. However, if we compare the civil society effects, the positive prevail over the negative.

Civil society is also a space for development of new bridging social capital (networks of relations and confidence among citizens) which according to empiric studies of Robert Putnam (1993)<sup>v</sup> assists the cooperation and stimulates economic development as well as political culture built on cooperation and solidarity. Civil society is at the same time a space for dialogue between different opinions and a space for the public opinion development (Habermas). To enable the dialogue of different opinions within the public space to reflect into the public decision-making, other mechanisms besides elections are necessary to enable citizens to enter actively the decision-making processes on public issues at the local as well as at the regional and national level. Civic pressure to consistently extend mechanisms of the public involvement into the decision-making process may be observed abroad since 1970s and since 1990s, the tendency to open governments and to adopt measures to extend opportunities for informing citizens as well as their active involvement into the public administration has become more significant.<sup>3</sup> The international Open Government Partnership Initiative<sup>4</sup> that Slovakia acceded to in September 2011, belongs among initiatives promoting open governance and civic participation.

## Brief Overview of the Civil Society Initial Status

This Strategy is based particularly on the description of the civil society status covered in two studies prepared by the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO) in consortium with the Centre for Philanthropy (CpF) and PDSC: *Study on Current Status of the Civil Society in Slovakia*<sup>vi</sup> and *Study of the Civil Society Trends in Slovakia*<sup>vii</sup> as well as two other publications *Slovakia 2010: Report on the status of society and democracy and trends for 2011*<sup>viii</sup> and *Citizenship, participation and deliberation in Slovakia: theory and reality*<sup>ix</sup>.

There were 37.409 NGOs in the Slovak Republic as of December 31, 2010. Thereof 404 foundations, 1.408 public benefit organizations and the largest number, up to 33.914, represented civic associations. The rests were non-investment funds, organizations with

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<sup>3</sup> The OECD (2011) publication *"Citizens as partners: Information, consultation and public participation in policy-making"* is an example of governments' approach to broaden opportunities for citizens to participate in the public policies establishment and public decision-making.

<sup>4</sup> Open Government Partnership, <http://www.opengovpartnership.org>

international element and legal entities associations. Churches and religious organizations constitute a specific and autonomous part of the civil society.<sup>5</sup>

Positive trends and areas where the participation and civil activity have increased within the last few years are<sup>x</sup>:

1. Increase of citizens' participation in the area of community development. Professional and sectoral organizations are becoming more active in entering the legislative processes as they fight for their rights and interests. At the same time, various professionals and associations become more engaged for benefits of public interest. The use of the institute for public comment to promote legislative changes, entering the land-planning processes, collective mails focused on activation of citizens, etc. is more effective. Within the last five years, the Portal of Legislative Acts improved its functioning by adding the feature of commenting of the public on draft legislation and drafts of public policies. Although this possibility is not being used on a large scale so far, it means a significant progress in the public having the possibility to enter the public decision-making process. "Internet activism" has developed and thanks to social media the citizens which have not yet been involved in public matters are getting involved.
2. Formal and informal volunteering is developing, primarily in social and environmental field, but also in cultural area. Public support for charity, donations and volunteering is increasing. Currently, more than a quarter of citizens are engaged in the formal volunteering and almost a half of the citizens is engaged in the informal volunteering<sup>xi</sup>.
3. Despite the disadvantageous external conditions, the NGOs' activities in the social field focusing on care for seniors, sick and long-term sick, running of hospices and crises centres are increasing, as well as provision of other services substituting the role of the State and the services that are not attractive enough for entrepreneurs.

The following are considered as unfavourable trends in participation and civic activism in the last few years<sup>xii</sup>:

1. Weak financial support from the State as well as from domestic "social philanthropists" for civic activism and civic participation. The concept of corporate social responsibility has been established only partially, particularly in multi-national companies. One part of the corporate sector understands the supporting of civic activities more in terms of their public relations (PR). Particularly organizations focused on defending the public interest (civic advocacy) and guarding democracy (watchdog) organization, as well as analytical NGOs, are threatened due to unfavourable financial situation.
2. The cooperation between State and NGOs has been marked by formalism - although the public administration representatives invited NGOs to cooperate on some issues (in the process of preparation of strategies, policies or legislation, in discussion or

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<sup>5</sup> Studies on the current status and trends of the civil society in Slovakia that this Strategy particularly follows do not deal with subjects related to churches and religious organizations. Therefore, specific tasks associated with this kind of institutions are missing in the proposed measures. Analysis on current status of the civil society needs to be amended by the actual status and trends of churches and religious organizations in the near future.

commenting procedures) but in the end their opinions, proposals and requirements were not respected very often. With respect to enforcing their requirements, in some cases NGOs use the obligations stemming from international treaties or agreements that the Slovak Republic has committed to respect as their arguments. Positive experience can be found as well, particularly the establishment of cooperation mechanism between the Ministry of Justice and NGOs in the process of preparation of legal acts. Favourable conditions were created for participation of civil society in the process of wider opening of judicial system to public and for implementation of elements of transparency in activities of courts and judicial self-governing bodies.<sup>xiii</sup>

3. Civic initiatives and NGOs are fragmented with regard to negotiations with representatives of state institutions. They lack a representative coordination or umbrella body that would enter the public discussion and be a relevant partner for the State. For particular sectors, platforms were established for some subjects promoting opinions of their members with regard to the State and they represent respectable authorities to a certain extent.<sup>6</sup>
4. Unfavourable development has been noticed with regard to the Roma participation in addressing the issues concerning the Roma minority. There is almost no Roma voice concerning the conceptual solutions of the Roma issue. Small Roma associations are rather decimated. Absence of a strategic and integrated approach and cooperation of all respective actors makes the Roma issue as well as other social issues complicated. Although this is a chronic issue, the NGOs' effort to implement a change has not been efficient over the last few years.
5. Internet activism is not aimed only at mobilising citizens to promote "good" civil society. In some cases, it is limited to occasional expressive verbal responses. Moreover, it is used as an effective tool also by extremist anti-democratic initiatives or groups.
6. Numerous cases of NGOs' misuse have been revealed and discussed in media during recent years. NGOs are facing a challenge to increase their credibility. Some civic associations and initiatives were misused for promoting corporate, but also political/partisan interests.
7. The on-going economic crisis contributes to financial stringency of some NGOs reflected in their loss of independency and diversion from their initial mission. The risk is significant particularly for those NGOs engaged in unconventional or unpopular topics and issues. Thus the environmental NGOs have lost their capacity to deal with some significant issues.

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<sup>6</sup> The platforms are for example: Association of Community Foundations of the Slovak Republic, Association of Organizations of Disabled Persons of the SR, Association of Social Services Providers, Association of Sports Unions and Clubs of Slovak Republic, Ecoforum, Donators Forum, National Council of Disabled Persons of the SR, Platform for volunteer centres and organizations, Platform for non-governmental development organizations, Youth Council of Slovak Republic, Socioforum, Union of Mother Centres, Rural Parliament, Association of Mountain and Other Rescue Systems of the SR, Women's Lobby of the Slovak Republic.

8. Sustainability of some NGOs may be threatened by deep global economic crisis affecting both individual and company donorship, as well as support of NGOs from the EU and state funds. On the other hand, civic initiatives and organizations could contribute to adaptation of people to the changed living conditions caused by the crisis, which may become a new source of activism.
9. From the long-term view, it is not possible to identify efficient programmes and approaches with regard to the issues exceeding the sectoral character, e.g. solution to poverty and social exclusion, searching for opportunities of inter-cultural dialogue and integration of migrants into the society, solution to violence on women and children.

## **Brief Overview of the Current Cooperation Between the State and NGOs<sup>xiv</sup>.**

State and NGOs are two independent entities focusing primarily on building their own identity, resulting sometimes in limited interest in learning about each other. Goals of the State and NGOs are not identical. They may have common goals in some selected areas and development of their functions creates the need for their cooperation. A real cooperation requires mutual confidence and positive activity on both sides. In Slovakia, cooperating initiatives between the State or public administration and NGOs are at an early stage. The existing experiences on both sides lead the involved actors to caution- prevailing practice did not enable the establishment of confidence, which is the base of cooperating relation.

The government that was formed in July 2010 expressed its readiness to consider the voice of citizens as important and its first steps at both declarative and symbolic level (represented by the Prime Minister in particular) were promising. Government's Manifesto, creation of the position of the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development as well as establishment of the Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality are perceived as potentially useful steps.

According to experts, the cooperation of the State or public administration with the majority of NGOs does not have stable regulative rules and it often depends on specific persons and on the composition of decision-making bodies. The application of the principle of partnership with NGOs and principle of civic participation is not adopted and internalized in the public administration environment. Even in case of enforcing better habits, there are no guarantees that the good practice of cooperation and partnership will last after a possible change of government or political climate.

The area of social services provision is the example where closer cooperation and partnership between the public administration and NGOs is favourable. In the present conditions, the State saves capital resources for construction and equipment necessary for social facilities. It does not finance education and training of employees and in the majority of cases, it does not finance the start-up phase of services provision either. The State does not finance the renovation of buildings and equipment, or extending the services, with the exception of EU funds (Regional Operational Programme).

The Strategy proposes four different approaches of public administration to NGOs: 1) strengthening the legislation and mechanisms necessary for functioning of free and independent civil society and for participation of citizens in public decision making; 2) establishing mechanisms for promoting activities of citizens and NGOs that strengthen social capital and public discussion; 3) defining the areas in which public administration counts on the active role of NGOs in public services provision and setting the conditions for equal position of NGOs in provision of these services and activities; and 4) establishing cooperation mechanisms in the areas of shared objectives of public administrative and NGOs.

## **Strategic objectives of civil society development**

### **1. Participation of NGOs in fulfilling the tasks of public administration and definition of cooperation areas**

#### **1.1. Reasons for participation of NGOs in fulfilling the tasks of public administration and for cooperation**

Non-governmental organisations are active in more or less all areas of society life. Not only do they represent a rich source of qualified and creative people providing public services for Slovak citizens and doing publically beneficial activities, they also form the intellectual potential for establishing social innovations and public policies. It is advantageous for the public administration to cooperate with non-governmental non-profit organisations in various areas where the State and local government formulate public policies, particularly in relation to public services provision.

Reasons for involving the non-governmental organisations in fulfilling the tasks of the State and local government and for possible cooperation can be divided into two basic areas.

The first area represents the values, where it is important, whether politic elites, government and public administration representatives share the belief<sup>7</sup> that democratic state needs civil society for its functioning and therefore NGOs as well, and that it is necessary to involve the engaged stakeholders and citizens in the management of public affairs. It is therefore in the State's interest to create favourable conditions for NGOs development, to create mechanisms, which would enable the public administration to use the potential of NGOs, as well as to involve the expert public and NGOs in creation of public policies. Various international documents and initiatives relevant for Slovakia are based on this value framework - in the European Union, OSCE, as well as in global framework (for example Aarhus Convention, already mentioned Partnership for Open Governance, OSCE recommendations in relation to public administration, etc.).

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<sup>7</sup> B.Strečanský warns about the missing consensus at the level of elites in relation to NGOs role in relation and institutional environment in: *"We and us or together?" Impact of non-governmental non-profit organisations on decision-making processes in Visegrad countries - Slovakia*. Bratislava, Centre for Philanthropy 2008

The second area is represented by practical and economic reasons, where it is important how the representatives of state institutions and public administration define areas, where they count on NGOs activity (areas where NGOs provide services and implement activities, which are not sufficiently or at all implemented by the State established subjects, or NGOs implement it cheaper or in better quality). In these areas, it is necessary for the public administration representatives to define the characteristics of the services and criteria for quality and services effectiveness assessment, for the services of their interest.

In both cases, it is critical for the public administration representatives and NGOs to share information. Public administration must provide information about the order from State or local government, which is formulated on the basis of priorities in public policies and NGOs on generally beneficial activities and services, which NGOs can offer (and are able to provide), but also about the target groups' needs.

## **1.2. Prevailing forms of NGOs participation at fulfilling the public administration tasks or cooperation**

Presently, the majority of relations between the State and NGOs is limited to relations between the donor and beneficiary or a party ordering services and a party providing it. It does not have the characteristics of equal position, when the assessment of the user or services beneficiary - citizen - decides on the success; neither it is the cooperation where two partners cooperate at implementing common goal. It is an asymmetrical relation, where sponsor - the State or self-government, seeks the implementing party - NGO. Sponsor (donor, ordering party) defines the extent of tasks, activities and provides the implementing party (beneficiary, provider) with resources, controls its use and evaluates the results.

In case of relation of the ordering party - provider, the ordering party – the State or local government has a very precise idea about the service, which needs to be provided, and NGO, trying to gain the order from the State, enters the tender often with enterprising subjects. In contrast to this, the State as a donor (although it also provides the finances for providing certain activities) enters in much lesser extent into defining the activities framework implemented by NGO and opens the opportunities for competition of various approaches within given priorities. Experts basically agree that NGOs can achieve higher effectiveness than the State or local government, or offer better solutions in the creation of innovations and public policies. So far, this type of relation was not significantly recognised despite the declared intentions<sup>8</sup>. Advantages of partnership are based mainly on sharing of the resources (not only financial, but also organisational, know-how, personnel), in implementing objectives agreed by public administration and NGOs, while partnership is favourable particularly in implementing pilot programmes or innovative measures that need to be amended and adjusted from time to time, that means in situations which are not suitable for

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<sup>8</sup> Principle of partnership cooperation is often declared mainly in program documents related to programming, implementing and monitoring of Structural Funds, but also in Norwegian Financial Mechanism, and Financial Mechanism of the EEA. Concrete mechanisms of applying partnership principle in solving community problems were so far implemented in particular on local, or regional level (e.g. creating regional and local partnerships of social inclusion of Social Development Fond or creation of action groups in micro regions of Leader+ programme).

standard situation of providing services to citizens or which do not exceed the usual project framework.

Another type of relationship is equal position of public administration organisations and non-governmental non-profit organisations in executing public services for citizens in the situation when the rules and conditions for both (and for organisations established for business purpose) are determined by law. There is also a possibility of different type of relationship in solving society problems, where no open approach exists and that is coordinated cooperation, i.e. partnership. Partnership may also have the form of joint action in problem solving, while both parties participate at the same objective and mutually respect each other. Partner relationship therefore represents another level of relationship, different from provision of services or relationship of donor and grant beneficiary.

### **1.3. Advantages and disadvantages of NGOs participation in fulfilling public administration tasks<sup>xv</sup>**

The main economic arguments in favour of service provision by NGOs are as follows:

- Price and quality ratio of provided service or activity, when the lower price is expected with NGOs while retaining the same or higher quality. In some cases, it may be lower price for lower quality, while preserving service availability.
- Simplicity of solutions - services provision from NGOs removes state bureaucracy and therefore further costs.
- Economic effectiveness - unit costs for delivering service or activity are lower in NGOs than in State environment due to additional private resources, voluntary work and a higher level of control by donors.
- Motivated and competent management.
- Variety of approaches, which brings higher sensitivity towards client's problems.

Economic arguments in favour of NGOs participation at activities for public benefit of the State are as follows:

- Increasing of competitiveness in the area of creation of ideas and public policies.
- Control of effectiveness of public resources spending and public administration performance (role of organisations focused on guarding democracy, i.e. watchdog organisations).
- Testing innovations and pilot verification of solutions before further massive dissemination.

The problems of economic character accompanying the cooperation among NGOs and State include:

- Possible duplicity of service provision.
- Unclear or improperly defined needs by the State enables promotion of "the projects for projects" and can lead to ineffective spending of public resources.

- Uncertainties in determining the rules of services provision by commercial providers and non-profit providers.
- Linkage of commercial objectives in using the mechanism of 2% share of legal entities' taxes.

Partnership can also have institutionalised forms, which have not been tried in Slovakia so far (for example establishing specific type of autonomous grant organisation) or are used on a very small scale (for example block grants used so far only by Norwegian Financial Mechanism, Financial Mechanism of the EEA and Swiss Financial Mechanism). These new instruments will have to be tested and applied on the basis of assessment, in areas where they will be proven as proper and effective.

At the time of the economic crisis, it will be even more important to focus on cooperation of public administration with NGOs, because it enables financing of public services and activities for public benefit from several sources, which the public administration is unable to provide.

#### **1.4. Long-term objectives for NGOs in fulfilling the tasks of public administration and for cooperation**

In the areas and themes where the State and local government implement policies and where at the same time NGOs implement their activities, and where the activities overlap, the long-term objectives are the following:

- Create mutual understanding between public administration representatives and NGOs about the role of NGOs in the provision of public services and activities for public benefit, set the conditions for equal position of NGOs in the provision of these services and activities.
- Define areas and themes where public administration counts on active role of NGOs in implementing public policies and create conditions for NGOs to fulfil this role.
- Use the potential of NGOs and civil activists in proposing, creation, implementation and impact assessment of public policies in solving serious issues.
- Create cooperation mechanisms in areas where public administration and NGOs share their objectives, with financing programmes implemented in the cooperation, or embed these new mechanisms in the legislation.
- Ensure fair, transparent and effective functioning of grant programmes, as well as programmes from the Structural Funds, Norwegian Financial Mechanism, Financial Mechanism of the EEA and Swiss Financial Mechanism. Consistently apply partnership principle between public administration and other involved actors, including NGOs in programming, monitoring and assessment of these programmes.
- Disclose information at the disposal of public administration to public, pursuant to valid legislation.
- Strengthen NGOs that mediate the dialogue between public administration and NGOs, as well as organisations which represent the interests of Slovak NGOs in the European networks.

## **1.5. Priority measures for securing the participation of NGOs in fulfilling the tasks of public administration and for cooperation**

### **National level:**

1. Individual ministers shall prepare and present the position or declaration in relation to the thematic/topical areas and forms of NGOs' participations at fulfilling the ministry's tasks. The declaration will contain particularly the themes and forms of NGOs involvement in:
  - Preparation of laws and subordinate legal acts,
  - Preparation of strategic and conceptual documents,
  - Assessment of ministry's results and fulfilment of the obligations resulting from international treaties and national programmes,
  - Determining priorities and mechanisms (including assessment) of grant policies of the ministry for determined period and circle of beneficiaries, especially in relation to NGOs.
  - Programming, planning, implementation and monitoring of development funds administered by the relevant ministry,
  - Ways and forms of communication, used by the ministry in informing NGOs, as well as readiness of the ministry for the dialogue with NGOs platforms and initiatives created for current topics,
  - Research, analyses and pilot projects in the ministry.

The declaration will be perceived as the first step in enabling a long-term determination of mutual relations. The objective of this measure could be long-term strategy of NGOs involvement in cooperation with the ministry in the future, which could become a stable part of the declaration. Another part of the declaration can be identifying new innovative possibilities of cooperation that enable extension and improvement of mutual relations.

2. After consultations with key actors of civil society<sup>9</sup>, Slovak government shall approve *Memorandum of Understanding*, based on individual ministries' declarations. The Memorandum will determine principal values and positions in relation to civic participation, principles in relation to organised initiatives and various types of non-governmental non-profit organisations and can determine the cooperation areas with NGOs. The objective of creating permanent platform for dialogue between the State and

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<sup>9</sup> Key actors of civil society are individuals and organisations working in civil society for a long time, either working in NGOs or as civil activists mainly in relation to specific theme where they publicly engage and influence larger groups of civil society. Key actors include umbrella, network, representative and coordination organisations and platforms. The choice of key actors varies in accordance to discussed theme, the choice of concrete representatives must provide representation of various opinion groups in the discussed theme. We recommend to consult identifying key actors with Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality and Committee for Non-governmental Non-profit Organisations.

the civil society will form a part of the Memorandum, which should, apart from the dialogue with NGOs, create an opportunity for public discussion on serious society issues, promoting active citizens and strengthening civic capital.

3. In case of mutual interest of a ministry and NGOs working in the area, they will elaborate and sign a *Memorandum of Understanding* in mutual dialogue. In the Memorandum, the ministry and NGOs will define areas of cooperation in the themes and issues, which are in the ministry's competence, principal values and principles of mutual relation, as well as obligations of both parties in fulfilling joint objectives. The Memorandum shall clearly define the status or mandate of non-governmental non-profit organisations signing the Memorandum and entering into cooperation with the ministry, as well as the rules and procedures for other organisations to join the Memorandum later.
4. In the ministries that have grant programs with NGOs as eligible applicants, the ministry in dialogue with NGOs<sup>10</sup> will assess transparency, effectiveness and impacts of the functioning so far and it will propose and implement amendments or changes. At the same time, in case it does not exist, it will create mechanism of regular assessment (evaluation) of effectiveness, transparency and impacts of grant program.
5. Ministry of Labour, Social and Family Affairs, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, Government Vice-chair for Human Rights and National Minorities in the dialogue with representatives of NGOs<sup>11</sup> will identify and choose at least one public policy<sup>12</sup>, where the sector and NGOs implement the activities and are interested in defining joint objectives and priorities. The process of joint creation of public policy with including representatives of the sector, representatives of NGOs, experts and other involved actors will be implemented in selected public policies. The proposal of implementation of created public policy, with participation of the sector, NGOs and involved agents will be part of the plan.
6. Various forms of involving the relevant actors and public in creation and implementation of the policy will be tested in implementing the processes of dialogue about public policies. The first implemented processes will be assessed and on the basis of results, the recommended procedures will be generalised, defining standards of public involvement in creating selected policies as part of administrative procedures.

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<sup>10</sup> In case of interest from other groups of eligible applicants, the inclusion of representatives from these groups in the process of grant program assessment is recommended.

<sup>11</sup> Dialogue can start in the sectors with created platform of NGOs or umbrella organisation(s). The whole process of dialogue must be opened for joining of other representatives of NGOs, which work in the relevant theme/area.

<sup>12</sup> Public policy is a legal intent, intent of reform strategy of programme, i.e. conceptual-strategic material, which has a long-term impact on involved actors (in this case NGOs in particular) and citizens.

7. Prepare analysis of local government competencies including financial provision with recommending rules for public services provision (for example equality of all organisation types in case of identical fulfilment of objectives and standards, multisource funding, etc.)
8. Prepare a bill on activities for public benefit defining activities which the State considers as those for public benefit and defining terms for financing from public resources.
9. Continue with mapping the cooperation mechanisms between public administration and NGOs and the forms of financing. Systematically assess individual cooperation mechanisms, including the way of financing (social and economic impacts, advantages and disadvantages in comparison to planned objectives as well as unexpected impacts). Assessment of impact of laws on public services and activities for public benefit is considered to be critical, because it has a major impact on quality and stability of services provided by NGOs<sup>13</sup>. Use the results of assessment in proposing the implementation mechanisms for public policies.
10. Apply the partnership principle in the process of programming, monitoring and assessment of the Structural Funds, Norwegian Financial Mechanism, Financial Mechanism of the EEA and Swiss Financial Mechanism, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, European Fund for Marine and Fisheries Management, i.e. provide all relevant information about the process and content of programming, monitoring and assessment of public and in strategic decisions provide at least 10-day framework for commenting of NGOs and public. Secure sufficient representation of NGOs representatives in all bodies created on the basis of partnership principle (for example in advisory councils, committees and working groups). NGOs representatives will be nominated by Council of the Government for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality and Committee for Non-governmental Non-profit Organisations (in accordance with thematic affiliation) by transparent and clear mechanisms while taking into consideration the criteria of NGOs representatives' competence in relation to thematic focus of advisory bodies.
11. Include NGOs as the eligible organizations (in particular programmes financed from ESF) in the process of structural funds programming (already for the period of 2014-2020) or create autonomous program for NGOs and propose implementation of network Slovak NGOs support programme, whose role is to represent Slovak NGOs in the European networks and influencing European policies and decision-making. Approve measures for decreasing of administrative demand of preparation and project management (for example requests requirements for supporting documents in presenting projects, providing and applying advanced payments for MGOs for project implementation) so the projects would not really exclude NGOs, because of their criteria setting, or would not threaten functioning of NGOs and at the same time would provide transparent and effective functioning of supported projects.

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<sup>13</sup> This concerns project financing (from grants or structural funds), financing via contributions for social services provision from regional bodies' budgets and specific assessment and amendment requires possible participation of NGOs in public procurement.

12. Introduce mechanisms limiting duplicity of financing from public resources via the Structural Funds, Financial Mechanism of the EEA, Norwegian Financial Mechanism, Swiss Financial Mechanism, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, European Fund for Maritime and Fisheries and ministry grant schemes. Create an inter-ministerial commission with the task to exclude duplicity of financing from public resources and to elaborate measures to remove drawbacks. Another task of the Commission shall be the coordination and exchange of information among all programs providing grants.
13. Create an instrument to support NGO programs, that search for solutions regarding the issues with inter-ministerial or above ministerial character, where the State does not have the appropriate approach to solve the problem, for example in area of poverty and exclusion, intercultural dialogue, integration of migrants into the society, violence committed on women and children, educational innovations or testing solutions functioning abroad, but are not known in Slovakia. The program should be focused in particular on themes and areas that are not particularly interesting for private sector and that solve issues of poverty and employment at the time of the economic crisis. In case of pilot projects, it is necessary to provide a mechanism of internal and external evaluation and in case of confirmed positive impacts ensure the continuation of financing the tested approaches and activities.
14. Propose and implement a program of support of State partners, i.e. platforms, umbrella or coordination organisations of NGOs or ad hoc coalitions, which represent opinions of wider group of NGOs on the basis of thematic focus or geographic area in the dialogue with the State. Institutional support of those organisations (support of organisation as such, not only specific project) will be a part of the program, as well as support of networking organisations, and establishment of platforms and umbrella organisations in those themes and areas where they do not exist so far, or ad hoc groups cooperating for short time at enforcing changes in specific thematic area.
15. Propose an educational program for public administration (employees of state administration and local government) in themes related to participation of public, involvement of actors and NGOs in the decision-making process, to organising meetings with involved parties and public, with tools for increasing transparency of public administration focused on advocating public interest (civic advocacy) and guarding democracy (watchdog organisations) in managing public affairs and introducing it as part of education in public administration. Propose in some themes joint education of employees of public administration and NGOs.

**Regional level:**

16. Prepare amendment to the Act on Promoting Regional Development (Act No. 539/2008), in particular in the area of document creating process (for example Programme of Economic and Social Development, PESD) by adding more detailed rules of involved the relevant actors and public in the creation and update of these documents. Define more precisely the partnership principle and define what organisations, institutions, or individuals are perceived as partners, i.e. involved actors who enter the process of creating the documents in applying partnership. Embed the status of participant in the

proceedings (pursuant to the administrative order) for partners (or social and economic partners) in relation to creation, implementation and update of the development plans and strategies of local governments. At the same time, define in the law the meaning of conflict of interests and the procedure for its minimising. The law will be prepared and negotiated with relevant partners with a sufficient time in advance.

17. Consistently apply the partnership principle in relation to the involvement of representatives of NGOs in preparation, implementation and updating of the operational programs of the Structural Funds. Provide all the relevant information on the process and contents of preparation, implementation, updating and assessment of the operational programs of the Structural Funds by social and economic partner in working groups (for example monitoring committee), provide a balanced representation of individual sectors and sufficient representation of civic organisations representatives who will be nominated in a transparent and clear mechanism and with clear definition of working group competencies.
18. Prepare and approve a legislative amendment of institutionalization of cooperation and partnership at the regional level, i.e. in the form of consultative regional body (for example platform, panel) that would fulfil the coordination function of regional policy<sup>14</sup>. The body would consist of representatives of regional government, towns and municipalities, representatives of state administration, institutions of academic, private and third sector.

## **2. Promotion of active citizens and open governance**

### **2.1. Reasons for supporting active citizens and open governance**

Social capital represents a network of relationships based on mutual confidence, cooperation and reciprocity between people who are not bound by family or clan ties. Social capital (bridging) has a positive impact on economic development and on building political culture based on confidence and cooperation (Putnam, 1993, 2000) Thanks to the self-help and mutual help (and reciprocity) on the local level, a part of citizen's needs can be satisfied through the assistance provided by neighbours, without interfering and financing from the State with significantly lower costs than what the State must spend in case of missing network of active citizens and volunteers. Therefore it is necessary to publically raise and appreciate self/help and volunteering activities, as well as provide financing of non-profit organisations which create organisational and educational supporting background for civic and voluntary activities.

In 2011, the National Council of the Slovak Republic has passed the Act No. 406/2011 on Voluntary Work and on Change and Amendment of some other acts, defining basic legislative framework for functioning the voluntary activities in Slovakia. The importance of self-help and voluntary activities is increasing in the times of the economic crisis, when many households are in the situation when they are not able to afford to buy services as before

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<sup>14</sup> These partnership councils with relevant competencies function successfully in Norway for example, as well as in other countries..

(free time activities for children, home care or help at home for seniors and people with disabilities, help for large families, crisis lines, etc.) In the time of crisis the citizens may appreciate non-profit organisations and volunteering centres, mediating the help of volunteers.

In September 2011, Slovakia became a part of international initiative Partnership for Open Governance and accepted the objectives of the initiative in the area of improving governance and managing public affairs by increasing transparency of public administration, its effectiveness and accountability, as well as creating opportunities for citizens to participate in governance.

Functioning mechanisms of public participation in the management of public affairs are a part of well-functioning society and open governance. Basic mechanisms of free access to information of citizens, as well as some instruments of public participation in decision-making were accepted in Slovakia in legislation or in international treaties (e.g. Act on Free Access to Information, Act on Assessing Impact on Environment, signed Aarhus Convention, collective comments in the legislation process, partnership principle in programming and monitoring of the Structural Funds). However, it is necessary for the future not only to maintain and really apply these mechanisms, but also on the basis of experience to amend them in the spirit of improving citizens' access to information and their greater involvement in decision-making concerning public issues. Structural dialogue, representing a specific form of activation and involvement of public in public consultations of policies created at the European Union level, is an example of public participation. This methodology may be significant in the group of young people and locally active NGOs, networking of which can consequently lead to a more consistent transfer in the dialogue of produced recommendations for the creation of public policies.

Another part of well-managed society is the legislative environment enabling the existence of independent and free civil society. Basic legal regulations have been approved in this area as well (possibly with the exception of the donors support), but the needs of citizens and non-profit organisations develop further and it is necessary to continually map how the existing legislation fulfils the requirements for creating environment for free civil society. Where new ideas for legislation change arise, it is necessary to negotiate them and search for new framework agreements. The same applies to the creation of conditions for organisations, with which the State and public administration do not plan to cooperate, but are critically important for the society (e.g. watchdog organisations).

The control function of these organisations of civil society may contribute to the creation of more effective policies, better management of public resources, as well as applying better investments in the society development and it is a natural part of increasing governance transparency. Preventive measures, approved in the past thanks to NGOs, ensured significant savings for the State and local governments. Finally, the experts also mentioned the building of social capital by NGOs.

## **2.2. Long-term objectives for supporting active citizens and open governance**

The long-term objectives for the State in the areas and themes where citizens and NGOs are active are the following:

- Strengthen the legislation or create new mechanisms enabling free access to information, accessibility of information for disabled people, children, young people and seniors, participation of public in decision-making, as well as various forms of associating of citizens and free and independent functioning of civil society,
- Create conditions for financing of citizens' activities strengthening (bridging) social capital from public and private sources,
- Create conditions for establishing and accepting of independent feedback for activities of public institutions.

### **2.3. Priority measures in the area of supporting active citizens and open governance**

1. Map the application of the existing legislation and mechanisms enabling free access to information (Act No. 211/2000 on Free Access to Information and on change and amendment of some acts), access to information for disabled people and seniors (Act No. 275/2006 on Information Systems of Public Administration and on change and amendment of other acts and Decree of Ministry of Finance No. 312/2010 on standards for information systems of public administration), as well as for children and youth and participation of public in decision-making (e.g. Act No. 24/2006 on Assessing the Impacts on Environment and on change and amendment of other acts, application of Aarhus Convention), based on present analyses. Elaborate new analyses in case of insufficient mapping of the abovementioned issues and preparing an international comparison. Propose measures for providing the application of valid legislative measures and propose possible changes on the basis of the EU requirements. Propose legislative changes, if needed, which enable a direct involvement of citizens in the decision-making of public administration, using modern technologies in accessing information. Provide independent regular monitoring and assessment of applying these mechanisms and laws (independent annual reports on applying access to information and participation prepared by NGOs and research and academic institutes) and amend the mechanisms or laws on the basis of the recommendations from the assessment.
2. Map the needs of citizens and non-profit organisations in relation to the legislation related to the establishment and functioning of various types of NGOs, public participation in decision-making, volunteering and donorship. Propose amendments of existing laws or draft new laws on the basis of mapped needs. If necessary, evaluate and propose solutions leading to a more effective functioning of NGOs registers.
3. Strengthen the existing instruments (commissions, advisory boards) and create new mechanisms and instruments (e.g. participative budget, round tables, dialogue on strategy, civic panels, planning cells, negotiation and mediation of regulations), enabling the participation of citizens and NGOs in the decision-making processes and the creation of public policies. Adopt internal rules and codes of conduct for public institutions, providing the use of mechanisms and instruments of participation in the decision-making and create a way to finance the participative processes, enabling also financing the participation of NGOs representatives in working groups and expert groups.
4. Map the possibilities in the Structural Funds and in additional ministerial grant mechanisms and create the space (in particular by amending administrative requirements

and financial frameworks) for the establishment of programmes with a decreased threshold, enabling awarding of small grants to small and starting non-profit organisations. Small grants are considered as those providing support in the amount from 500 € to 5000 €. Educational support for informal initiative and starting organisations related to program focus will be a part of the newly established programs. A possible instrument suitable for intermediary foundations able to manage such programs at the level of informal initiatives are the block grants. The establishment of such programs needs to be supported especially on the regional and local level by institutional support and support of grant programs of community foundations.

5. Propose and implement programs of volunteering and voluntary centres. Support of creating infrastructure for volunteering, financing of the institutional support for voluntary centres and its embedding in legislation, creating national prize for volunteers of the year (by specific categories) and educating local government employees about the role of volunteering and possible ways of using volunteers and voluntary NGOs in implementing public services is a part of the programme.
6. Propose and implement (especially in cooperation with Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, Platform of Voluntary Centres and Organisations, Council of Youth of Slovakia, Committee for NGOs, Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia, Union of Towns of Slovakia, Association SK-8) voluntary program focused on youth. Voluntary service for youth with the cooperation of NGOs, local government, high schools and universities, as well as educational blocks within the education at elementary and secondary schools will be a part of the program.
7. Voluntary activity is a part of the labour force in Europe and in the world. Statistical observations in other countries provide data showing that volunteers significantly contribute to the creation of GDP. There is not a reliable system for identifying the range, character and economic force of voluntary activity in the Slovak Republic. Voluntary activity is therefore underestimated in Slovakia. International Labour Organisation created a methodology of collecting data on voluntary work, including manual (Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work) for assessing the economic value of voluntary work. It is necessary therefore to propose the way to supply the missing data in Slovakia.
8. Propose and create an independent financial mechanism<sup>15</sup> to support non-governmental non-profit organisations and activities focused on advocating public interest (civil advocacy) and guarding democracy (watchdog organisations and activities) that provide feedback to public administration and fulfil the control function.
9. Provide the continuation of NGOs financing via mechanism of tax assignment of physical entities and legal entities as a model which provides a high rate of independence and transparency of decision-making on handling public resources. Strengthen measures increasing awareness of donors about assignation beneficiaries, as well as about using resources gained by assignation and increasing transparency of using the resources assigned by legal entities.

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<sup>15</sup> Independent financial mechanism is considered as the alternative way of financing than grant schemes, or using resources from the state budget.

10. Research the possibilities and adopt legislative measures for supporting individual donorship, for example by creating new payment tools such as direct debit, standing payment order, recurrent mobile payments and regular recurrent card payments for the individual donors.

### **3. Promotion of public discussion on important society matters**

#### **3.1. Reasons for the public discussion support**

Presently, there is no public discussion in many important public issues. The search for possible solutions to public problems is limited to elites and professional groups, which deal with the related topics. The result is a small degree of understanding of public regarding the decisions taken by politicians and public administration, often preferring solutions which bring short-term positive effects but may be disadvantageous in the long-term. Citizens often lack understanding of dilemmas the politicians have to face in the decision-making.

The connection of research and academic ground to public discussion lacks, which results in missing public support for applying results of research in practice. For that reason, a pilot project focused on discussion of public about the results of brain research in the form of deliberation was implemented in European Union in 2005 - 2006.<sup>16</sup>

There is a very strong trend abroad to support deliberation processes and consultations of decisions with citizens, in particular on the local and regional level, but also on the national and European level.

To support high quality public discussion, research organisations and public forums enabling the discussions are needed - not only state financed research organisations, but also independent research organisations (think tanks) formulating new content frameworks for discussion, alternative approaches to public policy and mapping the public opinion at the same time.

#### **3.2. Prevailing forms of public discussion**

Presently, public discussion is stimulated mainly by the media and unfortunately, public media do not have journalistic and discussion programmes profiled focused on supporting discussion about serious society themes for various groups of citizens of Slovakia.

Discussion is supported by some non-profit organisations (e.g. Slovak Debating Associations) or projects focused on discussion of involved actors and citizens (e.g. Consultations with Europe citizens 2007 and 2009, Board of European Citizens 2007, National Convent on European Union (2004 - 2006), but also public discussion about the future of PKO in Bratislava 2011) about serious subjects influencing their future.

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<sup>16</sup> [www.meetingmindseurope.org](http://www.meetingmindseurope.org)

### **3.3. Long-term objectives to support public discussion on serious society issues**

Long-term objectives in the areas and themes where public administration prepares or considers serious decisions or new public policies are the following:

- Create instruments to support civil and educational and discussion programmes deepening understanding of citizens about the topics important for Slovakia and enabling discussing the alternative approaches and decisions (deliberation),
- Raise public awareness on the existing possibilities of citizens participation in preparation of public policies, legislation, strategies, etc.,
- Strengthen the presence of NGOs' activities and reasonable discussion (deliberations) in public media.

The long-term objective is also strengthening the themes of civil virtues, patriotism, principles of democratic political system, European citizenship and role of civil society in democratic countries in education of children and youth.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.4. Priority themes in the area of supporting public discussion on serious society issues**

1. Within the framework of the Structural Funds and additional grant mechanisms of individual ministries (mainly, but not limited to Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development, Ministry of Labour, Social and Family Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Government Office) create space for the support of:
  - 1a) Civic and educational and discussion programmes for various target groups (e.g. student debating clubs, organising local and regional discussions on the future of municipality/town/region focused on the cultivation of public discourses about current topics such as minority issues, human rights issues).
  - 1b) Detecting an informed opinion of public (deliberation forums and deliberation research) about the themes where a decision is being prepared (e.g. position of Slovakia citizens towards European Mechanism for Stability or on the reform in Health area).
  - 1c) Support public discussion in 2012 with themes related to European Year of Active Aging and Solidarity Among Generations and in 2013 with European Year of Citizens and in the next years support the public discussion of themes selected by European Commission or extend it to other European themes important for Slovak society.

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<sup>17</sup> Various models of public discussion and joining of involved actors and public in creating public policies, which can be used in managing public discussion are can be found for example in J. Gastil & P. Levine (Eds.) (2005), *The deliberative democracy handbook: Strategies for effective civic engagement in the twenty-first century*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, or in the OECD publication (2001), *Citizens as partners: Information, consultation, and public participation in policy-making*.

2. Propose and implement program focused on the support of public discussion and social campaigns with themes important for Slovak society. The programme will support, apart from various discussion activities focused on specific target groups (e.g. students, citizens in the Slovak regions, engaged public, experts, journalists), also research activities (e.g. public opinion polls or deliberation research) and media activities. The program will support the cooperation of research and academic institutions, NGOs and public media. The program will support public discussions in the themes such as role of NGOs in society, ways of providing public services in Slovakia, defining activities for public benefit, etc.
3. Secure the presence of discussion in public media about the themes of public interest. Create cooperation between the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development and Radio and Television of Slovakia with the objective to achieve systematic mapping of significant themes and initiatives of civil society and providing presence of a wide range of NGOs acting in Slovakia in the public media.
4. Strengthen the themes of civil virtues, patriotism, principles of functioning of democratic political system, European citizenship, democratic citizenship, responsible freedom, civic participation and culture of peace embedded in the concept of human rights and the role of civil society in democratic countries in curricula for elementary and secondary schools.
5. Propose and implement a program to support research activities related to the status of civil society in Slovakia, such as financing of NGOs, civic participation, relationship between the State and the third sector, trends in volunteering, trends in individual and company donorship, corporate donorship, impacts of tax assignation of physical and legal entities. Mapping of present status and trends concerning churches and religious organisations as part of civil society in Slovakia belongs to the first tasks. Regular assessment of social, economic impacts and impacts on political culture of programmes implemented within the Strategy for Civil Society Development in Slovakia will be a part of the program, with the objective to understand the expected and unexpected effects of the programs, and the most effective approaches. Strengthen the cooperation of NGOs and independent think tanks with the academic institutions and research institutes financed by the State (e.g. Slovak Academy of Science) by creating joint research and educational programmes within the programme.

#### **4. Implementation and control of the implementation of the Strategy measures**

*Action Plan for the years 2012 and 2013* is a part of the *Strategy of Civil Society Development in Slovakia*. The Action Plan determines the responsibilities for the individual tasks. Fulfilment of the tasks resulting from the Action Plan will be reviewed annually. A report on fulfilment of Action Plan will be prepared by the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development, and will be discussed in the Council of the Government for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality and in the Committee for NGOs and presented to the Government of the Slovak Republic for approval.

In the middle of 2013, the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development will prepare the draft Action Plan for the years 2014 - 2015, which will be discussed with key actors of civil society and the public (e.g. at regional meetings) then by the Council of the Government for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality, in the Committee for NGOs, and approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic by the end of 2013. The focus of the Action Plan for the years 2014 - 2015 will be extended by the measures related to churches and religious organisations.

# Action Plan 2012 - 2013

## 1. Participation of NGOs in fulfilling the tasks of public administration and definition of the cooperation areas

### National level:

1. Individual ministers shall prepare and present the position or declaration in relation the thematic/topical areas and forms of NGOs participations at fulfilling the ministry's tasks.<sup>18</sup>The declaration will contain particularly the themes and forms of NGOs involvement into:

- Preparation of laws and subordinate legal acts in the particular functional period,
- Preparation of strategic and conceptual documents,
- Assessment of ministry's results and fulfilments of the obligations resulting from international treaties and national programmes,
- Determining priorities and mechanisms (including assessment) of grant policies of the ministry for determined period and circle of beneficiaries, especially in relation to NGOs,
- Programming, planning, implementation and monitoring of development funds administered by the relevant ministry,
- Ways and forms of communication, used by the ministry in informing NGOs, as well as readiness of the ministry for the dialogue with NGOs platforms and initiatives created for current topics,
- Research, analyses and pilot projects in the ministry.

The declaration will be perceived as the first step in enabling a long-term determination of mutual relations. The objective of this measure could be a long-term strategy of NGOs involvement in cooperation with the ministry in the future, which would become a stable part of the declaration. Another part of the declaration can be identifying new innovative possibilities of cooperation that enable extension and improvement of mutual relations.

Responsible: ministries, Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: April 2013

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<sup>18</sup> As the situation is at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic for example, the "Memorandum of Understanding exists between Ministry of Foreign Affairs of SR and Platform of Non-governmental Development Organisations", only the missing aspects will be added to the Memorandum.

2. After consultations with key actors of civil society,<sup>19</sup> Slovak government shall approve *Memorandum of Understanding* based on the declarations individual ministries. The Memorandum will determine principal values and positions in relation to civil society and participation, principles in relation to organised initiatives and various types of non-governmental non-profit organisations and determines the cooperation areas with NGOs. The objective of creating permanent platform for dialogue between the State and the civil society will form a part of the Memorandum, which should, apart from the dialogue with NGOs, create an opportunity for public discussion on serious society issues, promoting active citizens and strengthening civic capital.

Responsible: ministries, Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: June 2013

3. Assess transparency, effectiveness and impacts of ministerial grant programs functioning with NGOs as eligible applicants, propose and implement amendments and possible changes in the dialogue with NGOs<sup>20</sup>. At the same time, in if it does not exist, create a mechanism of regular assessment (evaluation) of effectiveness, transparency and impacts of grant program.

Responsible: ministries, chairs of other central bodies of state administration, Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: September 2013

4. Identify one public policy<sup>21</sup> in the dialogue with NGOs representatives<sup>22</sup> outside the original scope of local government, where ministry and NGOs platform working on the

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<sup>19</sup> Key actors of civil society are individuals and organisations working in civil society for a long time, either working in NGOs or as civil activists mainly in relation to specific theme where they publically engage and influence larger groups of civil society. Key agents include umbrella, network, representative and coordination organisations and platforms. The choice of key actors varies in accordance to discussed theme, the choice of concrete representatives must provide representation of various opinion groups in the discussed theme. We recommend to consult identifying key actors with Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality and Committee for Non-governmental Non-profit Organisations.

<sup>20</sup> In case of interest from other groups of eligible applicants, the inclusion of representatives from these groups in the process of grant program assessment is recommended.

<sup>21</sup> Public policy is legislative intent, intent of reform, strategy of programme, i.e. conceptual-strategic material, which has a long-term impact on involved actors (in this case NGOs in particular) and citizens.

<sup>22</sup> The dialogue can begin with the ministries with existing platform of NGOs or umbrella organisation(s). The entire process of dialogue must be kept open for entering and joining of other representatives of NGOs that work in the relevant theme/area.

topic will cooperate at drafting and implementing. Create a working group from ministry representatives, representatives of the platform and NGOs, experts and other involved actors to draft the public policy. Implement the cooperation of the sector and NGOs in one public policy in formulating its aim, priorities, target groups and tools/measures.

Responsible: Ministry of Labour, Social and Family Affairs, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development, Government Vice-Chair for Human Rights and Minorities, Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development.

Deadline: December 2013

5. Prepare analysis of local government competencies including financial provisions with recommending rules for public services provision (for example equality of all organisation types in case of identical fulfilment of objectives and standards, multisource funding, etc.).

Responsible: Plenipotentiary of Civil Society Development

Deadline: December 2013

6. Continue with mapping of cooperation mechanisms between public administration and NGOs and their forms of financing. Systematically assess individual cooperation mechanisms, including the way of financing (social and economic impacts, advantages and disadvantages in comparison to planned objectives as well as unexpected impacts), as well as ways of financing of NGOs.

Responsible: Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: December 2013

7. Apply the partnership principle in the process of programming, monitoring and assessment of the Structural Funds, Norwegian Financial Mechanism, Financial Mechanism of the EEA and Swiss Financial Mechanism, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, European Fund for Maritime and Fisheries Policies, i.e. provide all relevant information on the process and contents of programming, monitoring and assessment of public and in strategic decisions provide at least 10-day framework for commenting of NGOs and public. Secure sufficient representation of NGOs representatives in all bodies created on the basis of partnership principal (for example in advisory councils, committees and working groups). NGOs representatives will be nominated by Council of the Government for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality and Committee for Non-governmental Non-profit Organisations (in accordance with thematic affiliation) by transparent and clear mechanism taking into consideration the criteria of NGOs representatives competence in relation to thematic focus of advisory bodies.

Responsible: Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development, Ministry of Labour, Social and Family Affairs, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Health, Government's Vice-Chair for Human Rights and Minorities, Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development.

Deadline: December 2012

8. Create an inter-ministerial commission to exclude duplicity of financing from public resources of the Structural Funds, Norwegian Financial Mechanism, Financial Mechanism of the EEA and Swiss Financial Mechanism, as well as grants and prepare measures for eliminating the shortcomings. Another task of the Commission shall be the coordination and exchange of information among all programs providing grants.

Responsible: Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Date: June 2013

9. Propose and implement the program of support of State partners, i.e. platforms, umbrella or coordination organisations of NGOs or ad hoc coalitions, which in represent opinions of a wider group of NGOs on the basis of thematic focus or geographic area in the dialogue with the State.

Responsible: Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: December 2012

### **Regional level:**

10. Prepare amendment to the Acton Promoting Regional Development (Act No. 539/2008), in particular in the area of document creation process (for example Programme of Economic and Social Development, PESD), by adding more detailed rules of involving the relevant actors and public in the creation and update of these documents. Define more precisely the partnership principle and define what organisations, institutions, or individuals are perceived as social and economic partners, i.e. relevant actors who enter the process of creating the documents in applying partnership. Embed the status of participant in the proceedings (pursuant to the administrative order) for partners (or social and economic partners) in relation to creation, implementation and updating of the development plans and strategies of local governments. At the same time, define in the law the meaning of conflict of interests and the procedure for its minimising. The law will be prepared and negotiated with relevant partners with a sufficient time in advance.

Responsible: Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development, Plenipotentiary of Civil Society Development

Deadline: June 2013

11. Apply the partnership principle in preparation, implementation and updating of the operational programs of the Structural Funds in relation to the involvement of NGO representatives and other social and economic partners and provide a balanced representation of individual sectors and civil organisations nominated in transparent and clear mechanism in working groups (e.g. monitoring committee).

Responsible: ministries, Office of the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: December 2013

## **2. Promotion of active citizens and open governance**

1. Map the application of the existing legislation and mechanisms enabling free access to information (Act No. 211/2000 on Free Access to Information and on change and amendment of some acts), access to information for disabled people and seniors (Act No. 275/2006 on Information Systems of Public Administration and on change and amendment of other acts and Decree of Ministry of Finances No. 312/2010 on standards for information systems of public administration), as well as for children and youth and participation of public in decision-making (e.g. Act No. 24/2006 on Assessing the Impacts on Environment and on change and amendment of other acts, application of Aarhus Convention), based on present analyses. Elaborate new analyses in case of insufficient mapping of the abovementioned issues and preparing an international comparison. Propose measures for providing the application of valid legislative measures and propose possible changes on the basis of the EU requirements. Propose legislative changes, if needed, which enable a direct involvement of citizens in the decision-making of public administration, using modern technologies in accessing information.

Responsible: Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Environment, Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: December 2012

2. Map the needs of citizens and non-profit organisations in relation to the legislation related to the establishment and functioning of various types of NGOs, public participation in decision-making, volunteering and donorship. Propose amendments to the existing laws or draft new laws on the basis of mapped needs.

Responsible: Ministry of Interior, Plenipotentiary of Civil Society Development

Deadline: June 2013

3. Evaluate and, if necessary, propose solutions leading to a more effective functioning of NGOs registers.

Responsible: Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Date July 2013

4. Map the possibilities in the Structural Funds and additional ministerial grant mechanisms and creating the space (in particular by amending administrative requirements and financial frameworks) for the establishment of programmes with a decreased threshold enabling awarding of small grants to small and starting non-governmental organisations via block grants for intermediary or community foundations.

Responsible: Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development, Ministry of Labour, Social and Family Affairs, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Culture, Government Vice-Chair for Human Rights and Minorities, Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development.

Deadline: June 2013

5. Propose and implement programs of volunteering and voluntary centres.

Responsible: Plenipotentiary of Civil Society Development

Deadline: June 2013

6. Propose an independent financial mechanism to support non-governmental non-profit organisations and activities focused on advocating public interest (civic advocacy) and guarding democracy (watchdog organisations and activities) that provide feedback to public administration and fulfil the control function.

Responsible: Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: June 2013

7. Provide the continuation of NGOs financing via mechanism of tax assignment of physical entities and legal entities as a model which provides a high rate of independence and transparency of decision-making on handling public resources. Strengthen measures increasing awareness of donors about assignation beneficiaries, as well as about using resources gained by assignation and increasing transparency of using the resources assigned by legal entities.

Responsible: Ministry of Finance, Plenipotentiary of Civil Society Development

Deadline: June 2013

8. Map the possibilities and approve legislative measures for the support of individual donorship.

Responsible: Ministry of Finance, Plenipotentiary of Civil Society Development

Deadline: December 2012

### **3. Promotion of public discussion on important society matters**

1. Propose and implement a program focused on the support of public discussion and social campaigns with the themes important for Slovak society.

Responsible: Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: June 2013

2. Create cooperation between the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development and Radio and Television of Slovakia with the objective to achieve systematic mapping of significant themes and initiatives of civil society and providing presence of a wide range of NGOs acting in Slovakia in the public media.

Responsible: Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: December 2012

3. Propose a program to support research activities related to the status of civil society in Slovakia. Mapping of present status and trends concerning churches and religious organisations as part of civil society in Slovakia belongs to first tasks.

Responsible: Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: June 2013

### **4. Control of the implementation of the Action Plan 2012-13**

1. Implement regular annual assessment and control of the Action Plan implementation and elaborate a report. The Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development will submit the assessment results of Action Plan, after a discussion in the Council of the Government for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality and Committee for NGOs to the Government of the Slovak Republic.

Responsible: ministries, Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: annually on 31.12.

2. Prepare the Action Plan for 2014-15 in cooperation with key actors of civil society, discuss in the Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality and in the Committee for NGOs and submit to the Government of the Slovak Republic.

Responsible: Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development

Deadline: December 2013

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<sup>ii</sup> Bútorá, M., Bútorová, Z., Strečanský, B., Ondrušek, D., and Mesežnikov, G. (ed.) (2011). *Study of the Civil Society Trends in Slovakia*. [http://tretisektor.gov.sk/data/files/1539\\_studia-trendov-vyvoja-os-na-slovensku.pdf](http://tretisektor.gov.sk/data/files/1539_studia-trendov-vyvoja-os-na-slovensku.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Dahrendorf, R. (2000). Občanská společnost. In: Pongs, A.: *V jaké společnosti žijeme?* (p. 79–95). Praha: ISV nakladatelství.

<sup>iv</sup> Diamond, L. (1994). Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation, *Journal of Democracy*, 5 (3), p. 4–17.

<sup>v</sup> Putnam, R. D. (1993). *Making democracy work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>vi</sup> Bútorá, M., Bútorová, Z., Strečanský, B., Ondrušek D., and Mesežnikov, G. (ed.) (2011): *Study on Actual Status of the Civil Society in Slovakia*.

<sup>vii</sup> Bútorá, M., Bútorová, Z., Strečanský, B., Ondrušek, D., and Mesežnikov, G. (ed.) (2011). *Study of the Civil Society Trends in Slovakia*.

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<sup>ix</sup> Plichtová, J. (Ed.) (2010). *Citizenship, Participation and Deliberation in Slovakia: Theory and Reality*. Bratislava, SAV Science.

<sup>x</sup> Bútorá, M., Bútorová, Z., Strečanský, B., Ondrušek, D., and Mesežnikov, G. (ed.) (2011). *Study of the Civil Society Trends in Slovakia*.

<sup>xi</sup> Brozmanová Gregorová, A., Matulayová, T., Mračková, A., Vavrínčiková, L., Vlašičková, J. (2011). Volunteering, when helping brings joy and the joy helps, The Government Office of the SR

<sup>xii</sup> Bútorá, M., Bútorová, Z., Strečanský, B., Ondrušek, D., and Mesežnikov, G. (ed.) (2011). *Study of the Civil Society Trends in Slovakia*.

<sup>xiii</sup> Bútorá, M., Bútorová, Z., Strečanský, B., Ondrušek, D., and Mesežnikov, G. (ed.) (2011). *Study on Actual Status of the Civil Society in Slovakia*.

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<sup>xiv</sup> Bútorá, M., Bútorová, Z., Strečanský, B., Ondrušek, D., and Mesežnikov, G. (2011). *Study of the Civil Society Trends in Slovakia*.

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid.